

Kāmākshi-The Divine Mother



A Compilation of Discourses by Kānchi Mahāperiyavā on Divine Mother
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Foreword

A mother gives birth to children, feeds and raises them. Hence, the Vedas say "Mathru Devoh Bhava," meaning a mother should be praised as an incarnation of God. If this is such a high status of a woman who gave us this human body and nurtured it, how can we even quantify the stature and divinity of the Sarveshwari Divine Mother, Kāmākshi?

In the Tamil book "Devathin Kural" (Voice of God), Kānchi Mahā Periyavā (the 68th Sankaracharya of Kānchi Kāmakoti Peetam) has described about the uniqueness of Sanāthana Dharma, the richness of our culture, the structures and forms of various Gods, a vivid explanation of the Vedas, and the philosophical truths in a simple language that can be easily understood by a layman. This book is indeed a treasure hunt of Vedic knowledge. However, in today's busy world, it is not an easy task to read this voluminous book and many may not find enough time to review the book. So, I took the initiative to pick a few of Mahā Periyavā's discourses on Mother Kāmākshi that collates into a beautiful floral garland and bring the information in the form of this small easy-to-read book.

With utmost humble pranāms to the Divine Lotus feet of Poojyashri Kānchi Mahā Periyavā, I am extremely happy to present this book, titled "Kāmākshi-The Divine Mother."

Please read this book at your convenience and share the knowledge with your friends and family members, particularly the next generation.

It is a very difficult task to translate some of the Sanskrit and Tamil words into English. My sincere thanks to Smt. Sundari Ravi and her family members who have worked hard in translating the original Tamil version of this book into English. I am grateful to my dear friend Sri K. Raman for providing the finishing touches.

Jaya Jaya Shankara; Hara Hara Shankara!

Sincerely

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1. History of Shri Kāmākshi Devi

Do you know how benevolent is Kāmākshi Devi who resides at her abode in Kānchipuram? She holds a sugarcane bow (*Ikshuchāpam*) in one hand and holds the floral arrow (*pushpabānam*) in the other. Yet another deity holds the same two weapons; he is none other than *Manmadan*, also referred to as *Kāmadeva*. The sugarcane bow and floral arrows are common weapons of Devi Kāmākshi and Kāmadeva. Manmadan's sugarcane bow has a string made of honey bees. These honey bees stand closely from one end of the bow to the other, forming the string. Kāmadeva uses this sugarcane bow with five arrows, aims against all the life forms (*jeevās*), and rules the world by creating desires in their minds. Any sweet delicacy available in this world is either made of sugar or jaggery, having its origins from sugarcane and the sweetness comes from Manmadan's bow. Flowers are famous for their heavenly fragrance, tenderness, beauty and purity. Manmadan's arrows are made up of five such flowers. Melodious buzzing music comes from the bees. A deeper analysis of this proves that Manmadan, with the help of his bow, arrows, and bow string made of bees, rules the five sense organs (*pancha indriyās*), by displaying the beauty of this world, generates and binds us all in the web of desires in this world. It was the Divine mother, who blessed and granted Manmadan with a sugarcane bow and floral arrows. Instead of a real bow and arrow, she has given a sugarcane bow and floral arrows, allowing Manmadan to attract, create desires in the minds of living beings and to rule this universe. The Divine mother created this universe and has a great responsibility to sustain it as well, so she herself bestowed this unique blessing to Manmadan as part of Her divine play.

But mother Kāmākshi did not desire to put too much hardship on her children, by entangling them into the vicious web of all the indriyas. It is important that the mortal beings, though involved in the contemporary world of desires, should never deviate from the path of right conduct (*dharma*).

Human beings should constantly tread the path of right conduct in the pursuit of earning livelihood (*artha*), fulfilling the worldly desires and lead a moral life. The mind and all the indriyās should be kept under a complete control in order to lead a Dharmic life. We should never let our sensual desires control our mind. Placing a ceiling on our desires while leading a worldly life is the first step in the ladder of dharma or right conduct. Then our mind and indriyās (senses) without any disturbance will concentrate on gnana (wisdom) or inner (pure) consciousness. When the mind attains pure consciousness, there is no question or doubts of re-birth.

In such a state, Manmadan who is responsible for creating desire and helping the divine play of sustenance will have no work to do. As part of Her play, the Divine mother, who blessed Manmadan to create desires in our minds also grants us the knowledge of dharma to control desires. And finally, to relieve us from this divine play, she grants us the state of pure consciousness to achieve *moksha* (being released from the cycle of re-birth).

Manmadan who was endowed with the power to induce kama or desire in the minds of people, with the help of the sugarcane bow and floral arrows, was himself once relieved of these two weapons by the Divine Mother. Her un-paralleled love for the humanity made Her perform this leela. The Divine Mother desired to protect this Universe, which is the embodiment of Brahman or the infinite power. She desired to establish *dharma* (right conduct) and *gnana* (ultimate knowledge). The Divine Mother took hold of the Manmadan's Sugarcane bow, floral arrows and incarnated Herself in the form of Kāmākshi.

During this time, Lord Parameswarā assumed the yogic form of Dakshinamoorthi. Lord sat in the form of ultimate (superior) knowledge, expressed in the form of Divine Bliss. Lord Dakshinamoorthi resembled the unity consciousness (*advaita*). When the Lord is immersed in the meditative posture, how will the mortal living creatures sustain? Who will uplift them?

None other than the Divine mother, the embodiment of immense love, took the responsibility of Universal motherhood. This divine quality of mother is a blessing to sustain life in this universe. Yet, She desired that She herself will inculcate the state of ultimate knowledge in our minds. She decided to give prominence and be a loyalist to Lord Parameswarā. Lord Shiva and Shakti are always united. We cannot identify the Lord without the Divine Mother and vice versa. They are Shiva – Shakti swaroopam. So, the Divine Mother desired that gnana (ultimate knowledge) and benevolence should overflow out of Her form. This desire induced Her to take the form of Kāmeshwari with the sugarcane bow and the floral arrows.

The *asuras* (demons), like Thārakāsuran and Surapadman, did severe and a very long *Tapasya* (penance). They attained un-paralleled valour and power as a boon for their Tapasya. Thārakasuran also got a boon that he can be killed only by the child born out of the Divine spark of Lord Shiva. This blessing created a negative effect on their minds, they were inflicting atrocities on the three worlds and torturing the people to the maximum limit. On the other hand, the Lord as Dakshinamoorthi had gone into yogic meditation, was seated as gnana moorthi with complete detachment and observed divine bliss. In this state, how will the Lord bless the world with his Divine spark?

The immortal Devas were undergoing extreme mental stress and torture due to the atrocities by the asuras. It was then, Devi Parvathi, daughter of mountain King Himavān, decided to perform service to Lord Dakshinamoorthi. The Devas and God of Kāma (desires), Manmadan, realized that if Devi Parvathi did not gain the attention of Lord Parameshwara, the birth of Shiva Kumara is not possible. So, all the Devas, instigated Manmadan to use his talent of creating kāma or desire in the mind of the Lord.

It was Lord Parameswarā who granted boon to Kāmadeva to instigate and bring the whole universe under his control of Kāma (desire).

If Kāmadeva could have surrendered his power to lord with devotion, the lord could have helped him to finish the task. Instead, he was proud of his power, thinking that if the entire universe can be under his influence, why not Lord Easwara too? He thought that he can attract and cast a spell on the Lord Easwara and could make him fall into love with mother Parvathi. He displayed his power by mere pride and ignorance over Lord Easwara by shooting the flower arrows instigating the love desire (*Kāma bhānam* – the arrow of love).

Suddenly, Lord Easwara felt a slight intrusion in his meditation. He opened his third eye, situated at the centre of his eye brow which holds the fire element. He slightly opened that eye. A blaze of fire burnt Kāmadeva into ashes. Kāmadeva was proud of his physical beauty and also his powers. No eternal beauty will dare to stand in front of Easwara's third eye. His beautiful physical parts had now become an ash mountain, he lost his physical body and was named "*Anangan*", a man without any physical body.

Kāmadeva's wife Rathi Devi lamented over her loss. Pārvathi Devi consoled Rathi and gave her a boon that while others cannot see Kāmadeva, only Rathi can see Kāmadeva in his physical form. Pārvathi Devi uttered the following words to Manmadan (*Kāmadeva*), "I only bestowed you with these bow and arrows to instigate Kāma (desire) among all living beings. In your absence, the entire beings will remain as gnani's (interested in attaining salvations or Self-realization) like *Sanagadhi munis* (saints). When people die, they leave behind their bundle of karma's to be completed. Now, in case all people attain salvation, they will not take any rebirth to complete their karmas of previous birth and this will be a hurdle. So only rebirth will cleanse their thoughts and help complete their karma's of previous birth. That's the reason for me to delegate you as an officer with such power to bless the living beings with offspring. But on the contrary, you misused your power over the Lord Himself. You cannot win Lord Easwara with your power that is filled with pride. Instead you can win him by your devotion. I know how to handle this."

By saying those words, Ambāl took the sugarcane bow and arrows from Kāmādeva. She stood in front of Lord Easwara, and looked at Lord Easwara, with love and affection. With a bow and arrow in her hands, love and affection in her vision, she assumed the form of “Kāmākshi”. Here, Kāma – means love and affection, Akshi – means Eyes. The Devi who has eyes filled with love and affection is termed as Kāmākshi. There are various meaning and interpretations for the word Kāmākshi, but the direct synonym might be “love and affection filled eyes” and is known in Tamil as “Kāmākanni”. This term is traceable from the early Sangam Tamil literature period where one of the Tamil poetess was named as “Kāma Kanniyar Nappasalaiyār”. This evidence shows that the worship of Goddess Kāmākshi was present even during the Sangam period (BCE).

Manmadan used the arrow on Lord Parameswarā, and due to this, Manmadan was reduced to ashes. On the contrary, Ambāl took the same sugarcane bow and arrow in her hand, surrendered those at the lotus feet of the Lord and prayed him. Lord Easwarā gave Himself to Ambāl for Her great devotion. This is the power of Ambāl’s love, affection and humility.

By looking at the love filled eyes, Lord Easwarā also showered love and affection. By controlling the five senses and mind, the entire creations were controlled by Ambāl. In representation of those five senses and mind, Devi surrenders the five arrows and the sugarcane bow to Lord Easwarā. This paved the way for Parameswarā to shower His love and affection on Devi.

Then, Pārvathi’s marriage was celebrated and as a result Lord Muruga (Kumaran) was born. At last, Lord Subramaniam slayed asuras like Thārakāsuran, Surapadman and others.

Any individual will feel ashamed when he/she is defeated by others. But there is an exception for this norm. If this happens with his own blood (i.e. with his own son or daughter) they will feel proud. “Putrāt Ichetparājayam” in Sanskrit meaning, ‘let my son or daughter win over me.’

In accordance with this phrase, even asuras like Tārakan and other were not killed by Lord Parameswarā, but were slayed by His son Lord Subramaniam. In addition, earlier to this incidence, Parameswarā being the primordial guru for the Universe, got the knowledge about "*pranava mantra*" from His own son. He was proud of His son's achievement and knowledge. This was possible only by Ambāl's immense love with Lord Easwarā. That the Lord Himself assumed or took the form of Lord Subramaniam with great knowledge and invincible powers. This pride of having a great son like Subramaniam is due to the act of Kāmeshwari or Kāmākshi, who took the sugarcane bow and five arrows of Kāmadeva and stood near to Lord Easwarā with love and affection.

As an evidence to this *Purāna* (legend), there is a Murugan temple named '*Kumara Kottam*', in the town of Kānchipuram, between the temples of Kāmākshi and Ekāmbaranathar. As in the Somaskandar Murtham, between Easwarā and Uma Devi there lies Skanda. Following the same norms, between Kāmakoti Kāmākshi's temple and Rudrakoti Ekāmbaranathar temple, there lies Kumara Kottam.

Do you know why Kāmākshi transformed Dakshinamoorthi into Kalyana Sundarar? It was not done just for slaying the demons. Instead the main intention was that She wanted a compassionate God head who can help relieve all '*jeeva rasis*' or humans of their karma, grant them liberation from the cycles of birth and death, ward off the pains and ignorance. Paramagnana Dakshinamoorthi being absorbed in gnana, would care less about the problems faces by all '*jeeva rasis*' (living beings), as according to him, these are part of *Māya* or illusion. Kāmeshwari desired that Dakshinamoorthi, the embodiment of absolute knowledge to become the embodiment of compassion. So, Ambāl assumed the form of Kāmeshwari and transformed the Lord as Kalyana Sundarar. Kāmākshi is the only refuge who can grace us with such compassion. It looks like the Lord Dakshinamoorthi is showering His compassion at the request of Kāmākshi. In principle, it is She who is the doer being the dynamic energy through Him who is the static form.

Since She is the dynamics of all actions, She is the role model for all women, be it in Her divine leelas (plays) or compassion. If She decides to do something, She gets it done. Though the actions are Her brain child, She gives all credit to the Lord and experiences immense happiness in that.

Why did She create 'Kāma' or desire for Her in the mind of Parameswarā? The reason behind this is that She desired that humans need to control lust, yet expand our generations in a spiritual way. Saint Mookar says, "*Divine Mother, it is surprising that you could attract Easwaran, who absorbed in pure gnana, by your loving glance and make him fall in love with the form Sivakāma Sundari. Similarly, a compassionate glance can uplift all the people sunk in lust and illusion towards Moksha.*"

Ambāl created 'Kāma' in the mind of Parameswarān and curtails our unwanted 'Kāma'. Kāmadeva with the help of his *pancha pushpabānam* (five floral arrows) and sugarcane bow tries to induce sensation through our five indriyas and allow the senses to go astray. But Ambāl holds the very same weapons, enables us to keep control, and maintains discipline through her compassion. She holds the *Ikshu* (sugarcane) bow in Her hand through which She is able to control our senses and eradicates sensual pleasures. The beauty of the five senses that we enjoy of sound, touch, form, taste and smell, all project her creative power and beauty. Kāmākshi holds the sugarcane bow and floral arrows, to make us understand that our mind is under Her control, as we enjoy the beauty of these five senses. Another meaning to this is that Kāmākshi's beauty is as sweet as the sugarcane, and yet tender as that of the flowers in Her arrows.

Ambāl with Her loving glance was able to make Yogic Easwaran yield to Her, for the universal good. If only a drop of the same glance of compassion was cast on us, all our sensual pleasures will vanish. Then whatever we see, will be Her dwelling. Equanimity will prevail. There will be no more talks of discrimination and all will be looked upon as one and the same.

Saint Mookar sings "whoever is blessed by Kāmākshi and absorbed in Her name will realize that forest and home, friend and foe, ball of clay and tender lips of a young girl are one and the same. And that is the stage of Brahman!"

At the time of Pārvathi Devi's wedding, all the worlds experienced happiness. So, at that time, Pārvathi requested Easwaran to return the physical form to Kāmadeva who was burnt by Shiva, to make Kāmadeva and his wife Rathi feel happy. Parameswaran granted this desire. Parameswaran who was practising celibacy finally married Parvathi Devi and Kumaran, their son, was born. Kāmadeva felt happy as this was his indirect victory. Having got this feeling Kāmadeva wanted the whole world to know this and credit him for this deed. After all he considered this work of inducing Kāma in the minds of people was his department's job and that Ambāl had appointed him as the officer designate of that department. So, any credit that was related to the scope of work of this department belonged to Kāmadeva. He realized that all he had to do was to whole heartedly pray to the evercompassionate mother to get this desire fulfilled.

Kāmadeva came to know that Ambāl, the Omnipresent - *Parabrahma Shakthi* has taken the form of Kāmākshi and seated in complete bliss at Kānchipuram. If we consider the whole earth as a woman, Kānchipuram is like an *odiyānam* (Sanskrit name of a golden girdle that women wear over the hip as an ornament) that She wears. Thus, Kānchipuram can be seen to be in the centre of the whole world. Kānchi means Odiyānam. In the navel of this world, the sanctum sanctorum of Kāmākshi is located. And it is known as '*Bilakāsam*'. '*Bilam*' means cave and '*ākāsam*' is the infinite space. Just as the child in the womb gets its nourishment from the mother through the umbilical cord, in the same way all living beings get their energy from the Bilakāsam with the Divine grace of Ambāl.

Ākasam is the '*Ātma swaropam*' or representation of the Ātma. The space is infinite and expands in all directions and is called '*Mahākāsam*'. What is outside is inside us, in the form of Ātma and Gnana.

PerAmbālam becomes ChitrĀmbalam, and Mahākāsam becomes DaharĀkasam. In short it means 'the infinite becomes finite'. The other name of ChitrĀmbalam is 'Chidambaram'. 'Chit' means 'gnana' or ultimate knowledge and 'ambaram' means space.

If we understand these concepts, we gain the knowledge of who we are, the source of our breath and will also gain knowledge that our heart acts as the space between which lives revolve.

If we consider the world as a 'purusha' or man, then the heart of this 'virāt purusha' or radiant personality is space inside the sanctum sanctorum of Chidambaram temple. This is called as 'Chidambara Rahasyam' or secret of Chidambaram. In the same parlance, in Kānchipuram, it is called as 'Bilakāsam'. In Sanskrit, the Kānchi Kāmākshi temple is called as 'Kāma koshtam' and in Tamil it is called as 'Kāma Kottam'. The Puranas or ancient scriptures say that though the 'Bilakāsam' is present in the sanctum sanctorum of this temple, yet its radiance is felt in the entire town of Kānchi. Here Kāmākshi assumes the form of Bilakasa Roopini and enthroned there with the sugarcane bow and floral arrows of Kāmadeva.

Kāmadeva realized that Kāmākshi is the Sri Raja Rajeswari whom he can meditate upon and gain Her grace. Kāmadeva performed austere 'tapas' (meditation) and gained the grace of the Divine mother. The everbenevolent mother was also pleased with Kāmadeva and appeared before him. Kāmadeva prayed to Her, "Oh Divine Mother! Parameswarān who burnt me down, later yielded to your affection and married you. You are the one who designated me the portfolio of love, desire and affection". Kāmadeva went on further to discuss his jurisdiction rights with the Divine mother thus, "Going forward, the benefit or credit for whoever falls in love and carries desires, should also belong to me. Oh! Mother! Parameswarā after negating me, went into a wedding bliss with you. The entire universe is aware that He reduced me to ashes.

But the fact that I won him over by shooting the arrow of love, is least known in the universe. You are the universal mother, please bless this child of yours and grant me the credit for that victory."

Ambāl took pity on Kāmadeva and immediately withdrew Her energy or source of power from Kailash and all other Ambāl Sannidhis, and locked it inside the 'Bilakāsam'. Kailash, the abode of Shiva and Parvathi lost its lustre, so also all the Ambāl Sannidhis in the Shiva temples around the world lost their source of energy, and their lustre. The omnipresent and omnipotent Lord Shiva started missing His beloved. Is it not true that the Lord was indeed aware of the desire of Kāmadeva and the *Leela* (divine play) of Ambāl? Yet the Lord pretended to be suffering and missing the presence of His consort to please Kāmadeva.

But Lord Brahma, seeing Easwarā going through such suffering in Kailash and other Shiva temples, appeared before Kāmākshi and requested Her to help Easwarān come out of this phase. The evercompassionate mother replied to Brahma's request thus, "*Oh Brahmadev! Kāmadeva wanted to get credit for this action that without his help even Easwarā will have to long for his beloved. This is what he desired and I withdrew my powers to fulfill his desire. Now that Kāmadeva's desire has been fulfilled, I will re-establish my power all over the universe*". And again Kailash, all Shiva and Ambāl temples regained their lustre. Easwarān was also pleased with this.

This incident is described in the '*Kāmākshi Vilāsam*' and there are immense number of proofs of this through stone inscriptions in many temples. From the stone inscriptions in various Shiva temples, it is also known that Ambāl Sannidhis are called as '*Kāmakkottam*'. When the Cholā Kings undertook construction and renovation of temples, they got their sculptors, as a rule to engrave on the culverts, that Ambāl Sannidhis are called as '*Kāmakkottam*'. In temples at holy places like, Avinashi, Vijayamangalam, Thiruvotriyur, Thirukāttupalli, Vallam, Thirupazhanam, Koilati, etc. there are stone inscriptions to show that Ambāl is

addressed as '*Thiru Kāmakotta Nachiyār*' or '*Thirukāma Kottamudaya Azhagu Mangayar*' or '*Thirukāma Kottamudaya Akhilanayagiyar*'. In Chidambaram temple, there are stone inscriptions in Tamil language and in Sanskrit that Ambāl's name is referred as '*Kāmakoshta Sthithāya*.'

Do you know that Puranas mention that all living beings from all corners of this universe are drawn towards Kānchipuram and returned or redirected to their respective Kshetras, as this place is the centre of the entire universe? That is, in whichever place we are placed now and whatever divine energy we are experiencing, were once withdrawn to Kānchi Kāmākshi's sanctum sanctorum. And later these energies were redirected towards their origins. Since the divine waves came to Kānchipuram and redirected back, all the Ambāl Sannidhis in all other Kshetras are called as 'Kāmakkottam.

In Thevāram penned by Thiru Gnana Sambandar, there is paragraph that says "*Kacchi podi Kāmakodiyudan Koodi*." Thiru Gnana Sambandar refers to Ālangudi Ambāl as '*Kāmakoti*' clarifying it as a name not created inherently for this *Kshetram* (place), like '*Kachipoti*' refers to Kānchipuram.

In the same way Appar Swamigal, in Thiruvadigai Thiruthāndagam uses a phrase '*Kozhum Pavalachengani VaiKāmakoti*'. This is yet another proof that all Ambāl Sannidhi's derive their energy wave from Kāmākshi. Appar uses the terminology '*Kāmakkottam*', probably because Ambāl dwells in Kāmakkottam (*Kāmakotta Vasini*).

'*Kāmakoti*' is different from '*Kāmakotti*'. Kāmākshi's abode is called as '*Kāmakkottam*' and Kāmakoti is a place of '*gnana swaroopam*' or pure consciousness, where we can get liberated from our karmas. Kāmākshi Herself is Kāmakoti. As a form, She assumes the name Kāmākshi, and as Kāmākshi peetam or institution, it is called as Kāmakoti. Hence in all Kāmākshi *Sannidhis* there is Kāmakoti.

In Bhāgavatham, there is a mention that Parasuraman addresses Kānchipuram as '*Kāmakoti Purīyān Kānchi*' or Kānchipuram is the place of Kāmakoti, during his '*theertha yatra*' or pilgrimage.

In Kāmakoti Purīyān Kānchi, there are many Shiva and Vishnu temples, ever since the ancient times it is referred more specifically as Ambāl's Kāmakodi Puri. Ambāl after having returned the energy source and divinity to all temples back to all Ambāl Sannidhis, desired to gift a permanent memorial for Manmadan to mark his victory over Shiva. She ordained that Kānchipuram will be known as '*Shivajit*' and in all the Shiva temples, there will not be any Ambāl Sannidhi other than Kāmakkottam.

People may wonder why there is no Ambāl Sannidhi in any of the Shiva temples in Kānchipuram. Why is this *Kshetra* (holy place) called as Shivajit? Right? When such questions are raised, Purānas should be referred or this point should be discussed with scholars who are well versed in Purānas. Then people will come to know about this history of Manmadan of having gained this significance on account of his victory over Lord Shiva. The everbenevolent Divine mother blessed Manmadan thus. There are many temples in Kānchipuram, yet there is no Ambāl Sannidhi in any temple except in Kāmākshi temple even to this day.

While visiting Onākanthanthali, a town in the outskirts of Kānchipuram, Sundaramurthy Swamigal, has sung the following Tamil verse:

var irunkuzhal vāl nedunkan mālai magal (Long grown hair, mighty sword like sharp eyes. Parvathi who is daughter of Himavan)

madu vimmu konraith (She wears garland that oozes honey)

kondrai (garland which runs through Her chest)

thariru thadamarbu neengath thaiyalal, ulagu uyya vaiththa (She who protects the entire universe by giving rain and giving grains)

karirum pozhil kachchimudōr Kāmakkottam (the one who resides at Kāmakkottam- Kāmākshi)

undaga neer poi ooridum pitchai kolvadenne, Onākanthaṇ thaliuleere.

(When Universal mother who feeds everyone is with you, why Lord should you need to beg for a bowl of food from outsiders, O Lord of Onākanthaṇ thali)

He says that in the '*thali*' or temples around here, there is no Ambāl Sannidhi. Yet she is the compassionate mother. She is the Kāmākshi of Kāmakkottam, who feeds the entire world. He then asks Easwarān, "Why do you have to go around the world with you begging bowl seeking alms"? Kāmākshi is not only embodiment of Gnana, she also feeds the milk of Gnana and as '*Annapūrani*' feeds the entire universe. In Tamil literature there is a reference which states that Kāmākshi feeds her subjects in 32 forts with two measures of rice grains.

She is the compassionate mother who feeds us and fulfills all our desires through her graceful look. '*Kāmākshi*' means graceful glance, made of two words '*Kama*' or desire and '*ākshi*' or glance. Kāmākshi felt pity on Manmadan and showered her blessings on him. She is the one who transformed celibate Parameswaran into Kameswaran. If we meditate on '*Sivakāma Sundari*' (another name for Ambāl) with complete devotion, She will fulfill all our desires and requirements. Once we get Her blessings, all other sensual pleasures will vanish. Let us all pray to Kāmākshi to drive away all the evil qualities like, Kāma (unwanted desire), krodha (anger), lobam (money mindedness), mōham (lust), and greed, completely and grant us divine bliss.

2. Kāmākshi

Without any action, enjoying, experiencing and being self-satisfied in itself; the Brahman lives who is also called as Shiva or Shivam. This Brahman stays without any responsibility, shape, colour, traits, characteristics and shape; but from this Brahman only all life forms of so many types, shapes, sizes, colours, smells and traits evolved; All these evolved by the power of Māyā! That Māyā power which shows the one reality in multitude forms, is Ambāl. We have come into being by that power only. Actually, we are not any different from the Brahman that is wholeness in itself. But unaware we humans, think that we are different from the Brahman. We get such thoughts due to the Brahma Shakthi Māyā. Ambāl subjects us to such thinking through her power of Māyā, as an amusement, called Leela.

Ambāl, not only subjects all of us to this Māyā, She will also wards off the Māyā, keeps us out of those bonds, if we submit to Her sincerely and truthfully. She can also bestow us Brahma Gnanam. To attain the Brahma Gnanam, there is no other recourse for us, except surrendering to Her. It is She who hides the Brahman and displays as multi-layered Prapancham (Universe). To get relieved from this play of Samsara, to get rid of the cycle of birth - death, and to become as Brahman, we need to seek Her Grace. She who created such Māyā, can only bless us to identify the reality. She is the power of Māyā, and had to take the form of Gnanāmbikai, for our sake and grant us the liberation (*Moksha*).

'Māyā', means, 'that which is not'. How can the non-existent thing, play merry with our lives? It was never absent and it never remains stagnant! Until, one attains the supreme knowledge, we are entangled in 'Māyā', keep looking at all the varieties of life existence, think that each of these are real individually and separately. We develop desire, or/and develop discrimination towards them. This will entangle us further, into the cycles of birth and death. If one surrenders to Ambāl, he/she will be bestowed with that supreme knowledge and will realize that these manifestations are the various forms of Her divinity.

The moment we gain this knowledge, one will realize the Unity in all. When realizing oneness inside, all those constantly changing outside appearances will never instigate any desire or feeling of partiality towards it. Absolute higher knowledge forming basis for these behaviors will gradually melt the heart of the individuals. Vision of multilayered universe will vanish. Until we reach stage of gnana, Māyā plays its part and we will harbour feelings of desire and partiality.

Māyā is the divine play of Brahma Shakthi – Ambāl. She also gives us the higher knowledge to understand the Māyā out her infinite compassion for us. Even though she created many Māyās, Ambāl herself blesses us with the grace to get rid from such illusion. In the world of illusion (*Māyā*), the pains and pressure were created due to our senses and mind. We drive our mind towards the sensory pleasure, results in losing the track of higher Self. All the sensory pleasures were created by Māyā. To ward off from such sensory pleasures and cleanse the individuals from such Māyā, She herself incarnated as Kāmākshi. Kāmākshi has four arms. In one hand She carries bow and in other hand She carries five arrows. This bow is made up of sugarcane.

Arrows are made of flowers. Usually bows are made up of hard iron metals. On contrary, She has a bow made of the sweet sugarcane in Her hand. Instead of sharp piercing arrows, She holds floral arrows. Sugarcane bow represents the heart. Ambāl who has a sweet heart, influences our mind by this bow. Those five floral arrows will grab our senses and make them inactive. Lalitha Sahasranamam also endorses this view in the following verses as "*.... mano roopekshu kodhanda - pancha tanmatra sayaka....*". To quench the sensory thirst and mental disturbance, Ambāl in the form of Kāmākshi has the sugarcane bow and five arrows. In the remaining two hands She holds *Pāsam* (rope) and *Angusam* (tool used to control elephants). *Pāsam* is the rope that helps us to get rid of desires, unwanted relationships and draws towards Ambāl. Whenever feelings of discrimination comes up, it in turn stirs anger in our mind, *Angusham* will bring this under control.

The concepts used in the physics are attraction and repulsion, in the same way we get tangled by desires and discriminating attitude. To help to control the desire and relieve us from the tangled knots in our mundane life, Ambāl as Kāmākshi holds the Pāsam and angusam in Her two hands. Lalitha Sahasranamam claims in the following verse, "*raga swarupa pāsadya... Krodhānkara kushothvala*", meaning pāsam representing desire, Angusa represents the discriminating mind, which will be controlled by Ambāl. Thus Ambāl carrying the four weapons in Her hands comes from the colourless Brahman. Ambāl emerges in bright red colour, the colour of Kumkum. Her bright red complexion is similar to the rising sun, or pomegranate red or like the saffron colour or like Hibiscus flower. The moment we approach Her, She manifests Herself in brilliance. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva represent Parāshakthi's Rajo Guna.



3. The Divine Grace of Kāmākshi

Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, were created by Parāsakthi's Rajo, Sathva and Tamo Gunas. They do their respective jobs of Creation, Governance and Destruction. As I told you earlier, we, the Jeevas of differing life forms, also have these three traits. We also do these three jobs in three different 'Avasthās' or states of consciousness.

While sleeping, in dreaming, we do the job of creation. In our dreams, we create many things, places and people. It seems that She has created this dream state, as an indicator of Her Leela or divine play. A man has to be awake in order to work. When the man is tired after work, he has to sleep. So, these two states of Jāgrat (Wakefulness) and Sushupti (Sleep) are good enough for an average human being. What is the need for a dream state? She did grant us the third state of dream, out of Her extreme compassion and grace. She has enabled us to dream and thereby realize about other jeeva rashis. But in reality, 'the whole world, universe and all life forms are only Her dream,' so say the Gnanis.

We may still doubt the knowledge of these gnanis by asking, "How do we believe the Gnanis? We are seeing so many people, animals, creatures and other life forms, interacting in Time and Space. How do we consider these as dream characters?" To clear this doubt, Ambāl has granted (for each one of us) the Dream State, in addition to Jāgrat and Sushupti. As we are all Her creations, we create, people, places and events, in our dreams! During our dream, do we think of them all as imaginary? In the dream state, everything seems realistic. We laugh, cry and vice versa. What happens when we wake up? All the scenes, places, people and events end up to only be a figment of our imagination! But only one being was witnessing all these changing states? That is our inner self. The inner awakenings or the soul (*Jeeva*) is present during the dream state and during the wakeful state. So, the entire universe is the dream expression of Parāsakthi. She is the one who stays permanent and absolute.

While dreaming, we are dragged into the happenings of the dream, in the same way we are entangled in the worldly affairs not knowing these are illusions.

Dreams are a test for self-analysis. Our deep rooted thoughts and past predilections are vaguely replayed in dreams. We do not realize our inner self or how pure we are inside. When we go to temples with pious and saintly people, we feel very peaceful and serene. We think that we are pure or spotless in our inner self. On the hand, triggered by our indriyas, we seek pleasure by watching cinemas, reading novels, etc. Later when we give a second thought to it, we start to think how lowly we actually are. In truth, Ambāl has intended the dreams to be a touch-stone for assessing ourselves. Through the dream, we are able to learn about our inner self. Whether we enjoy the lustful dream or we get divine Dharshan from Kāmākshi, we can evaluate our inner feelings clearly. Outwardly, we may show off our devotion and piety, but unless we get Kāmākshi's Dharshan in our dreams, we cannot classify ourselves to be pure and mature in our mind. We do not have to feel bad if we are not pious enough. Just the thought of this, can lead us towards the path self-satisfaction. Again, for that, we must seek Her divine interference through our prayers. "Amma! I need to improve immensely. Instill in me the true devotion. Please lift me out of the mire of sensual desires!" Ambāl has created the Swapna Awastha, out of Her Infinite Love and Compassion, to enable us to know our shortcomings and to help correct ourselves,

Swapna or dreams exhibit our creative power. During the state of dream, we act like Brahma, creating our own surroundings. During the state of wakefulness, we protect ourselves and our kith and kin, thus doing the sustaining or protection work of Lord Vishnu. During the state of sleep, our organs temporarily retire and are in a state of restfulness. This sleeping state is correlated with Rudra or Shiva's Samhara or destruction stage. Our physical body is the representation of the universe (*Andathil irupadu, pindamthil undu*). Likewise, the creation, sustention and destruction powers are present within each of the individual. Ambāl is not restricted with these three stages of creation, sustenance and destruction.

She also represents a fourth stage called "Tūriya" or the transcendental stage. This stage is like putting a piece of sugar candy in our mouth and tasting its sweetness. It is delicious, sweet and pleasant when it strikes our tongue. Similarly, in Tūriya state, ultimate bliss is realized (i.e. it is the stage of wakefully alert or restfully alert). This ultimate bliss overflows within our inner self and fills our awareness with that state. It makes us radiate that ultimate bliss on others too.

In the *Srushti* (Creation) and the *Sthithi* (Sustainment) stage, this ultimate bliss is absent. Even during the destruction (*Samhāram*) stage, we are in complete bliss due to lack of any disturbance, yet we unable to experience this bliss due to lack of awareness in this stage. Only in the Tūriya or transcendental stage, the pure consciousness which experiences the ultimate unbound awareness and understands the absoluteness. That pure consciousness, under the influence of illusion, splits and displays three different stages. If illusions are erased, these three divisions will vanish. When Ambāl can ward off us from this illusion and get rid of these three stages of bondages, then, the ultimate bliss under the transcendental stage could be enjoyed.

As long as we are entangled in the web of illusion, we pray to be successful in our exam, to get promotion in our jobs, to be cured from our sickness. We pray for these petty things. Once we achieve the desired results, we claim that God has blessed us for this reason or occasion. But when considering the Parāshakthi's "Pancha krithya" (five works), the real blessings are to make an individual realize his ultimate purpose. The blessing should awaken his or her pure consciousness and lead to liberation (Moksha). The five-prime works of Ambāl is described in 'Lalitha Sahasranamam'. It claims, "As Brahma you create, as Vishnu you sustain, as Rudra you destroy, as Maheshwara Shakthi you eradicate the illusions in our mind and as Sadashiva you bless us." "*Srushti karthree - Brahma roopa; Gopthri - Govinda roopini; Samharini - Rudra roopa; Thirodana kari - Easwari; Sadashiva - anugrahada; pancha krutya parayana.*

“With reference to Jeevas (human beings), I said that dream, wakefulness and sleep are equivalent to srushti, sthithi and samhara. Tūriyam is also present here. Like a merry-go-round, we are also entangled with the three stages of sleeping, waking and dreaming. Some people sit on the elephant seats on the merry-go-round, some on the horse, and some on the lion. Whatever seat it is, the device cannot deviate its circle and cannot take you out of its course of action. Correspondingly, in the shield of maya (illusion), we go round and round, cherish on our pride, experience pain and other things. We are unable to come out of this vicious circle”.

“The animal forms built in the merry-go-round, cannot go outside of their boundaries in the round circle. They go around in a fixed circle. When it circles, you might be happy at first but at the end you will have to experience boredom. To get rid of boredom or monotony, Ambāl prescribes sleep as a pill for all.

This is also an illusion, where you get dizzy while circling around and around, and you finally end up sleeping tired of the merry-go-round. Besides sleep, there lies Tūriya or Transcendental stage. Even when we sleep, there is something that is awake and drives our life force. That is Tūriyam. It is the absolute, which is beyond the merry-go-round life circle. That is Ambāl.

Ambika is called as Māyā (illusion) in general. Even Mooka Kavi claims, “Hey, great māyā, I feel tranquil at your tender lotus-like feet.”

'Leeye purahara jaye maye thava tharuna pallava chāye charane'.

In the above, the poet describes Ambāl as Mahā Maye (one creates illusion). Māyā creates desires, yet in the Tūriya stage, māyā gets merged with absolute bliss. Kāmākshi, who is also the māyā is the one who bestows us the boon to get out of the illusion. She who covers you with a veil, is the only one who can only remove the veil on you.

4. Glory of Kāmākshi Devi

Parāsakthi is the primordial deity, who is the basis of all existence, its creation, protection and destruction. "Māndukya Upanishad proclaims that, beyond these three stages, namely creation, sustaining and destruction, the fourth is Tūriyam also known as Chaturtham, Sivam, Advaitam or Shāntham". We address that also as the Brahman.

Since there is nothing other than that, it is Advaitam. It has no colour or form. It is a pure crystal. Suddha spatikam, meaning totally transparent and crystal. Look at the word, transparent. One meaning is see through. Another meaning is, 'trans + parent' that is, across or beyond + originate. This '*suddha spatika sankasam*', is Sivaswarūpam, 'Red Kāmeshwari, or Kāmākshi'. From the potential one, it becomes many and also becomes the protective force of Kāmeshwari, the Mother with intense compassion and grace. She is the power of Māyā, which makes one manifest as many. She is also the power which can nullify the effect of Māyā and dissolve us in the Oneness of Advaita Anubhava. Thus, She is also the Gnana Ambhikai. Her Greatness is infinite, it is just beyond human grasp and comprehension.

Since Brahman is Tūriyam, which is the power of Brahman, Kāmākshi also must be Tūriyam. Adi Sankara, in 'Soundarya Lahari', says that she is unaffected by the actions of Brahman. As the power of the execution, She is beyond the influence of that power. Creation, Maintenance and Destruction are within the purview of Māyā. "She deludes the entire universe by Māyā," says Adi Sankara. To quote, "*Mahā māyaya vishwam Brahmayasi, Parabrahma Mahishi.*"

How can She be another person and that person be Brahman's wife, when there is nothing other than Brahman? All creations originate from the Brahman. Is it not from a 'Shakti' (a power) that all creations emanated from that immovable Brahman?

That power of the Brahmam is called Brahmapatni, otherwise Kāmeshwari. The great '*Mahānubhavas*' or enlightened souls, who have personally experienced the supreme grace of this Mother, have named Her so.

Saraswathi is considered as Brahma's wife. As Brahma does creation, she imparts the power of imagination for creation in the minds of poets / artists. Mahālakshmi, who gives wealth is rightly considered as the wife of Mahā Vishnu, who is the Ruler of all beings. The Samhara Mūrthi Rudra's consort is Parvathy. The one who remains above all these activities is named as Parāsakthi Kāmākshi. She is considered as the patni (wife) of Parabrahmam (Lord Easwarā is Parabrahmam). Devoid of traits/gunas and actions/kriyas, She is the Maha Māyā too. There is no end or limit to Her Greatness, says Adi Sankara, in the phrase, '*Nisseema mahima*'. Her greatness cannot be understood either, he says, '*thuradigamam*.'

I wonder how we can dissolve ourselves in that power which is in non-stop motion. How can we achieve silence and peaceful in the life? If you deeply think about this question, you will realize that in spite being dynamic, She is also static, peaceful and in a happy state, that enables Her to move everything. As I mentioned earlier, the individual Jeeva too is doing the three '*kruthyas*', of *srushti*, *sthithi* and *samhara* in dream, wakefulness and sleep avasthas. You see that, even while one is asleep, there is that power in him that is awake, without which he will not wake up the next day. So, it is clear that the fourth state of Tūriya, is in him too. It is not moving, even when he is moving. Yet it is the basis of his actions and inaction.

In the same way, the prime source of all life forms and things is Parāsakthi. But She is absolutely quiet and peaceful. If we whole heartedly devote ourselves to Her, even we can attain absolute peacefulness.

With the passage of time, man changes, life forms change, plants, trees, worlds, planets, stars, galaxies, all change.

The only non-changing fact is the basis of all existence; the Brahmam. That does not change. That is called, '*Sat*' or state of being.

It is of no use, if something is existent. It has to realize that it is existing. If this thing or force is not able to realize, that it is existing, there is no purpose of its existence. It is as good as not being there. This awareness of being is called, 'Chit' or knowing or being aware. This is Gnanam. 'Sat' is Easwaran and 'Chit' is Ambikai. This knowing or awareness gives happiness. That happiness is called 'Ānandam'. So, Easwarān and Ambāl - Kameswara and Kāmākshi together are *Sat Chit Ānandam or Sachidānandam*.

As you cannot separate the whiteness from milk, flower from its fragrance, honey from its sweetness, and fire from its brightness, you cannot separate Shakthi and Shiva too. That is why they are symbolically known as '*Ardhanārēswara*'. In this form, one half is Easwarā and the other half is Ambāl. May be that is why, we refer to the wife as the better half.

But, as though, this 50% sharing is also insufficient, Ādi Sankara has expressed a different idea in his '*Soundarya Lahari*'. In one of the sloka, starting with 'thvayā hruthvā vāmam', he says, "Hey! Ambike! Nirguna Brahman, which is a colourless suddha spatika, which is Lord Easwarā. You are the left side body of Easwarā or his left half. But as though not satisfied with the 50%, you seem to have occupied the other half of his body too! In the form of Kāmeshwari, where Ambāl is in bright red colour, you have occupied his entire body, you adorned his third eye and Chandra (the crescent moon). I think, you probably assumed this form with a desire to activate the static Brahman and bless or do anugraham to the life forms".

The 92nd sloka of Soundarya Lahari, starting with the words, '*kathāsthe manjathvam*,' means that Ambāl is doing all the five jobs. Ācharyāl says, "You are seated with Kāmeswara, in the cot which has Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra and Easwarā as the legs. Even Kāmeswara is not seen in physical form, He appears in the Brahma swaroopam and blesses your devotees.

The red colour aura of your body even dominates Kāmeswara's white complexion, and displays Him as red colour too". That is the effectiveness of Her Anugraha shakthi.

As said in the earlier sloka, Ambāl also has three eyes, She is also wearing the crescent moon on Her head, Her eyes are the sun and the moon, the third eye is 'Agni' or fire. This is described in another sloka in Soundarya Lahari, with poetic beauty and goes as, "Your right eye creates the day, left eye the night, and the third eye creates the 'Sandya' or the evening and morning twilight. That is why, it is red". Which means She is the creator of Time.

Poet Mooka Kavi also refers such a scene in his Panchasathi. The first 100 verses of Panchasathi are called as "ārya sathakam." In this sloka called as ārya, even Ambāl is referred as ārya, as embodiment of purity. For these two reasons, this poem is named as ārya sathakam. In the sloka starting with the phrase, "Aiswarya Indhu mouli", poet Mooka Kavi refers that Ambāl is the aiswarayam of Lord Easwarā. One who has the characters of Easwarā and is his embodiment that is called as Aiswaryam. Even Easwarā got his prowess from Parāshakthi. Soundarya Lahari also endorses this view stating that, "without Shakthi there is no Shivam, and he cannot even move without shakthi". To understand His own self, Shakthi gave Shiva the knowledge and dynamism. One can realize the omnipresence of Lord Easwarā only by her grace.

Due to Ambāl, Shiva could realize himself. On the contrary, He is the one who is supporting Her. Prakrithi resembles Her, it resembles like non-living being, Easwarā is the life for that being. Prakrithi was named as māyā and Easwarān was called as Māyi. Being *Aiswaryam* (wealth) of Easwarā, She merged with the Prakrithi, appears in the middle of Kānchipuram, having crescent moon on Her head, and radiates as the Veda swaroopam (form of Veda). So, claims Mooka Kavi.

In the beautiful sloka, "*Aindhava kishora sekaram*", he claims that She is having child-like crescent moon on Her head. Gnana Sambandar calls this as *muttrā venthingal*.

Ambāl is considered as Prakrithi and māyā. Her husband and the Māyā shakthi are also Kāmākshi. Ambāl stays strongly in bond with her husband Easwarā, without any difference. Both are same, they exhibit the Advaitam. The ultimate result of Veda is advaitam. Representing this advaita philosophy in Kānchipuram. Mooka Kavi says, Kāmākshi shines in glory in the verse, "*Aindhambariyam Sagasthi Nigamānam.*" We consider Her as the māta swaroopam (motherly form) and the moment we approach close to Her, one can witness the third eye and the crescent. This is the pithā roopam (father form). Due to devotion to her husband she has won over his half of the body. In reality, one can feel that she has occupied the entirety of Lord Easwarā and become Lord Easwarā. This is remarked in Soundarya Lahari sloka too.

Due to high order *bhakthi* (devotion) and the flow of poetic expressions both Ācharyāl and Mooka kavi, have stated these in the above-mentioned verses. In summation, the idea is that She is the total Brahma shakthi (totality of pure consciousness), in par with Her Easwarā, and also equally radiates the same shakthi.

Acharya claims that Ambāl has stolen the physical body of Lord Easwarā, whereas Sri Neelakanta Dhikshidhar, who is son of great saint Appaya Dhikshidhar claims that Lord Easwarā only has stolen Ambāl's name and fame.

Every one claim that Parameswaran has burnt Manmadan into ashes, He also kicked the god of death, but half of the physical body of the lord is occupied by Ambāl. Neelakanta Dhikshidhar, in a list of accusations, says "Lord opened his third eye on Manmadhan and turned him into ashes, doesn't the half of the eye belong to Ambāl? Ok, that's fine, let that credit go to Lord himself, but the credit for kicking the lord of death does not belong to Lord.

Because, it is evident that the Lord used his left leg and kicked the Lord of time or death. But that portion of the body belongs to Ambāl. So, it is purely Ambāl who have done this act”.

The meaning of this act is that even if we get a drop of grace from Ambāl, we can get rid of desire, death and become immortal. Her glories cannot be counted and expressed in words. Even static Shiva was moved and changed dynamic by Ambāl’s energy. The silent Shiva form has become the dynamic form thanks to Ambāl. Soundarya Lahari claims that, “even at the winkle of Her eyes, Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Easwarā and Sada Shiva, all have performed their five allotted activities. Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra in turn perform the creation, sustaining and destruction, activities as known to everyone. In addition to this, Māyā - the illusion and Gnana - the higher knowledge for getting rid of Māyā, are all collectively called Panchakrithya. Easwarā and Sadashiva help in accomplishing these actions. Yet all these are performed under the orders of Ambāl. They all are five officer designates, who work for Parāshakthi. They cannot perform that work by themselves. The energy and power is delegated solely by Parāshakthi. “Amma, if we offer flowers at Her lotus feet that will be counted as performing pooja and offering flowers on the heads of three moorthis. This is because, all the three moorthis are prostrating at your lotus feet”. This statement was made by Adhi Shankarā in his famous Soundarya Lahari. The inner meaning is that Parāshakthi is the life source of all beings and She is the one who grants powers to all Devathas, so anything offered at Her lotus feet is equivalent of offering to all deities.

Furthermore, Ācharyāl in Lahari states, “Amma, you are living in a fort guarded by nine layers. Inside you are with the Brahma Swaropa Easwarā. No one has the guts or rights to penetrate any layer or to come inside. All the devatha’s are standing outside the ninth layer for your grace. The guardian of this nine-layer, *anima siddhi* and others supply the needed eight great siddhi’s (boon) to all the devatha’s (*Purarathey andha puramasi*).

This nine-layered fort is the form of *Sri Chakaram*. Ambāl was without roopa or any form but later She took the roopa of Kāmeshwari. Now She resides in the *Sri Chakra Yantra*. Looking at this yantra, we see lines, triangles and cones. This is the form of Ambāl. As we believe that some sound sounds have divinity in them, they form as 'mantra.' Similarly, some lines, triangles form into a diagram and have some divine power. That is the yantra. Ambāl's every form has a different mantra. Kāmeshwari or Kāmākshi or Lalitha Triupurasundari is the prime deity, the mantra to pray her is SriVidhya, yantra is Sri Chakram. Sri Chakra avarna means nine fort or layers. The centre dot is called as Bindhu. The Bindhu is none other than Parāshakthi. Betond the fortress or layers, there is a centre triangle, where lord Easwarā or Kāmeswara is united with Kāmākshi. She is *poorna shakthi*. There are other devatha's or deities who reside in each of these nine forts. They are all Parāshakthi's amsams (manifestations). Each one of these deities, has some unique energy. And the outer most layer of the fort has eight guards like the anima siddhi.

We refer to some saintly people as *siddhars*. They have supernatural powers and they display it from time to time. Such powers are bestowed to the siddhars by the eight Anima Siddhi devatas. This is referred in Lalitha Sahasranama as "Animathi Siddhi". *Anima Siddhi* means the power to reduce the entire physical body into a small size like that of an atom. On the contrary, *Mahima Siddhi* means to expand the physical body into a gigantic size. Similarly, the power to make the body so light like cotton that it can fly is called as *Lakima*. Then, to accomplish the task determined, one needs to be blessed by Prāp̄thi. Prākamyā Siddhi is gaining *Icha Sakthi* - the invincible power. *Eeshithvam* is *Easwarathvam* - means the siddhi of gaining the power to rule. *Vasithvam* means winning over others and attracting them towards us.

Above all the aforesaid seven siddhis, there is one siddhi, which is supreme to all and that is controlling of one's own mind. With other siddhis, one can perform good or bad deeds.

But, above all good and bad, to be most peaceful and enjoy bliss is something not attainable by any other siddhi. It is possible to attain such a state only by the total control of mind. To have a control on one's mind, it is important to control desires. The siddhi to control desires is called "*Kā mavasyanam*", referred to as the last siddhi. Poet and saint Thāyumanavar refers to this siddhi as amazing as, "you can do any magical act, but it is very hard and rare to control your desire and mind and remain in peace." Saints, without any self desires, may use the other siddhis for the benefit of the world. Such siddhars, sometimes referred as pathinen (eighteen) siddhars, have existed. Many of their actions may seem crazy and weird, but in reality, they performed those actions out of love for the people and universal welfare.

By saying that even those devathās who grant such amazing siddhis are mere guards standing far from the real parashakti's sanctum, you can guess the mighty power of parshakti.

Sometimes and in some places, such a power of Ambal pours out. In ancient days, the power of Akhiladeshwari in Thiruvanaikāval was fierce. At that time, Achāryāl (Adi Sankarachārya), considered to be a reincarnation of Lord Shiva, made two Thādangams (ear rings) as *Sri Chakram and Shiva Chakram*. He extracted the excess power of Ambal into those thādangams and installed them on Ambāl Herself. When Kāmakshi Ambāl was fierce in Kānchipuram, the same Achārya installed a Sri Chakram in front of Ambāl to make her passive. Ever since then, Ambāl has become very pleasant and has been showering blessings to all.

5. Divine Eyes of Kāmākshi Devi

Among our body parts, eyes are very important. We address our loved ones as "en kanne" (my eyes - in Tamil Language), and not use words like my ears or my nose! If this is the importance given to our eyes, then just imagine, how significant is are the eyes of the ParamĀtma Moorthi Ambāl? Ambāl has other names such as *Kāmākshi*, *Meenākshi*, *Visālākshi*, etc. In these names, 'Ākshi' means eyes.

Kāmākshi not only holds Manmadan's Bow and arrows in Her hands, She also has these in her eyes. In the composition of '*Soundarya Lahari*', Ācharyāl poetically describes Her eyes thus "*puruvo bhukne kinchit.*" Ambāl's eyebrows from one side to other looks narrowed and looks like the bow. Only when someone is worried or anxious, the eyebrows will narrow. The 'Loka Matha' or the universal mother is worried seeing Her children going astray and wants them to retract into the path of righteousness. So, Her eyebrows look narrowed, the two bent eyebrows are like the two bumps in the bow, the slight constriction or narrowed space in between is like the centre of the bow. That is the beauty of Ambāl's eyebrow. The centre gap is where the nose starts. According to the '*Sāmudrika Lakshana*¹', this space between the brows, should be devoid of facial hair. The eyebrows that are connected with central facial hair at the starting point of the nose is not a sign of divinity.

But when we compare Ambāl's eyebrows as a bow, then the eyebrows should be joint. Or how we compare her eyebrows as a bow? Also when you see the bow, between the two side bumps, in the centre there is lowered flat piece that connects the two sides of the bow. And our Ācharyāl, very appropriately compares with a nice example of the archer holding the bow. When the archer takes position to shoot the arrow, he holds the bow in the centre flat portion with his fist, positions the arrow on the string with the sharp pointer aligning from the centre

¹ Samudrika Lakshana is an ancient Science that discusses about the physical features of human beings and beauty.

of the bow. Thus, the archer's fist hides the centre of the bow. Similarly, the centre gap between Ambāl's eyebrows is like an archer holding his fist on the bow (eyebrow) of this divine mother. His fist is the hairless part between the eyebrows or the starting point of the nose.

Now who is this archer, whose fist is holding the bow or eyebrow of Ambāl? Yes, it is Manmadan! Ambāl's eyebrow is in the shape of the bent sugar cane bow of Manmadan with honey bees as the string. Just like the active bees, Ambāl's eyes keep moving from one side to another side. The reason why Her eye balls keep constantly rolling is because, by Her compassionate nature, She does not want to miss out blessing any of Her beloved devotees.

Manmadan puts all his energy on the centre point between Her eyebrows, positions his arrow on the string and shot his floral arrows on Shiva. And Parameswarān yields to Her love. The ascetic Lord now cast his merciful eyes on the living entities in this universe, thus making the Universal mother happy. Ācharyāl compares, Ambāl's eyebrows to that of the bow, Manmadan's one fist holding the bow is the centre point between the eyebrows, and his other fist is holding the arrow on the lower bees' string. Finally, the arrow is Ambāl's nose.

These very eyes of Ambāl that was able to attract Lord Shiva from his celibate life to marital bliss for the welfare of the humanity. Those eyes can also destroy unwanted desires in our minds and grant us supreme knowledge. What are the five arrows Manmadan? They are made of five fragrant flowers – Lotus, Jasmine, Blue Water Lily (Karunkuvalai in Tamil Language), Mango flower and Ashoka pushpam (an ancient spring flower, literally means a flower that gives no grief). His floral arrows through their shape, taste, fragrance and touch, try to attract and imbalance our sense organs. The beauty of flowers is pleasant for the eyes, the honey that comes out of the flower is sweet for the tongue, fragrance captivates the nose and soft touch affects our skin. The honey bees string of Manmadan's bow, keep buzzing and attract the fifth sense of hearing.

On top of all these is the sugar cane bow, which tries to penetrate into our five senses and creates an imbalance.

Manmadan is very effectively carrying on his business of affecting the five senses of all living entities in this universe with just these five flowers, sugarcane and bees. How does he do this so efficiently? If you have the grace of Ambāl, "*vallavanukku pullum ayudham*". This quote in Tamil language means "for a shrewd person, even a grass can become a weapon." Ambāl gave this power to Manmadan so he can help sustain the life source in this universe. It is with Her blessings that Manmadan is able to play around with our senses. So only with Her blessings, we can keep our five senses under control.

God protects when needed and reprimands man when he or she goes astray. All the sufferings we encounter are due to the karmas that we accumulated in the past. And this is the way Ambāl sustains life. She helps Manmadan or Kāmadeva to be victorious. So, we should surrender to Her lotus feet to be victorious over Kāmadeva, who has the capacity to play around with our sense organs. Being the Universal mother, She is very concerned about protecting Her beloved children. Hence with narrowed eyebrows, She aimed the bow towards Parameswarān, so the Lord in turn can help Her in sustaining this universe.

The compassion seen in the eyes of Ambāl was reflected within our Ācharyāl like a radiant light. This radiance come out of him as a sloka (verse) in Soundarya Lahari, "*drusa thrakiyas yathradhali Nilothpala rucha*". Without Her divine grace, there is no way such a great sloka would ever be composed. But in this sloka Ācharyāl requests for the divine blessings of Ambāl. Here we have to understand that Ācharyāl is not requesting Ambāl to bless him. Instead he is requesting Ambāl to bless him also². Such an enlightened soul shows no trace of ego whatsoever.

² Meaning Ācharyāl is requesting Ambaal's blessings for the humanity as a whole including himself.

Ācharyāl also describes Kāmākshi's 'katāksham' or divine grace in this sloka, "drusa thra Keeyasva." This sloka means that Ambāl's eyesight is far reaching. A mother will always keep her young child within her reach. For Ambāl, we are all Her young children! However great we may be in our life, however talented we may be, yet we are Her dear children. She is the mother of all animals, birds, bugs and insects. She is the mother of this infinite universe. And all these are within Her eye's reach. So, there is no limit to Her divine grace. Her grace extends to the infinite that includes those who try to stand at a distance and think that they do not need her grace. Her eyes are half-closed yet broad like the 'Neelothpala pushpam' or blue water lily in Sanskrit. Ambāl's eyes are pleasant and cool, like the 'Neelothpala pushpam' in the pond. 'Neel³' is blue, long and broad, in the same way Ambāl's eyes are pleasant like the colour blue, wide and far reaching. Hence, Ācharyāl compares Her eyes to the 'Neelothpala pushpam'. He also requests Ambāl that he also be submerged in Her grace flowing out of Her far reaching, wide and pleasant eyes. He uses the word 'Maam Api', meaning including me. He did not request Ambāl's 'katāksham' (compassion) for him, instead requested 'katāksham' for all including him. He further says, "Amma! I am an insignificant person, who does not deserve your 'katāksham', yet please shower me with your divine grace". Ācharyāl, who is considered to be Parameswarā avathāar, has called himself as an insignificant person and going further thus, "Amma, I know that I do not deserve your divine grace, yet I am requesting this as you are not going to lose anything by showering your blessing on me also".

Ambāl never loses the divinity in her eyes, she even casts Her eye sight on evil minded people (Ambāl will never be harmed by any 'haani' or negativity). "Na cha the Haaniriyatha," meaning "negativity will not affect you, on the other hand, I will also be blessed and will feel elated.

³ The word 'Neel' has various meanings in various languages

I will be ever thankful "*Anenayam Dhanyo Bhavathi.*" Dhan means wealth, so those who gain the divine grace of Ambāl are the wealthiest people, there is no wealth greater than this.

Ambāl blesses everyone without any discrimination. Ācharyāl in order to substantiate this phrase gives an example. "On full moon day, the moon light radiates all over without any discrimination, it is pleasant for anyone who sees the full moon. There is no difference in the moon light radiance, it is seen in the balcony of the Emperor's palace and that radiance is also seen on the thorny bush in the forest. The moon light that falls on the balcony of Emperor's palace does not enjoy the comforts of the palace. So also, the moon light that falls on the thorny bush is not pricked by the thorns. In the same vein, there is no variance in Ambāl's 'katāksham' or who get more grace and who gets lesser. If her divine 'katāksham' falls on me, she has nothing to lose. On the other hand, I will experience fulfillment. Amma, without you losing anything, I derive happiness, so submerge me with your katāksham."

When Ācharyāl uses the phrase 'including me', he has intentionally included all of us in his prayer. Ambāl, Easwarān and Ācharyāl are all one and the same. Such an enlightened soul is standing along with us, and praying (through the sloka) for all of us, with complete humility and compassion. Here, he intended to say, that if we pray with an open mind and complete devotion, Ambāl's heart will cool down like the moon and she will elevate us with Her 'katāksham' or blessing.



6. Abode of the Divine mother

There is no place where Parashakthi is not present. But for our own satisfaction, we say that She is dwelling in certain areas. In the devotional path of '*Sri Vidhya*', Ambāl is said to be residing in the centre of the '*Amritha Sagarā*' or ocean of nectar in the peaceful island of '*Mani Dweepa*.' This beautiful island has many forts, decked with '*Chintāmani*' -full of gems and surrounded by beautiful gardens. She is seated on the left side of Kāmeswaran on a beautiful cot whose legs are adorned by Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra and Maheswara, and Sadashiva as the bed spread. The place where she is seated is called '*Sri Puram*.' Just like in '*Amritha Sagara*', '*Sri Puram*' is also said to be on the golden peak of Mount Meru.

There is a very comfortable and peaceful place of meditation. In the '*pala struthi*' or concluding stanza describing the fruits of chanting Lalitha Sahasranama, it is said that many saints have sat in this place and attained the ultimate bliss. The place described is '*Chandra Mandala Madyaga*,' meaning centre of the full moon. This is the place most suitable for a deep and peaceful meditation.

The beauty of moon is beyond description, we are never tired of looking at the moon. In order to enjoy this beauty, we organize and have moon light dinner or moon light concert. But in the current world, we do not lack the light generated by electricity and other sources, so our young generation have little knowledge of the happiness and inherent value of the moon light. As compared to blurring electric lights, moon light is soothing to the eyes and gives a sense of peace. Especially beauty of the moon on the full moon day has a special value. As per the divine play, it was destined to have full moon day on only one day out of the 30 days in a month. Probably, if the full moon was available on all the 30 days, the moon would have lost its attraction or intrinsic value. When we sit in meditation, we should first concentrate on this bright full moon and on its grandeur effulgence. And in this meditative state we should visualize Ambāl.

As we concentrate on the full moon and meditate, we can experience the pleasantness and cooling effect on moon in our minds. Peaceful mind will in turn remove the negative and discriminative thoughts from our minds. There is a saying in Tamil, that '*andathil ulla ellam pindathil undu*', meaning what in the entire universe is also prevalent in our body. We are part of the whole, so also each part in combination makes the whole. In the '*Purusha Suktham*' mantra, it is said that Mother '*Parāshakthi*' is inherent in the soul of each and every living entity, so Her mind is the moon light that has the capacity to bring peace in our minds. So it is evident that there is some connection between our minds and the moon. In the English language, people who have lost their mental stability are called as lunatic. There is Lunar in this word and Lunar refers to the moon. Our ancient sastras, recommends that we meditate on Ambāl in the Chandra Mandala (meditate on Ambāl by concentrating on the effulgence of full moon) to cure any mental ailments.

We should meditate assuming Ambāl is seated in the core of moon. It is said that the person meditating should be seated on a tiger skin. Here it is important to note that the quality of tiger is quite opposite to that of the moon. So why should the meditator sit on the tiger skin? Tiger is an animal, which by single minded concentration, casts its eyes on its prey, and hunts. Similarly, the meditator sits on the '*vyagrāsanam*' or tiger skin, and should hold his/her '*Dhyana Lakshya*' in the mind with complete concentration and steadfast devotion. As we visualize Ambāl in the Chandra Mandala, we can see our mind coming in oneness with her mind. Ambāl will then bless us and quench our thirst for ultimate knowledge, in the same way that She quenches the thirst of Chandran.

Scriptures say that Sun is embodiment of knowledge or '*gnana swaroopam*', but brightness of the Sun, generates heat and thirst. On the other hand, brightness of the moon is soothing and pleasant to the eyes. Ambāl is self-effulgent as the Sun, but is as cool and soothing as the moon. She is the only one who can quench our thirst and yet grant the brightness in our mind through gnana.

She is the Divine teacher or 'Guru Moorthi'. Poet Kalidasa describes Her as '*desika roopena darsithabyuyaam,*' that is 'one who comes in the form of Guru and grants us the ultimate knowledge'. Hence, we should sit in Chandra Mandala, meditate on the holy feet of Guru or concentrate on Ambāl. Then our quest for divine knowledge will be quenched, will lead us from darkness (ignorance) to brightness (knowledge) and establish pleasantness in our minds.



7. Bhavanithvam

There is no need to list out our desires and pray to Ambāl, seeking those things that we need in our mundane life. Neelakantha deekshithar, in the *Ananda Sagara Sthavam* says, "Hey Meenakshi, daughter of Malayathwaja Pandiyan, even though I do not utter a word or express my worries vocally, it indeed does irritate me within. That's the reason, for my for appeal to you and this prayers seeking you're your blessings. My intention is not to highlight something that you are not aware of. Instead when I put forth before you my internal worries that have irritated me like the yam, I find some solace and get peace of mind."

Even if we do not make any requests, as a grace for being Her ardent devotee, She will bestow Her choicest blessings. First and foremost, we get good sense. Good thoughts emerge in our mind. The way to perform good deeds flashes in our mind. She blesses with the resources required for performing activities for societal harmony. We gain equanimity in our mind that enables us to shower love on all without discrimination. Today, without this love in our mind, we utter words like "brothers and sisters" and talk about equality. As long as an individual is not devoted to Ambāl, these words do not make sense. These types of people remain just hypocrites and exhibit pomp in their speeches. If one understands the Universal mother existence, then one will say, "In reality there is only one mother for this entirety of universe, inclusive of cow, birds and all human beings. Ambāl is the Universal mother, that's why we all are really brothers and sisters". If we realize this, then we will not show hatred, dislike or discrimination amongst us. That calmness will eradicate the mentality of 'fault finding'. Once we achieve, even when someone commits mistakes, we will try to correct in a polite manner without mocking or hurting the sentiments of the other person. Being sincerely devoted to mother, we will be elevated to the state of understanding the Oneness amongst us, and consider all as one large family.

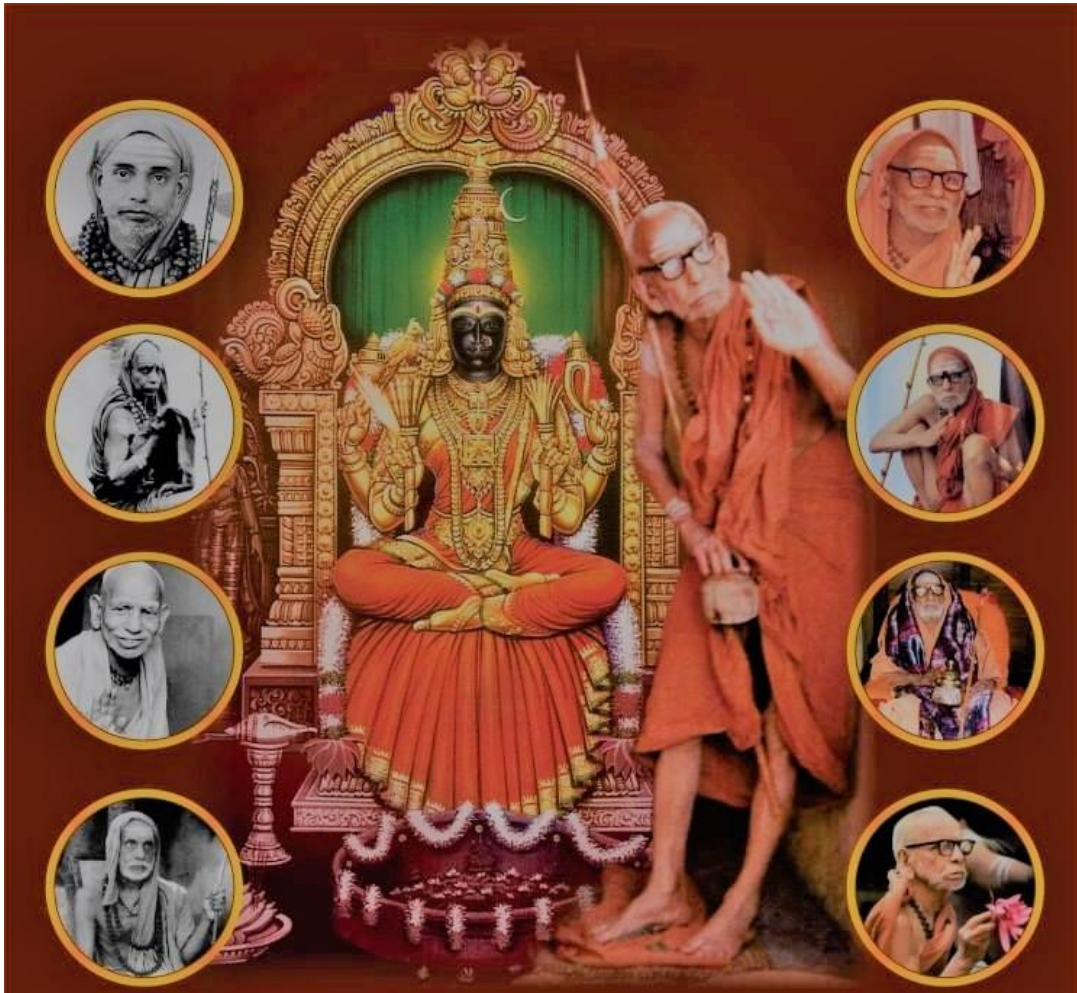
Kavi Mookar emphasizes that, if one gets the grace of Ambāl, he or she will never have a discriminating mind. And all are considered and same, be a friend or an enemy.

The grace and blessings of Mother will lead us to the 'Unity Consciousness'. By Her grace, we will reach the pinnacle of 'Gnana' and we not only realize that She is the 'Ultimate mother', but we will also understand that we are all Her children. The Universal mother on Her part, will dissolve the difference between mother-child relationships and make us realize that we are Hers. We will also realize that 'One energy has taken many forms or different shapes, though shapes are vary, but inner awareness or consciousness is same'. This is the highest Advaitam, which is nothing but the higher state of consciousness namely - 'Unity Consciousness'. Poet Mooka Kavi also state as '*Shiva Shiva Pashyanthi Samam*'- meaning, for a person who has Kāmākshi's grace, both dwelling house or forest, enemy or friend are one and the same.

Considering Ambāl as the mother and we as Her child, one start showing his/her devotion, eventually She will eradicate the difference between herself and us. She will bless that higher state of consciousness. This has been referred by Acharyāl (Shri Adhi Shankarācharya) in his famous "Soundarya Lahari" verses as "*Slesha*" (two meanings to the same phrase).

A devotee starts his/her prayer as "Bhavani / O Mother, I am your follower". *Bhavani Thwam* – meaning "Bhavani, I am yours". *Thwam* – means I am yours. Acharyāl brings another dimension to the word. He says that when a devotee prays with this thought, Bhavani bestows on him the high status of "Bhavanithwam" (note the double meanings). When a person begins to pray, *Bhavani* means Ambāl. Lord Shiva has eight different names, one among them is "Bhavān." Bhavān's spouse is "Bhavāni". Now, when the devotee utters Bhavanithwam, Ambāl blesses the devotee with the status of Bhavānithwam, meaning "the status of becoming Bhavāni."

We normally use "Dheerga Sumangali Bhava" meaning live long as a Sumangali (a Married women). Here in this phrase "Bhava" means "to be". And Bhavani means "becomes". So now, *Bhavanithwam* means "I become like Bhavāni." The devotee is blessed with the higher state of consciousness – Unity Consciousness (Advaitam). If one prays to Ambāl with this verse, starting the prayer as "Bhavani, I am yours, so kindly grace with your divine vision for a moment". The moment we utter these words, Ambāl will intercept with a blessing that means "You and I are not different, both are one and the same." So, Bhavanithwam, can be interpreted in two different ways. That is, "Mother, I am your devotee and you are my mother." In another way, we can interpret it as "Mother, you and I are one and same." At the end, devotee gets the Parāshakthi's divine grace and becomes Bhavani.



8. Granting of Pathi Bhakthi and Guru Bhakthi by Devi

When women develop devotion towards Ambāl, it is very natural that she will also be devoted to her husband, because Ambāl herself is extremely devoted to Her husband Parameswarā. It is always difficult to love and show faith over someone who is not loveable or prefers celibacy. Vaikuntham is adobe of bountiful wealth, where handsome and charming MahāVishnu resides. There is no surprise Mahālakshmi showers Her love and devotion to Her husband MahāVishnu. On the contrary, Ambāl's husband (Parameswarā) resides at burial ground, wearing tiger skin and garland of skulls. With a begging bowl in His hand and goes begging for alms. It is really surprising that Ambāl shows Her devotion and love on such a person. When Ambāl was born as Dākshayani, Her father Dakshan did not give due respect to Lord Parameswarā. Unable to tolerate the disrespect, Dākshyani gave up Her life on Her father's yagna site saying, "Being born as a daughter to Daksha who has no respect for my Lord Easwarā, I do not need this body carrying the name Dākshayani." The story goes that She sacrificed Her life in the Yagna Kundam (the holy fire place). Dākshayani had the birth name as "Sathi". As She was Dakshan's daughter, She acquired the name of *Dākshayani*. Because of the practice of chaste women jumping into their husband's funeral pyre, the white men termed this act as "Sutti". The word Sathi itself now means woman of high virtue. Dākshayani was later reborn as Parvatharaja Kumari, with the name Pārvathi. Even then, Her love and devotion to Lord Parameswarā remained unchanged. In order to attain Lord Parameswarā as Her husband again, She performed a severe penance at a young age. Eventually, She married Lord Easwarā. As a result of this marriage, the Ghora (fierce) Rudra described in the Veda as, "*Ghora Ghora Tharebya*" became a softened Mangala Moorthy 'Shiva.' Ambāl' is thus called as "*Shivā*."

There is nothing more auspicious than Ambāl. She is referred as "*Sarva Mangala Māngalye*".

Parameshwarā also becomes auspicious as She is always with Him. In Her auspicious form, Ambāl is Mahā Sumangali (a married woman blessed with long life with her husband). In "Soundarya Lahari," Adhi Shankarācharyā says that because of this (being a Sumangali), Parameshwarā was not affected even when He drank the deadly poison. Ear rings, Kumkum (Red vermilion) on forehead, a neck chain of black beads are all auspicious signs of a Sumangali. Ambāl is wearing 'Thātankam" (ear rings) made from ordinary palm leaves - referred as "Thalipalāsa thātankam" in Sanskrit verses. This seems to be an example of how simple and prideless people were in olden days. It would be nice and simple if present day women too could wear ear rings made of palm leaves. Because of this, there is a practice to describe the present day fashionable diamond ear-studs as 'vaira olai' (in Tamil) meaning diamond leaves.

Now let us talk more about Ambāl's ear rings. It is an auspicious symbol that should never be removed from Her ears. It means Her husband Parameshwarā should live eternally. That's why, even after Lord Shiva drank the deadly poison, it did not affect Him. Adhi Shankarācharyā says that the Lord was unaffected by the poison due to Ambāl's "Thātanka Mahimā" - the greatness of the Divine mother's ear stud. Acharya made ear rings embossed with Sri Chakra and Shiva Chakra for Goddess Akilandeswari, at Thiruvannaikovil (near Thiruchirapalli town, Tamilnadu) to make Her passive. He describes, "thava jnanani thātanka mahimā" - meaning "the greatness of the ear studs worn by the divine mother."

Even after drinking poison, Lord Parameswarā was fine and healthy because of His being together with Ambāl who acted as an Anti-venom medicine, the immortal nectar of *Amirtham*. This is referred in the Vedic verses of Sri Rudram. "though you are a fierce god as Rudra, you also have an auspicious form as "Shivā." This Shivā is the medicine for the entire universe (*Shiva Viswaha Bhesaji*). Is it the medicine only for the world? No. Even for you Rudra, this is the medicine. 'Shiva rudrasya bhesaji' says the Vedas.

If women worship Ambāl who appeased the fierce form of the lord with Her "pathivrata" virtue and made Him immortal, they will be blessed with ever lasting devotion to their husbands and long life as *Sumangali*.

For women, Husband is the *Guru*. In olden days, in order to introduce *Gāyathri* mantra before *kāma* (desires) enters the mind, people performed *Upanayanam* (thread ceremony) to boys before the age of eight and led them to a Guru. Around the same age, girls were married. The husband became a girl's Guru. *Kāma* or passion came much later. Hence, for women folk, both guru bhakthi and pathi (husband) bhakthi are one and the same.

Ambāl is the epitome of love towards Her husband. She also bestows Her women devotees, the Sumangali status (to be ever married and devoted to her husband). Sri Bhāgavaṭham describes that the Gopika women folk, during the month of December- January (Dhanur Masa), used to wake up very early in the morning and pray to Devi, thus attaining salvation through Lord Krishna. Sri Bhāgavaṭham also states that Devi Rukmani also worshipped Ambāl and attained Sri Krishna as her husband.

During the old Sangam period, there was a ritual called 'ambāvādal' through which unmarried girls worshipped Ambāl to get married. This ritual is also referred as 'Pāvai Nombu' in Tamil. (Reference about this ritual can be found in Thirupāvai and Thiruvempāvai). Even now, to get married, "Gowri Pooja" is performed by young girls. This practice is more in Andhra Pradesh.

Whoever comes as husband, the sign of a truly devoted wife (pathivrata) is to consider her husband equivalent to God and wholeheartedly surrender unto him. At some place, the mind should be surrendered totally. It is important not to change the mind. The object of surrender is not important. Let it be anything. Once the mind is totally surrendered to that one, there is nothing personal or individualistic. This is a state of losing self-interest. Such a state of 'selflessness' or 'losing one's ego' is like opening the doors to 'Moksha' (liberation).

If a woman surrenders to her husband and considers him as Lord Parameswarā, eventually, that Parameshwaran Himself will bless her through that husband. *Nalāyani's* husband had a very unpleasant form with evil attitude too, yet she showered her unconditional love and was greatly devoted to him. Due to this exemplary 'Pativrata' quality, she gained the power to stop the Sun from rising. The husband to whom such a 'Pativrata' is devoted seldom has any such power. Did *Nalāyani's* husband have the power to stop the Sun from rising for the day? Certainly not! Such a husband does not even carry even a particle of Lord Parameswarā's traits or attitude. But the good intention of the wife and intense devotion bestows her with such divine strength. The inner thoughts of such wife should be, "God has given me such a husband who is neither good looking nor pleasant in his behaviour, to test my inner strength. If I had a noble person as my husband, there would be no scope to realize my inner strength or sacrifice. By following an unpleasant husband, the insults and embarrassment may last only for a short period. Such a wife cultivates the attitude of, 'this blame or shame is not mine'. In a nut shell, by giving up the selfishness and ego, moksha or liberation becomes near.

The concept of surrender that I mentioned above also applies for 'Guru Bhakthi' or devotion towards Guru. We think a person is good and accept him as a guru. Later, even after discovering this Guru to be a different type of person, I think, our mind gets cleansed by continuing to serve him. We should develop an attitude that Lord Parameswarā manifests in different forms and now He has appeared in the form of this guru. Even if it is inappropriate, I feel that carrying on this kind of devotion may result in more benefits. What is so special about loving a good object? If you love a bad object, it might even become good with the intensity of your love, just as the fierce Rudra became a Mangala Swaroopi because of Ambal.

Ambāl also comes in the *Guru Swaroopa* (form of Guru). She runs the whole world of '*Mayalokha*' (world of illusion). To lead us out of this illusory world, She comes and guides us as Guru.

The *sadhakas* of *kundalini yoga*, bring their '*Prana Shakthi*' (air) to the top of the head and visualize Ambāl's feet in the full moon. This is described as '*Guru paduka*.' Even poet Kalidasa praises this as, "*Desika rupeena darshithāpthutham*", meaning Ambāl appears as acharyā to guide and lead us.

"Does Lord Easwarā live in the cremation grounds? Let him do so. Does he dance with the ghosts and spirits? Let him continue to do so. Does Easwarā perform the '*Samhara Thāndavam*' or the dance of destruction? Let him dance. Is he going around begging for alms? Let him beg. Whatever He does, I will surrender my heart to Him." So saying, with deep love for Easwaran, Ambāl sacrificed Her life at the Daksha Yagna. It is this Ambāl who will bless us to get the '*Guru bhakthi*' and '*Pathi bhakthi*'.



9. Why Ego When Divine Mother is Present?

It is not fair to feel proud and say that "I achieved this or that". Where did we get all the intelligence or physical capability to accomplish these? We get our strength and capability from a great source of energy that runs the universe. Without that supreme energy, can we even take a breath? One day, the breath also departs from our proud self. We do not have the capacity to hold on to that breath. On that day our energies vanish like a dream. If we think about it, we can realize that it is foolish to imagine the activities are all ours while those are really carried out with the blessings of Ambāl who is like the ocean of energy. The more we realize this with our experience, and feel humble as tiny specks before Her, we are sure to get more of Her '*anugraha*' (blessings).

The '*Avathār Purushas*' (enlightened souls), who came to preach humility to us, lived very humble lives. Likewise, Lord Ramachandramoorthi also lived a humble life following the path of '*Dharma*' (righteousness) and '*Sastras*' (a set of rules). If I think about Sri Rama's '*Vinayam*' or extreme veneration, I just get a thought that may sound strange to you. There are many people, who feel upset for not being able to live during the time Sri Ram lived in this world, right? But personally, I am happy that I was not born during his life time. Do you know why? Rama in spite of being born in the Kshatriya (the ruler) clan, lived a humble life, he used to prostrate before the Vedic scholars, Rishis and Acharyaas. Had I been a '*Mat Athipathi*', during His time, He would have prostrated before me also. That would make me feel embarrassed. But now, I am the one who is happily prostrating before Him.

The reason why I am telling this is though Sri Ram was an incarnation of Narayana, He lived a life of utter humility. Unlike a divine avataram beyond people's reach, He lived the simple life of an ordinary human being. He acted to exhibit all the happiness and sorrows like a common man. He wept when separated from Sita Devi, and he bewailed when Lakshmana fell unconscious.

He showed anger to the King of Oceans. On some occasions, the 'Avathāra Purushas', exhibit fear, anger, grief in such ways to create a feeling in people that they one among them. They let their minds play casually to match the actions or movements of their hands and legs. But inwardly, they will remain at peace and not let their actions affect their minds. In spite of being aware they are Avathārs, they pretend not to be aware of their divinity and behave as normal human beings. They lead a life that serves as a role model to the common man. If Sri Rama was an example for humility. His devotee 'Ānjaneya' was known for his valour, strength, mental and physical alertness. He remained devoted to Sri Rama as his true 'Rama dāsā' yet performed tasks that is normally impossible.

The qualities of our Adi Shankarā Bhagawat Padhāl were also similar to the qualities described above. I feel there is no greater Avathār than our Ācharyāl in our modern times. Ācharyāl was an incarnation of Parameswarān. He lived in this Earth only for a short period⁴, yet he accomplished tasks that could not have been done by the entire humanity collectively in this earth. He started from Sethu, walked all over India to reach Himachal and single-handedly took up the task of uplifting and revitalizing the Vedic tradition. He established 'Advaitha', (the concept of non-dualism) and established the 'Shanmatha' (merging of the six folds of worship into the Sanathana Dharma). He was a scholar par excellence, a great Ambāl devotee, poet, intellectual, capable of accomplishing many tasks, and an embodiment of compassion – all rolled in to one. In a stone carving in Sanskrit, dating back to more than 800 years, that was found in Cambodia, there is note that all the great legends of his time were hovering around his lotus feet like the bees. The saying goes as "*Nishesha Moorthali Mala Leetangari pankajaat*", the inscription says that Ācharyāl was addressed as 'Bhagawan'. The last paragraph in 'Soundarya Lahari', exhibits how a person of such a calibre was humble in his devotion to Ambāl.

⁴ Archaryaal's life span in this Earth was for 32 years only.

Authoring a great 'grantha' like 'Soundarya Lahari', is a gigantic task that could justify a person to be proud of his work. There is no better example of such a beautiful garland of words penned in this earth before or after our Ācharyāl. This is a wholesome piece of word art that you never get tired of hearing or reading the verses in 'Soundarya Lahari'. Our Ācharyāl, in spite of penning this mammoth piece of work, did not show even an iota of ego or pride. This humbleness can be seen in the 100th Sloka of 'Soundarya Lahari', where he completes this stothram and offers at the lotus feet of Ambāl with a sloka that starts with "*Pradeepa Jwalaapi.*"

He begins saying, "Amma you are the '*Vāk Swaroopini*⁵', I am offering prayers with the words that you blessed me with. It is like lighting a camphor before the Sun. Where is the tiny flame from the camphor and where the brilliance of the Sun? After all, the camphor gets lit by energy of the Sun. The camphor will not even burn easily if there is no Sun for four days. On the occasion of Maha Sankranti, we offer salutations to the brilliant Sun by offering ārathi with the camphor. Does mean that we are belittling the brilliance of Sun? Instead, we can see that the light from camphor gets dissolved and faded in the brilliance of the Sun. In similar vein, Ācharyāl says his vocal power gets faded in front of Ambāl.

Ācharyāl also gives another example by saying, "my poetic offering to you, is like the Chandra Kāntha stone (moonstone) offering the argyam to the Moon⁶". It is as if we are offering Moon, the water that oozes out of the moonstone, instead of the normal water. It is said that the Chandra Kāntha stone absorbs the cool rays of the full moon and produces water in the form of cool moisture. Whether in reality, if this is true or not, it has been a tradition to use this phrase in poetic circles. Offering oblation with water or 'argyam samarpayāmi' is one of the 'Shodasopachāram' (sixteen forms of worship).

⁵ Bestower of good communication

⁶ It is tradition to offer 'argyam' to Moon, after lunar eclipse. We offer normal water as 'argyam'.

Is it not strange to offer the water that oozes out the moonstone to the Moon? Ācharyāl compares his poetic rendition to this argyam samarpayāmi that the words in his stothrams were nothing but the words that oozed out of Ambāl herself.

There is a third example that exhibits his humbleness. "Amma, the words that I used in this Sthuthi to praise you, are like bathing the ocean with its own water". When people visit Rāmeswaram, it is a practice to symbolically bath the ocean with the water from the Sethu Samudhiram. Few drops of water from the ocean is taken and offered as oblation to the ocean. Ācharyāl says that he took few drops from Ambāl's ocean of letters and offered as his Sthuthi to her. He asks, "Is this (water) owned by the worshipper? No, it was taken from the ocean and offered back to the ocean".

Ācharyāl's humbleness is exhibited where he says that the words in the Sthuthi, were the words gifted by Ambāl herself. "There would be no moisture in the Moonstone, in the absence of the Moon. Similarly, without the blessings of Ambāl, I would be devoid of words". We take few drops of water from the mighty ocean and offer oblation to the ocean itself. In the same way, we extract the few words from Ambāl's ocean of words or letters. This being reality, the sloka's inner meaning is that, it is a mockery to claim that we write verses or poems in praise of Ambāl, or that we offered camphor to the Sun. When Avathār Purushas are personification of humility, is there any justice, if we carried ego and pride for our accomplishments? The world will praise and shower us with floral tributes, for the flow of language, word power, poetic skills, or for any other accomplishments. It is very important that we stand deep rooted on the ground, try to avoid taking pride and analyze if we deserve this praise. We should analyze from where we got this prowess to accomplish this work and remember that this prowess came from a small spark of Ambāl's blessings. What was taken, was extracted from her energy source, we need to keep away from feeling proud of ourselves for any achievements and surrender with complete devotion to her.

This will free us from ego and we can enjoy absolute bliss. We should never give any room to thoughts that glorify our ego and pride or never allow them to flourish. Ego and pride will always finds ways to sneak into us tactically. Finally, the only solution is to surrender to Ambāl's lotus feet with complete devotion. When we wholeheartedly dedicate our achievements and successes to her, Ambāl will shower us with endless blessings.



10.Divine Mother as shown by Acharyā

Our Ācharyā Sri Sankara Bhagawat Padhāl has authored many stothrams in praise of Ambāl. In addition to 'Soundarya Lahari', he has penned big stothrams, like 'Anandha Lahari', 'Devi Bhujangam', 'Thirupura Sundari Manasa Pooja Stothram', "Thirupura Sundari Veda Pada Sthavam", and small stothrams like, 'Annapūrna Ashtakam', 'Ambāshtakam', and others. If only we keep chanting these stothrams, we can happily float in the 'anugraham' or grace of Ambāl. Ācharyā's language flow in these stothrams is exceptional. Yet he remains untouched by 'ego' and seeks the grace of the divine mother in all humbleness and with complete humility. Ambāl is the source of energy in all animate and inanimate entities and in whose energy we survive. But many a times, Ācharyā says that he does not deserve or is not capable of receiving her blessings. We can find this humble tone at many places, more specifically in 'Soundarya Lahari'. There are two places where he exhibits such humble feelings that will in touch our hearts. In one instance, he says "*drucha thrakee yasya*" seeking the compassionate grace of Ambāl. In the next, "*Drutheenaam Moorthano*", where he seeks to touch Her lotus feet. He is requesting Ambāl to turn towards him also and give a partial glimpse at least. Mother, please bless "*Maam Api*" meaning 'including me'. In the first instance, he is seeking blessing for all including him and in the next he is seeking blessings for all including him, to touch her lotus feet. He is seeking Ambāl to put her feet on our heads to bless us. In both situations he uses 'Api', (meaning 'also' or 'including'). In reality, it is we who do not deserve her blessings or compassion, yet he includes himself along with us by classifying him as an undeserving person.

Considering his gnana (knowledge), devotion, intellect, eloquent speech, accomplishment or compassion, there has been no one prior to our beloved Ācharyā or will there be anyone in future. In spite these credits to his side, he has set an example for us to tread his path in humility and devotion to Ambāl.

He has attempted to teach us humility directly through his actions and indirectly by using the phrase "*Maam Api, Maam Api*" (grant me also the blessings to touch your lotus feet).

Is it right, for a person to demand something that he or she does not deserve? No! Surely not! In spite of negativity prevailing, there are some good deeds happenings around us, without any discrimination. Example, "on a full moon day, does the moon light radiate only in the balcony of the King's palace? The moon showers its pleasant light on the thorny bush in the forest as well. The moon does not discriminate and but radiates everywhere equally. Just like Chandra (moon), Amma can you please shower your divine grace, without any discrimination, on the deserving and the undeserving persons like me"? In the phrase, "*Drusa thakee yasya*", Ācharyāl further adds, "Can't you shower us with the pleasantness of your compassion and spark of your gnana or knowledge?"

Similarly, when Ācharyāl prays to Ambāl seeking blessings to touch her lotus feet, he says "Amma! Your lotus feet are borne by the Vedas on their heads just like a crown, can't you touch my head with that lotus feet? If my asking is not fair, the question of fair and unfair comes only when you are judging an action or inaction. Compassion does not weigh on these concepts. And you are the embodiment of compassion. Hence, Amma out of your compassion, please place your lotus feet on my head (*Dhaya Dehi charano*)."

There is an inner significance, when we say that 'Vedas hold the lotus feet of Ambāl in their heads'. Upanishads have a name '*sruthi siras*', meaning 'head of Vedas'. Earlier, when narrating about Gnanāmbika, I had mentioned an incident about Ambāl's *avirbhavam* (manifestation) from *Kenopanishad*. When the ego of the Devas was growing beyond control, Ambāl had to manifest as *Gnanāmbika*, to give them enlightenment. So, I think Ācharyāl had that incident in his mind while seeking the touch of Her lotus feet. Hence, according to the Upanishad, in order to annihilate our ego, it is important to tread the path of enlightenment.

True to the words in the Upanishad, Ācharyāl, with complete humility and in a humble tone is seeking “*Maam Api*”, “bless us by the touch of your lotus feet”.

For every action, there is a direct effect and some indirect effect also. Even if these were not intended, these effects just happen. In Kenopanishad, there is a direct reference that Ambāl manifested as Gnanāmbika to impart the ultimate knowledge. In addition to this, there is another indirect significance. In this, there is no relation between ‘*gnana upadesam*’ (imparting of ultimate knowledge) and the principle of Ambāl. But I am elaborating on this, so the modern generation can understand this.

The current day scholars say that the forms of Gods like, Parameswarān, Parvathi, Vishnu, Pillaiyar, etc. were all creations during the period of Puranas and that these forms never existed during the Upanishads. They also go on to say that there is no mention about these forms in the Upanishad. But in Kenopanishad, there is phrase that specifically states, “A Celestial Sthri or woman named Uma alias Himavathi manifested”. So, there is mention about ‘*Sthri*’, ‘*Himavathi*’ and ‘*Uma*’ in the core of Upanishads. It further states that she stood in the same Ākasham, where Brahmam Yaksham stood, basically it means both are one and the same. When the word ‘*Sthri*’ was used, that is direct refuting of these current theories of Upanishad speaking of the ‘formless God’. When mentioning about the ‘*Sthri*’, Upanishad did not just mention ‘*Uma*’, it also mentioned about ‘*Himavathi*’. So, it is a fact that Himavathi was born as the daughter of Himavan (Himavan putri Himavathi or Parvathi - daughter of Parvatha Raja or King of Mountains). So the form (Moorthi) worship predated the Puranas. This is significant evidence, that forms were present during the period of Upanishads.

Ācharyāl is seeking the blessings of Ambāl to place her lotus feet on his head. This reiterates the fact that Ambāl is the ‘*Guru Swaroopini*’ or Divine teacher. Mantra sastras mention that the appropriate place of Guru Padukas are our heads.

This is the place we get '*Guru Thiruvadi Dheeksha*' or the process of passing the knowledge from Guru to sishya (student).

According to the Upanishad, Ambāl manifested as 'Gnanāmbika' to impart the ultimate knowledge. She placed her feet on the crown of the Vedas. Ācharyāl describes other benefits of this divine lotus feet in the sloka. So we have to wash the holy feet of elders, saints, Acharyas (spiritual teachers) with water and seek blessings. When we welcome such persons, there is procedure called as 'Shodasopacharam' or sixteen forms of veneration. Among them 'Padyam' means washing their holy feet with water. Ambāl in the form Ganga flows from knotted hair of Lord Shiva. She is the ParaBrahma Shakthi whose feet touches, the head of Lord of all animate or inanimate - 'Pasupathi'. Meaning this Pasupathi also pays his obeisance to Ambāl. When Easwarān himself pays his obeisance to Ambāl, the Ganga Jalam naturally fall at her feet, right? That is why it is called as 'Pādhyam'. After all Easwarān's Lordship of this Universe, was also her manifestation. So Easwarān is prostrating without any hint of '*Aham kāram.*'

Pious women decorate their feet with designs of a red colour paste, called as '*Laksharam*⁷'. But to decorate Ambāl's feet there is different red mark. 'Hari' or Narayan's head is adorned by a *Chudamani* (red crest jewel). Ācharyāl says, that the radiance from this Chudamani is 'Laksharam' of Ambāl. After all Narayan is the preserver or sustainer of this Universe, even he is prostrating at the feet of Ambāl with humility. So, the jewel worn by Vishnu on his head, is the jewel worn by Ambāl in her feet. The red stone shining on the crown of Vishnu, reflects as the red paste worn by Ambāl.

The Devas, Sri MahaVishnu and Parameswarān, all worship her without any trace of ego with complete humility.

⁷ In Sanskrit, the work "Laksha" means mark

Hence she is the one who can shower her grace and bless us to wipe our ego. We in turn should follow the footsteps of our Ācharyāl, and seek the blessings to place our heads at her lotus feet.

Ācharyāl, while describing the qualities of Ambāl, had described as a 'Pathi Vratha' (one who is ever devoted to her husband). But here Ācharyāl mentions that Easwarān is prostrating to Ambāl. All these are but their Divine play. They both are one and the same. At one time, Ambāl pays her respect to Easwarān and in another situation it is vice versa. Though both are one, he is the static form of truth and she is 'Sat Chit' (true consciousness or bliss).

In the very first sloka of 'Soundarya Lahari', Ācharyāl describes about this exemplary power of Ambāl. '*Shiva Saktya yukto*', meaning "Amma, the source dynamic energy form. So even Lord Shiva (Parameswarān), the static energy form needs to connect to your dynamic form in order to get momentum. Without you, Easwarān is but static and devoid of any action". Brahman, is the ultimate higher consciousness, and is the principle which lies realized in the whole, so it does realize anything beyond itself. There lot of types of knowledge these days. Brahman is filled everywhere and in everything, so it has no room to move. In spite of this, there is movement in the cosmic world filled with Sun, stars, and nucleus of the atoms, etc. all these are in constant movement. So also the mind, there is no question of being in peace or state of rest. All the knowledge and movements seem to have come from the Brahman. That is action of illusion or Maya or Brahma Sakthi. So Ācharyāl rightly says "Amma! It is you who activates Shiva". The world that came into existence will finally vanish because of you. Māyā - "what is not, that is Māyā". She is also the one whole removes the cover of illusion.

The various forms that we see in this universe are all the product of Her creation. Yes, none other than Ambāl Herself. Yet, only when we meditate on some form

of hers, we feel comfort in our minds. She accommodates, all the forms in Her formless Ākasam or space.

She is our breath, She is the *Agni* (or fire the blazing element), *Jalam* (water) and *Bhoomi* (Earth). In the sloka '*manasthvam*', Ācharyāl describes all these.

In the sloka before this (*Sareeram Tvam*), Ācharyāl says that Ambāl is the dark night and the bright morning. Just like the mother feeding her baby, Ambāl is feeding and providing this world with the help of Sun and the Moon. The plants get their Chlorophyll from the Sun. people survive by eating the plant and plant products or by eating the animals that survive on the plants. (The non-vegetarians also feed on the meat of animals that feed on plants, like the goat, cow or pig. They do not feed on animals that eat meat, like cat, lion or tiger). Sun is the source of life energy, but the Moonlight helps regenerate the energy in the plants. Ācharyāl says that Ambāl runs this Universe with the heat generated from the Sun and shade of the Moon. These are some of Her other forms.

In the Yoga sastra, we can raise our Kundalini shakthi from the bottom portion of our backbone to the top of our head. When we break open the lotus stem, we can see a very thin string or strand, just like this Ambāl raises in us, like a thin strand. This is described in the Lalitha Sahasranām sloka '*bisathanthu thaniyasi*'. It is fact that we cannot see with shakthi moving with our naked eye, yet it radiates like millions of Suns. At the same time, it is also cold as million moons.

In addition to all these, she also resides in all sound forms, in communications, and more specifically in all the Vedic chants. These are not evident to the naked eye and are to be inferred. For the layman like us, she takes forms of Lalitha, Durga, Bhvaneswari, etc. These forms can be seen as deities in various temples and religious places, so we can worship their forms or '*Vigraha Moorthis*.' (temple idols)

She was born as Parvatha Raja Kumari, in the northern province of Himachal. In the southern tip, she assumed the form of Kanyakumari.

In Kerala, she is Bhagawathi; in Karnataka, she is Chamundeswari; in Chola kingdom, she is Akhilāndeswari; in Pāndiya kingdom, she is Meenākshi; in Andhrapradesh, she is GnanĀmbāl; in Maharāstra, she is ThulajaBhawāni; in Gujarāt, she is Ambāji; in Utharpradesh, she is Vindyā Vilasini; in Bengal, she is Kāli; in Assam, she is Kamākya. So, she has manifested in many forms in various temples and religious places and blesses her devotees.



11. Hardship is the Divine Blessing of the Mother

In Lalitha Sahasranāmam (1008 Names of Lalitha), there is a sloka which goes' "Avyaja Karunāmoorthi," meaning immensely compassionate or one who showers unconditional love and affection. Hence, we say Ambāl is a personification of love and affection.

But the world is filled with innumerable problems. I only know what types of problems are there. People who come to me tell me of some of their sufferings. Even those who perform pujas, visit temples, go on theertha yatra (pilgrimage) suffer from untold problems. Some of these people come to me with a heavy heart and say, "I have performed so many pujas, I have done many devotional activities, yet Ambāl has given me more problems. You call Her *Karunāmoorthi*, *Karunāmoorthi*, but in my case She has not turned Her eyes towards to me." They get annoyed with Ambāl. If you ask me, I think suffering is a blessing from Ambāl. It seems to be the biggest blessing.

We think only about the good things that we do in our lives, and lament whether it is fair to receive sufferings. We get upset with God. Whoever we are, have we done only good things to everybody? If we did a self- analysis, we will realise the many mistakes and sins that we have committed, if not in physical actions but through our mind. These are concerning actions that we committed in the current birth. We do not know what we did in our previous births. According to the law of nature, as ordained by Ambāl, "You reap as you sow." We might have committed sins in our previous births, and the current problems that we face may be the results of our past actions. (We are reaping the fruits of our own actions). In reality, if we are able to know fully our own past actions and misdeeds, the problems we face now may seem far less than what we deserve. Then, we may feel sorry about ourselves. In spite of so many problems, She has provided an opportunity to think about Her and show us a path to liberation. Is it not an extra blessing?

Even if we do not deserve Her grace, She blesses us out of Her compassion. How pathetic it is that we do not seem to understand this logic, but are simply complaining? As if we are not satisfied with the bad karmas we accumulated in our previous birth, we end up accumulating even more karma by finding fault on the Divine mother.

A child eats mud. The mother ties the child's hands with a piece of cloth. The child gets angry and thinks, "is she really a mother? she is heartless and my prime enemy." Did the mother tie the child's hands without any reason? Who else can think better for her child? The child is his/her own enemy, yet he/she thinks that the mother is the enemy. To some extent we are like this child, however old we are. We are unable to bear Her punishment for our past misdeeds. We do not have the strength to get relieved. We are just blaming the mother who tied our hands. In the same manner, to prevent us from committing the same misdeeds, Ambāl has tied our hands with a cloth called problems or challenges. So going forward, when we face difficulties, let us understand that these were the results of our past actions. So, if we commit misdeeds in this birth, we will continue to face problems. So let us pray to Ambāl, so that She blesses us with the stability of mind that will keep us on the right track and thus lead us to liberation.

When we are blessed with things that we consider pleasures of life, we think that Ambāl is ever so compassionate. When we are blessed with such pleasures even when we do not deserve, it is said to be compassion without reason. The problem we face is compassion for a reason. The reason is our past misdeeds. Ambāl gives us problems to make us realize that we should not repeat the same misdeeds, and to reform ourselves. The pleasures we think are good for us may lead to unmeaningful results. So, I feel that the compassion to give us problems with the intent to reform us is superior to the compassion that provides us pleasures.

Her compassion may arise naturally without any reason. However, it seems to me that Her compassion with a reason to test and reform us is superior. We only see bits and pieces. We do not know what is prior and after. We think the problems we face within the short gap of time are detrimental to us. If we know the three phases of time (past, present and future), we will realize that She is not causing any harm to us.

A man loaded his donkey with a bag of salt and went to the farmer's market in the neighbouring village. In earlier days, cows and donkeys were used to transport things from one place to another. And as this trader started his journey, there was torrential rain on the way. So, what would have happened to the salt bags? All the salt dissolved in the rain water. The trader got annoyed with God and concluded, "Why is God punishing a poor man like me? I am not going to worship this heartless God anymore." So, he started walking back towards his home. Eventhough the return path was through a forest, he took it boldly because there were other traders too who were returning home after business. Expecting the traders, there were robbers hiding in the forest. The robbers waited with the fond hope that the traders will carry lots of money after selling their wares and they can shoot and rob the traders. What can the traders do before gun-wielding robbers? In those early days, they did not have bullets for the guns. The explosive was a powder that was filled into the gun at site and used for shooting. On hearing the noise of shooting, regardless of a victim, all traders will drop their belongings and run for their lives. On that day too, the robbers filled the explosive powder as usual into the gun and shot. But the gun failed to cause explosion. If it is a bullet, it will not be affected by moisture. Because of the heavy rains, the gun powder was moist and did not explode. Now, without other weapons, the robbers panicked. So, instead of the traders, it was the robbers who dropped their guns and fled.

Only now, the salt trader realized how wrong he was in condemning God.

The salt trader realized that due to rain, only salt was lost. If there had been no rain, he may have lost his life. This rain did give him a small problem but he was saved from a greater calamity. How great was God's compassion! He then prayed wholeheartedly.

So, we do not see the past or future, but just take into consideration our current problems, and make a big fuss. We question the universal mother, asking why we should suffer all the problems in our life if She is really a Karunāmoorthi. If only we knew the benefits that would come our way, on account of these sufferings, we would never question Ambāl or her love for us. Keeping us in the dark of our past and future is also her divine play.

Even without the ability to know of the past (previous birth) or future, a man has a high level of *ānavam* (arrogance) and *ahankāram* (ego)! If only he is endowed with '*trikāla gnana*' (the ability to know the past, present and future), there would be no limit to his arrogance and ego. So, Ambāl has rightly controlled us. But, even in this state, we ourselves can realize that we do not know the past or future. We can trust the Mahans who have the *trikāla gnana* (knowledge of the three stages). The entire business of the universe happens as per some rules for its own effective functioning. Similarly, we should understand that our lives also should be lived as per the law of nature. If we are undergoing difficulties in our lives, there must be some reason behind it. All we can do is to pray for Ambāl's blessing to solve our problems and surrender to Her.

Ambāl is not the one who will find happiness by making us suffer. At all times, She is our '*bandu*' or relative and '*saka*' or companion, She is our divine mother and father. Ambāl is everything to us.

12. Shakti of Lord Shiva, Sister of Lord Narayana

Ambāl or the Divine Mother is the energy source of Parabrahmam. The energy node of a matter and the energy inside the matter are one and the same. Matter cannot exist without energy, nor is energy separate from the matter. Both co-exist as inseparable entities. They are not two separate entities. Shakti (Divine Mother) is the Parabrahmam. We address Easwarān (Lord Shiva) as Parabrahmam, Ambāl is the other half of Easwarān that concludes that Shakti is the Parabrahmam. Can we think of a flower without its fragrance? Similarly, can we separate the milk and its whiteness? Nor can we separate the sweetness from honey! In the same way, Easwarā and Ambāl are inseparable. Parameswarān and Parashakti form the inseparable primordial couple. And they are the mother and father for all creations.

Father and mother cannot be separated from each other in an ideal family and we identify them as '*Ammaiappam*' and '*Thayumānavar*'. This inseparable couple of Shiva and Shakti is addressed as '*Ardha Nāreeswara swaroopa*', which means that this Divine couple is bonded together in body and soul as one. But in reality, we are all blessed with mother and father who have their own individual physical bodies. The father disciplines us and helps us in attaining gnana or knowledge. On the other hand, we need a mother who protects us through her unconditional love. In principle, it is not appropriate if the mother and father have their own agenda and are indifferent to each other. It is for this reason Easwarān and Shakti took the form of '*Ardha Nareeswara*' to reiterate that mother and father are two sides of the same coin.

Archaryāl, while describing Ambāl, says that "*Sareeran Tvam Shambho*" meaning "Shambu, the truth, is formless and you are its form." Ambāl became formless because of Shakti - the energy source. However, we desire to see Ambāl's Brahmam (Lord Shiva), the embodiment of pure knowledge and the other compassionate form of Ambāl in two individual forms as mother and father.

There is an individual form for Lord Shiva. We also need a common unified form of both mother and father. For this purpose, Ambāl and Lord Shiva, have taken the unified form of 'Ardhanareeswara', with Parameshwaran on the right side and Ambāl on the left side. Just as positive and negative nodes form a single electricity, the single truth exists in ardhanāreeswara form.

Looking at the 'Ardhanāreeswara' form, there is a half connection of Ambāl with the third eye (of Shiva) that burnt 'Kāman' (God of Desire or Kāma – Manmadan). The left leg that kicked and killed 'kālan' (Yama-the God of death) is entirely that of Ambāl. From this, we can infer that Ambāl is the one who liberates us from the cycle of birth and death.

Realizing that Easwarā and Ambāl are inseparable, cultivate devotion on both of them in equal proportion. It is said that ignoring one and being fully devoted to the other is not adequate. Only we love both of them, we can retain the *gnanam* (knowledge) that Easwarān is the supporting 'pathi' (husband) of Ambāl and She is the inseparable 'shakthi' of this 'pathi.' If we ignore one of them, the 'sathi-pathi' relationship is forgotten resulting in serious consequences. You all know the disastrous consequences of Soorpanaka hating Seethā and loving only Rāma and Rāvana loving only Seethā and hating Rāma. If we want fullest blessings without such serious consequences, we should not forget to worship Ambāl and Easwarā existing as 'Ardhanāreeswara.' Remembering that He is 'madhoru bāgan' (a Tamil word meaning having a woman-on-one side) and Ambāl is 'bāgam piriyaī', (Tamil word meaning one who is indivisible), we should love both of them.

In the Ardhanāreeswara form, the left side occupied by Ambāl is the same side that is occupied by Lord Vishnu in the Shankarā Narayana form. So, it can be inferred that Ambāl is also Narāyana. Appar Swamigal, while offering prayers at 'Thiruvaiyār', says that Easwarā has no other wife other than Hari (Lord Vishnu): "Arialaal Devi illai, iyyan Iyaarnaarke" (Tamil words there is no Devi without Hari).

In the Puranic way, we describe Ambāl as '*Nārāyana Sahodari*' (Nārāyana's Sister) to support the philosophy that Ambal and Mahavishnu are one and the same.

Whether it is Ardhanāreeswara or Shankarā Nārāyana, in both forms, the parabrahma Easwarān is on the right side. If we consider the right side as positive in electricity, then the left side becomes negative. Atomic scientists say that while the positive energy is the nucleus, the negative energy rotates at high speed around the nucleus. Likewise, with the inactive *Nirguna Brahman* (formless brahman -Shiva) as the nucleus supporting the universe as positive energy, the *Sarguna Shakti* (the energy of Ambāl) creates and sustains the activities of the entire universe as negative force going around the nucleus. If the same forces are shown in a physical shape for worship, they are certain forms on the right and left sides without the nucleus and the rotating force. In these forms, the right positive side in the inactive brahman; the left is negative, the energy of the brahman for all activities. In the ardhanāri swaroopam, the left side is Ambāl in a woman's form; Mahavishnu in Sankaranārāyana form.

Vaishnavite Poet Thirumangai Āzhvar, while singing on 'Perumān', says, "*Pirai thangu sadaiyanai valathe vaithu,*" (In Tamil- meaning 'Perumal or Vishnu has on his right side, the one who has crescent moon on his knotted hair'). So, it can be inferred that Perumān is on the left side.

If we call the ever static *parabrahman*, the embodiment of *gnana* or knowledge as *Parameshwara*, the dynamic energy who executes all the work in this universe through '*māya*' or illusion, and leads us out of this illusion is the compassionate Ambāl or Lord Vishnu. She is Parameswarā's Shakti; She is really Nārāyanan. In terms of *Puranās* (Ancient Sanskrit literature), Ambāl is seen as Shiva's '*pathni*' or wife and Nārāyanan's sister. The concluding verse of '*Lalitha Sahasranāmam*' (1008 names of *Lalitha Devi*), mentions '*Shiva Shakti Aikiya Roopini,*' (the united form of Shiva and Shakti). Elsewhere, it is mentioned '*Padmanābha Sahodari,*' (sister of Padmanābha -Lord Vishnu).

Shyāma Shāstri (one of the musical trinity), in his musical compositions, calls Ambāl as '*Shyāma Krishna Sahodari*' and keeps it as his symbol.

On Krishnashtami day, the baby girl born to Yashoda was Ambāl Herself as 'Vishnu Māya.' On Rama Navami, She was born as '*GnanĀmbikha*' and this is celebrated as 'Vasantha Navarathri' or spring Navarathri (nine holy nights). The incarnations of both Vishnu and Ambāl took place at the same time implying they are siblings.

Andāl, (a staunch devotee of Sri Krishna), dreamt of marrying Sri Krishna and has sung it as a pāsūram (verse). In that verse (in Tamil), Andāl says, "*mandirak kodi uduthi manamalai andhari sooda kanaakanden thozhi naan.*" - meaning Andāl dreamt that as per the *Vaidika Brahmanic* tradition, Ambāl came as Andāl's sister-in-law, draped the 'koraī puduvai' (wedding saree) on her, garlanded her and led her to the wedding 'pandhal' or site.

Thus Ambāl is considered as no different from Easwarā and no different from MahāVishnu; to one She is wife, to the other She is sibling. Once we get used to this viewpoint, we will not think of who is superior or inferior between Easwara and Vishnu. The discord between Shaivism and Vaishnavism will snap.

When the static form becomes dynamic, it takes multiple forms. There is no superiority or inferiority between these forms. Likewise, there is no difference between these forms and their origin of Satya. If we get this *gnana* (wisdom), there will be no fights, quarrels, differences of opinion and discord in our religion. Only Ambāl, the Easwara Patni and Padmanabha Sahodari, should bless us to get this mental balance.

Ambikā (other name for Ambāl), is in many forms in temples. One of them in Shiva temples is the '*Koshta Devathai Durga*.' In Shiva temples, the 'Garba Griham' or Santum Sanctorum is surrounded by murthis (idols) of Vinayagā (Ganesh), Lord Dakshnāmoorthy, MahāVishnu (or Lingodbhavar), Brahma, and Durga. Among these deities, Lord Dakshināmoorthy does not have a patni (wife). Likewise, Durga Devi is seen as single.

Lord Dakshināmoorthy holds *japa mālā* (rosary beads) in one hand and on the other hand holds a bundle of palm leaves. He is fair in complexion. Similarly, Saraswathi Devi, who is also fair in complexion, holds *japa mālā* (rosary beads) in one hand and on the other hand holds a bundle of palm leaves. Siblings do look similar in many ways.

Hence, Saraswathi Devi is Lord Shiva's sister. Both are embodiments of gnana or ultimate knowledge. Brahma is seated on lotus flower, his complexion is bright like that of molten gold. In the same way, Lakshmi Devi is of similar complexion and seated on Lotus flower. Brahma is associated with the creation life in this universe, while Lakshmi Devi is the life sustainer, creator of health and wealth. So, Brahma and Lakshmi are siblings.

Now, how is Durga Devi, who is always alone without any male consort depicted? Her complexion is that of blue-grey clouds in the sky. She holds '*sangu*' or conch in one hand and '*chakra*' or disc of Vishnu on the other hand. She is the destructor of '*asuras*' or demons like, Mahishāsura and other demons. When we analyze these points, we can conclude without much ado that Durga Devi is the sister of Lord Vishnu. Both Lord Vishnu and Durga Devi, hold '*sangu*' and '*chakra*' in their hands, they assume different '*avathārs*' or forms to fight and destroy the '*asuras*'. Both Lord Vishnu and Durga Devi are embodiments of compassion to their devotees, yet ferocious in destroying the evil forces. They both manage and sustain the entire creation of '*Māya*' or illusion through their divine play. During the Sangam Tamil period, Lord Vishnu was called '*Māyon*', meaning one who preserves or sustains this universe with his Divine play or illusion. He is also called "*Māyavi* or *Māya Sutradhāri*", meaning Lord Vishnu is the executor of the divine play of creation, which is also an illusion. And Durga Devi is called as '*Mahāmāye*' meaning source of ultimate illusion. As compared to other God siblings described above, this sibling pair of Lord Vishnu and Durga Devi are closer to each other- almost one! The Durga that I mentioned has the name itself as "*Vishnudurgai*."

The brother-sister pair of Ambāl and Vishnu is better known among the people in this world, than the other two brother-sister pairs of Saraswathi - Shiva Sagodari or Lakshmi - Brahma Sahodari. Usually there is a notion that 'māya' or illusion is the divine play associated with female power. But this characteristic is more prominent in Lord Vishnu. That is why, for sharing the 'Amrit' (the nectar of immortality), Lord Vishnu incarnated as Mohini avathār. To show that Vishnu is another form of Ambāl, appropriately, Parameswarān marries Mohini. Amongst all the Vishnu Kshetras (holy places), Tirupathi is more widely known, and attracts more devotees. When you see Venkataramana Swami in this temple, we can see a close resemblance to Ambāl. Here, Perumal is adorned with a saree. On Fridays, they perform Abishekam to Him. In other Perumal temples, Perumal has Garuda Vahana (eagle vehicle), but in Tirupathi he has Simha Vahana (Lion vehicle). Ambāl's Vahana is also lion.

Ambāl, MahaVishnu and Parameswarān are three precious gems. Sri Appaya Dhikshidhar has authored a 'Grantham' (book) called '*Rathna Traya Pariksha*', wherein he has stated that Shiva, Vishnu and Ambāl all three are the same supreme reality, but in three different forms. Ambāl is inseparable from Shiva as well as Vishnu. While she is the 'pathni' or wife of the former, She is the sahodari or sister of the latter. We should have our bhakti or devotion equally on these three deities. We should understand that the silent 'Truth' is Shiva and the dynamic energy is Ambāl or Vishnu and be steadfast in our devotion.

I mentioned that there is no difference between Ambāl and Vishnu in a philosophical angle. Now let me tell you a story that you may not be aware of. You all know the story of Rāmāyana. But now I will tell you the same known story as if you do not know it. Other than the commonly known Rāmāyanams like Valmiki Rāmāyanam, Kambhar Rāmāyanam, Tulsi Das Rāmāyanam, there are many other Rāmāyanams like, Anantha Rāmāyanam, Arpudha Rāmāyanam, Dhurvasa Rāmāyanam. What I am going to say is from one of these Rāmāyanams.

It is said that Ambāl took birth as Rāma and Easwarā accompanied Ambāl in this avathār as Seetha. Sri Rama's complexion is described as '*Maragadha Mani Varnan*', meaning bright green colour as seen in the gem 'emerald'. Kālidāsa describes Ambāl as '*Mātha Maragadha Shyāma*'. Muthuswami Dheekshitar also sang on Goddess Meenākshi describing her as '*Maragadha chaye*'.

When Ambāl is the source energy, beyond the scope of '*srushti*' (creation), '*sthithi*' (sustenance) and '*samharam*' (destruction of evil), she is bright red in colour. As the wife of Shiva (one of Tridev or Trinity), Ambāl is described to be green in colour. So Ambāl took the form of Sri Rama and Parameswarā descended as Seetha Devi.

In olden days, marriages used to be conducted at young age. During the wedding ceremony, Homams and other elaborate religious rituals used to be conducted. In order to ensure that the children don't get bored of the rituals, and to entertain them, they had some activities like '*vilayadal*', '*oonjal*' (ceremonial swinging), '*nalangu*' and '*oorvalam*' (wedding procession). During the '*oorvalam*', the groom used to be dressed as a girl, and the bride used to dress as a boy. In similar vein and to eradicate the threat from the Rākshasas from the world and go about in symbolic procession, Ambāl assumed the form of Sri Rama and Easwarā assumed the form of Seetha Devi. No layman is aware of this divine play, but Sri Rama and Seetha Devi also pretended as if they had forgotten this truth.

Sometimes, in extreme emotion, what is hidden deep in the mind explodes. Such a situation happened in Rāmāyana. Due to the promise given to his step mother Kaikeyi, Sri Rāma decided to leave behind Seetha in Ayodhya and proceed to the forest. Seetha Devi gets extremely angry, and asks Sri Rama, "What sort of man is he who desires to leave behind his wife, due to the fear or Rākshasas and wild animals?" Seetha Devi goes on further saying, "My father Janaka, who got me married to you, was not aware that you are but a woman dressed in man's attire!" (*Sthriyam Purusha Vigramam*). This verse is in Valmiki Rāmāyanam.

On hearing these words, Sri Rama is reminded of the fact that he is indeed Ambāl and the purpose of his avathār. Immediately he complies and requests Seetha Devi to accompany him to the forest.

But Rāvana, whom Sri Rāma had to defeat was a great Shiva Bhaktha or devotee. Rāvana desired to bring Shiva from the Kailash Mountain, instal Him in the *Ashoka Vanam* (forest) for worship there. So, Rāvana tried to uproot Mount Kailash. At that ime, Parvathy got scared and embraced Lord Shiva. And Shiva pressed the mountain with His toe slightly, and Rāvana had to save himself and ran to Lanka. Being a staunch devotee of Shiva, Rāvana realised that it was Shiva who has come in the avathār of Seetha. In the earlier instance, Rāvana felt that it was Ambāl who prevented him from taking away Shiva to Lanka. So now, Rāvana did not want Ambāl in the avathār of Sri Rāma, to come in the way and designed a game to remove Sri Rāma from the scene using Maricha (the golden deer). Once Sri Rāma was diverted with another pursuit, Rāvana skilfully abducted Seetha Devi and placed Her in his Asoka Vanam (Asoka Forest). Having been born in the Rākshasa lineage, and separating the Divine Universal parents, Rāvana’s devotion became ‘Kāma’ or inappropriate love. And Rāvana was desperate in possessing Seetha Devi for himself. But being a Shiva Bhaktha, Rāvana did occasionally get glimpses of ‘Avathāra Rahasyam’ (secret of the Divine incarnation). On seeing Anjaneya (Hanuman), Rāvana asked if he was ‘Nandi Bhagawān’. Sage Valmiki describes this situation as "*Kim Esha Bhagawan Nandi?*" meaning "Who is he? Bhagawan Nandi?"

On seeing the Seetha Rāma Bhakta Hanuman, Rāvana asked if Hanuman was the regent (Nandi) of the Swami of Kailash (Shiva and Ambāl). The reason why I am telling all these stories is because Ambāl is in fact Nārayanan. Both are one and the same! But Nārayanan is the *purusha roopam* (male form) and Ambāl is the *sthri roopam* (female form). But our minds tend to think that their individual forms are also great, and let’s worship them as separate deities as brother and sister.

There are innumerable Puranas to prove the brother – sister relationship of Ambāl and Nārāyan.

Desire is the root cause for all conflicts and negativity. Such an unwanted desire is called as 'kāmam'. When our desire is not fulfilled, we get angry and sad. Desires drags us to the vicious circle of birth, death and re-birth. We are killing ourselves to this 'kāmam'. A good rain proof umbrella cloth like taffeta protects us from getting wet in rain. We call it water-proof. Similarly, is there a protective shield like 'kāma proof', 'anger proof', 'sadness proof'? Yes, there is. That shield is the grace of Ambāl.

We may be endowed with plenty of wealth, power, name, fame, beauty and health. We may even attribute these to the Divine grace of Ambāl. To some extent, it is true. But still, what is the use of all these possessions, if we have unreasonable desires, frustration, anger, fear and unhappiness in our minds? So, in reality, the sign of Ambāl's anugraham (grace), is being untouched by desire, discrimination, fear and anger. The root cause for hate, anger, fear and discrimination is the desire of "I" or "Self". Hence, once we wipe out 'kāmam' from our minds, the rest of the undesirable qualities will also vanish. Then, we attain 'moksha ānandam' – the divine joy while we are still in this earth and this body.

If we earnestly and with utmost faith pray for the Divine grace of Kāmeshwari or Kāmākshi, She will annihilate our 'kāma.' Kāmeshwari was instrumental in resurrecting Kāmadeva after he was burnt down. On the other hand, Kāmākshi cast her divine glance on Shiva who burnt off Kāmadeva, with Her pure love. Now, we tend to think, how can this Goddess who has blissful love for her husband Shiva can eradicate our 'kāmam'? Though this seems to be contradictory, yet not so! In the cosmic play, we humans are entangled in Kāma. If we have to be relieved from this, we have no other way other than pray for the compassionate grace of Kāmākshi.

This compassion created love for Kāmākshi in the mind of Parameswarān. The prime desire was nothing, but the well-being of all animate and inanimate in their creation.

She is the better half of Kāmeswaran, who with His third eye burnt off Kāmadeva. Having taken the left side of Kāmeswaran, part of the third eye is also Hers. Poet Mookar often says "*Shivanuku kāmathai utiya neye, bhaktargalin kāmathai nāsam seigirāy*", meaning "You are the one who taught the essence of love to Shiva, and you are the one who destroys the undesirable kāmam of the devotees."

Shiva burnt off Kāmadeva and being the Shakthi of that Lord who burnt Kāmaadeva, she is the one who can destroy kāmam from our minds. She is also Nārayanan's sister and Nārayanan is the father of Kāmadeva. Many of you are aware that Brahma is the son of MahaVishnu, but Manmadan (Kāmadeva) is also Nārayanan's son. When MahāVishnu assumed the Mohini avathār, Siva and Mohini had a son – Ayyappa. Just as Lord Subramanian was born out of Shiva-Shakti, Ayyappa was born of Shiva and Nārayanan, Ayyappa was a highly enlightened swaroopam. Brahma is the creator. But for a creation to take form, kāmam is necessary. And this desire is created by MāhaVishnu's other son Kāmadeva. Kāmadeva has the blessing to push all living beings into kāma and enact the divine play.

I said that Kāmākshi can eradicate lust from our minds, but she is the one who resurrected Kāmadeva who was burnt by Shiva. In the same way can Nārayanan, who is the father Kāmadeva, also eradicate lust from our minds? Yes, definitely! Who is Rāma? Rāma is one of the avathārs of MahāVishnu. Just by chanting 'Ram', 'Ram', 'Ram', there are many saints who got enlightened and attained liberation. So, when we say "Ram", we will not get entangled in Kāma. Now you may be thinking, if Vishnu is Kāmadeva's father, then why Kāmadeva is absent when Rāma is present? There is no secret in this, Kāmadeva keeps away, due to the

great respect for his father. Poet Tulsidas in lighter vein says, "The son holds his tail tight in the presence of his father due to respect".

He further mentions that due to the fear of being burnt again by Shiva, Kāmadeva will never come in the way of true Shiva devotees, and will not play his game on the devotees of Vishnu due to the respect for his father.

MahāVishnu took the twin avathārs of *Nara* – *Nārayan*. When they were doing 'Tapas' (meditation) in the Badrikāshramam, celestial beauties (Apsaras) descended with the intention to disturb their tapas. Being annoyed by this interference, Nara was agitated. In spite of being a divine avathār, true to his name 'Nara' (meaning human being), he carried human qualities. Nara screamed the sound 'Hum'. The celestial beauties for the fear of being burnt by Nara, ran to Nārayan and tried to play their tricks on Nārayan. But Nārayan was unperturbed, remained calm and absorbed in meditation. Neither did he get annoyed like Nara. Nārayan smilingly patted his thigh and 'Urvashi' (another celestial beauty) appeared. Urvashi is from the word 'uruthoda' meaning one who is born from Nārayan's thigh. Seeing Urvashi's divine beauty, the Apsaras felt extremely embarrassed and realized that they cannot cast their spell on Nārayan. In spite of keeping this celestial beauty within himself, Nārayan was the purest great *Tapasvi*. The beauty born of him cannot cast a spell on him. This is the principle. Likewise, since Brahma and Manmadan came from Vishnu, they have the power to destroy the cycle of birth/death and kāmam.

Nārayan's sister Ambāl, burnt down Kāman as Shiva's Shakthi. She also resurrected Kāmadeva after he was burnt down. From this, it is clear that She has the power to create and destroy and Kāman is under Her control. So, he will not cause any impact on Her devotees. That is why Kāmākshi upāsakās perform Kāma Japam.

We chant 'Shiva Shiva', when some untoward thing happens. We shut our ears and chant 'Shiva Shiva', when we happen to hear undesirable things.

When Saint Mookar looks at some good surprising thing, he says 'Shiva Shiva' instead of 'Ahā! Ahā!.' "*Shiva Shiva pasyanthi samam Shri Kāmākshi kadakshithāt purusha.*" For those who are blessed with Kāmākshi's grace, so many surprises happen. He says "Shiva Shiva." What is the surprise? While we see things differently, for the devotees of Kāmākshi everything seems same. who see equanimity in all by her grace?" These days, people say 'equality, equality' in a casual way. This is just political, without real knowledge. Mostly, it is just falsehood.

Devotees who have received the grace of Kāmākshi attain '*advaita gnana*' (the knowledge of non-duality). For him, everything he sees is divine. Only for him, there is truthful equality. Saint Mookar says that for such a person, home and forest are one and the same. There is no trace of anger in him, so friends and enemies are one. Mookar further describes, "*loshtam cha yuvathi bimboshatam*" He is free from 'Kāmam' or desire, so the bright red tender lips of a young girl and the ball of clay are one and the same for him (Loshtam is ball of soft clay, Yuvathi is young girl, Bimboshtam is bright red lips).

The above phrase of Saint Mookar is very close to a phrase in The Gita, "*yogi sam loshtacham kanchana*" meaning for a yogi (enlightened soul), a ball of clay and kanchana (gold) are same. Bhagawan Sri Krishna compares mud and gold (lust for wealth), while Mookar compares mud and lust or Kāma.

A person absorbed in the thoughts of Kāmākshi, will not be affected by Kāma, krodha (anger), unpleasantness or fear, as they are thoughts attached to the absolute. Such a person sees Kāmākshi in everything and everywhere, he or she carries an unquestionable devotion that they are part of the divine, so they are divine and will finally return to the divine attaining moksha or salvation. In the initial stages, they may consider that they are different from the divine, but progress is seen when they start developing the advaita principle of "I am Thee,"

Similarly, we should hold on to Kāmākshi's lotus feet, surrender our body, mind and soul to Her and continue to worship Her. Gradually, we should dissolve into her.

Even little efforts will do. Kāmākshi will elevate and protect us. come with open arms to grace us. She will remove the barrier between us and Her and will eventually bless us to be Herself.



13. Annapūrani

Food insecurity and famine is increasing all around us not just in our country - India, but throughout the world. We can manufacture many machines; We can build factories but the growing plants and trees is not in our hands. are green. Unless agriculture flourishes and hunger is eradicated, other industrial advancements will not make sense. For agricultural harvest, smartness is not adequate. An engineer may construct dams but cannot bring rains. All we can do is to pray sincerely to Jaganmatha (the Universal mother) Annapūrni. She will pardon us for our grave mistakes and bless us with bountiful harvest of food grains

While our Acharya Shri Adhi Shankarā Bhagwat Padhāl was in Kāsi (now Vāranāsi), he composed a *stothram* on Goddess Annapūrni. Each of the *sloka* (verse) paragraph ends with the line, "*Bhikshām Dehi Kripa-Avalambana-Kari Maata-Annapūrneshwari*" – meaning "Oh! Mother Annapūrne, full of kindness and compassion, please grant alms". The word "Dehi" does not mean grant him Bhiksha. For him Bhiksha was going on splendidly. For our Ācharyāl, there was not even the slightly attachment to his physical body, or food, nor he had any ego of self. Once a Kabālīkan named "Kiragasan" told Ācharyāl that he has to give in sacrifice, the head of an Emperor or that of a sanyasi to receive divine darshan. Without any hesitation Ācharyāl told him, "you cannot ask for an Emperor's head, as you will end up losing your head. Instead if you want a sanyasi's head, here take my head for your sacrifice" and offered his head. But with divine interference and a turn of events, the Kabālīkan lost his life. Here, I am not going dwell on that story now. What is important here is to understand that Ācharyāl neither had any ego, nor did he give any importance to his body. When such an enlightened soul says, "Bhikshām Dehi", what does that mean? The answer to this question is in the last sloka of the Annapūrna stothram, where Ācharyāl says, "My mother is Devi Parvathi, my father is Lord Maheswarā (Shiva), and all the devotees of Shiva are my relatives, and my dwelling or house is all the three worlds".

So, when Ācharyāl is asking "Bhikshām Dehi", he is requesting alms for all the three worlds to eradicate their hunger. He composed this stothram, for laymen like us who pray for themselves.

It is no use to have only food. Without attaining wisdom at the end, it is no use to keep eating and growing the physical body. Mother Annapūrni (who is seated with a bowl of rice with milk in one hand and ladle in other hand) who feeds us food with love also grants us gnana (wisdom). Adhi Shankarā begs mother Annapūrni to give alms of enlightenment and perseverance.

Included in Kānchi Kāmākshi is Mother Annapūrni. Kāmākshi, with "irunazhi nel" or two measures of rice grains, established and developed 32 different dharmas. Anna Dhānam or food donation is one amongst these dharmas. In Kāma Kottam, there is sannidhānam or sanctum sanctorum of Mother Annapūrni. There is temple for Lord Shiva in Onā Kāntan, where the lord is in the pose of one seeking alms. Singing about the lord, Sundara Moorthy Swamigal asks Him, " why do You resort to begging, when there is Annapūrni in Kāma Kottam?"

vār irunkuzhal vāl nedunkan mālai magal (Long grown hair, mighty sword like sharp eyes. Parvathi who is daughter of Himavan)

madu vimmu konraith (She wears garland that oozes honey)

kondrai (garland which runs through her chest)

thariru thadamarbu neengath thaiyalal, ulagu uyya vaiththa (she who protects the entire universe by giving rain and giving grains)

kārirum pozhil kachchimudōr Kāmakkottam (the one who resides at Kāmakkottam- Kāmākshi)

undaga neer poi ooridum pitchai kolvadenne, Onākanthaṇ thaliuleere.

(When Universal mother who feeds everyone is with you, why Lord should you need to beg for a bowl of food from outsiders, O Lord of Onākanthaṇ thali)

Let us, on behalf all life forms, pray to Annapūrneswari, who feeds and nourishes both the body and soul, to remove all 'dūrbiksham' (scarcity) and bless us all.

We suffer 'dūrbiksham' due to our past sins. But the ever-compassionate mother Kāmākshi as Annapūrani blesses and relieves us of our suffering. Her intention is that even the sinners should not suffer due to hunger. In Kerala, there is an Annapūrna Kshetram or place called 'Serukkunnam'. In this place, all visitors are appropriately fed. In addition, in order to feed late comers and even the hungry thieves, they hang food packets in the tree outside the temple, so no one goes hungry.

Even with such a compassionate Mother, if there is so much of scarcity in the present day world, we should realized how much sins we have committed. In 'Saraka Samhita,' Sage Athreya says that, "In a country or city or village, if the people in governance move away from the path of 'right conduct' (dharma), other citizens or common man will consider this as a norm and will follow their leaders. When 'Adharma' or misbehaviour becomes the norm, even the Devas do not hesitate to forsake the people (Devas are the bureaucrats or designate officers of Lord Eshwara). The moment, Devas forsake the common man, seasons fail, changes in the climate results in lack of rain fall or out of season rain, rain fall at wrong time, place or quantity. This causes lack of gentle breeze, floods, washing of land soil and these alterations brings in disease causing germs. Plants lose their fertility causing food scarcity or insecurity, and the little quantity of food is contaminated with negative energy. The cumulative effect of this is polluted air, widespread disease and poor economy in the country. All these should bring a realization of our grave mistake and we should takes steps to correct this situation. Then Mother Annapūrni will cast her divine grace, and grant us with alms of food (Anna Bikshai) and absolute knowledge (Gnana Bikshai)."

She is an embodiment of Gnana or absolute knowledge. Ācharyāl describes the divine mother as, '*Mantra Mātruka Roopini*' (mother of mantras and alphabets) who created all the alphabets from 'a' to 'ksha'. She is the "*Ādikshanta samastha varnanakari*", meaning total embodiment of patience. Hence, she will not only grant us alms that will take care of our gross body, but she will also give alms of intelligence in order to quench our hunger for absolute knowledge.

In the last paragraph of 'Annapūrni Sthuthi', our Ācharyāl highlights what sort of 'Gnana', the Divine mother Annapūrni will grant us. When we reach that stage of knowledge, we will realize that Lord Parmeswarā as the father and Devi Parvathi as our mother. All their creations or life forms become our siblings. All the three worlds will become our dwelling. This concept is far more ahead of the present day concept of national unity. With the unification of three worlds, we have to develop our bhakthi (devotion), and understand that the Divine mother is taking care of us. Then, it is pertinent that all life forms are Her children and the feeling of universal brotherhood develops automatically. There is no need for lectures, propaganda or master plan to emphasise this.

From time immemorial, in reality, this is how there has been a feeling of unity. People from the south went to Kāsi for Swāmi, and people from the north came to Rāmeshwaram for Swāmi. There was no talk of integration, nor was there any talk on 'brothers and sisters.' There was just religious unity, and existence as offsprings of the same mother. In addition, the common language of Sanskrit among the intellectuals and all *Sastras* (codes of conduct) united the four corners of the country. In the current period, we have forsaken our religious responsibility in the name of secularism. There is also ongoing efforts to get rid of 'Sanskrit' language. I am not talking just about our people here. Even the Hindi- speaking people are deliberately and earnestly working to do away with this language.

They are trying to wipe out even the English language that came in as a common link language in between.

Language is only a secondary issue. It is important that we develop devotion. Then the divisive feelings with in us about my province, my community, and my language will get wiped out. Recently there has been propaganda on the need for unity. On the other hand, there is wide-spread divisive feelings that one province is refusing to supply water to another province and another one refusing to send excess food grains. There is fight over provincial borders. In addition, there are wide atrocities and unfair exploitation in the name of language and caste. The reasons for this situation are loss of faith in our religion and lack of devotion. True devotion and faith in religion is the only binding factor to bring the thought of universal brotherhood in the minds of people. The only cure for this is to develop utmost faith on Eashwaran or the Lord, then universal brotherhood will be established as we are His children. Then, there will be no place for anything other than mutual help amongst us. Thirumoolar says '*Anbe Sivam*', meaning 'Love is Sivam'. That is absolute knowledge. Thāyumanavar says, 'knowledgeable divinity'. Let us all pray to the Divine mother Annapūrni to give us alms of knowledge and love. Adhi Shankārcharya's reiterated this in this prayer:

*"Annapūrne, Sadapūrne, Sankara prāna vallabe I
Gnana vairagya sidhyartham bikshām dehi cha Parvathy II"*

Meaning : "Oh Mother, who is always content, yet overflowing with compassion, the life source of Lord Shankarā, Oh! Mother Parvathi, please give me the alms of absolute knowledge and renunciation".

14. Mother

In this world, we cannot see anywhere a complete unadulterated love other than a mother's love. No matter how a son is, even if he does not reflect the love, without a concern a mother continues to pour love. There is a saying in Tamil, "petra manam pittu, pillai manam kallu" meaning tender is the mind of the mother, the child's mind is stonehard. In the *Devi Aparadha Kshapana Stotram*, there is a verse wherein we convey our shortcomings to Ambal and ask for forgiveness. In that stotram, there is a line that reads, "there can be a wicked son, but never a wicked mother." We can find complete love and selfless toil only in a Mother.

The moment we are born as a baby, we are attached to our mother. Right from our food to other necessities, mother is the only refuge to a child. The mutual love between a mother and a child is more in childhood than in advancing age. More than human beings, this love overflows amongst cows. The calf's mew of 'Amma' is something we cannot find anywhere else. It seems like even the humans started calling Amma by looking at the calf. Not only in Tamil, even in Telugu, Marathi and Kannada languages, the word 'Amma' is used for Mother. In Sanskrit, mother is "maa" or "amba". In Hindi. Mother is "maa" or "māyi". In English, mother is more commonly addressed as "mummy" or "mamma". The origin or root word for all these different ways of addressing mother must be from the sound of the calf calling its mother cow "amma."

Leave aside the mother's love. She is the mother only for this body. Once this body or the mother's body is gone, there is no connection between us and the mother. Later, there will be pregnancy, there will be another mother. There is a mother who is just not the physical mother of this body, but the mother of life or soul. Body is mortal, but the soul is immortal. After this body is gone, the soul travels to another body. The mother of this immortal soul is the eternal Divine mother.

In any birth, at any time, like the cow's calf, we should place abundant love at the feet of *paradevatha* who is the mother of all living beings. That is the purpose of taking birth. It is also the path for liberation. After the soul sheds this body, without it entering into another body, but to enjoy bliss, the divine mother is the only refuge.

All the energy that we have is all Hers. It is the single large parashakti that has divided into small pieces and exhibits the power in all living beings in small ways. So, we do not have any right to feel proud and claim that "this is my creation, I did this or that", etc. Whatever we do is from the energy that emanated from the Divine mother. The moment we realize this ultimate truth, give up our ego and surrender to her lotus feet with all gratitude, she will grant her choicest blessing, bliss and elevate our soul. Just as a (mortal) mother attends to needs of the baby that does not know what to ask, the ever benevolent and compassionate Lokamātha or the Divine mother, on Her own, bestows health, wealth and knowledge even if the devotees do not ask for it. She is also the one who later leads us towards the path of ultimate knowledge or jnana, and thus helps us gain the advaita ānandham or divine bliss. This will happen at some point of our life, we may not be sure when or how this will happen. Let us not dwell on this thinking. Whether this happens or not, at this moment of life, we just need to realize we have the Divine mother who will take care of us and shower Her love on us. All we have to do is to reciprocate our love for Her. There is nothing comparable in this universe to this true Divine love. Let us pray to Ambika, the embodiment of love, for the welfare of this entire world and all living beings.

15. Where is Bliss?

We have innumerable desires. But it is absolutely sure that some day the things that we love will leave us or we will leave them. Instead of this parting happening through death, how nice it will be if we resign or voluntarily give up our desires. We bind ourselves by planting as many seedlings of grief as the number of desires. By reducing the desires, the cause for grief will also reduce. If we give up all desires before the end of this birth, we do not need to be born again and suffer again. We can happily merge into paramatma.

We pride ourselves that man is superior in knowledge when compared to animals. But what special action do we take that makes us superior to animals? Animals like dogs, foxes, and insects also eat, give birth to offspring, and die. In general, human beings do not seem to do anything better than these mundane things. So, how can we differentiate ourselves from the animals or insects? Humans should work toward achieving of 'Eternal Bliss' through the highest gnana or complete knowledge. The question here is how many of us really even intend to achieve this gnana mārga or path of 'Eternal Bliss'?

If we think deep, we will realize this gnana, bliss, and we, are all one. In reality, when we get gnana to become aware of who we are, we will realize that we ourselves are the bliss or happiness that we seek. We are not getting happiness from external objects. Happiness comes from within. Due to ignorance, we are deliberately trying to cover or ignore our natural happiness within, by searching for happiness outside. In such an external search, if humans find some pleasures, we get attached to that material and assume ownership of the material. Once we lose this material, we have lost our happiness too. For example, let us say that a person has a small piece of land and he reaps a good harvest in the first year. Because he owned this piece of land and whenever the yield increased, he feels good and becomes happy. Later, when the yield became less, he sells this piece of land to someone else.

After the land changes hands, the following year, the same land yields a bonanza. Does this make the former land owner happy? Will our mind experience the same happiness that we experienced when the land was in our possession? Certainly not, He would think, "Oh, last year, when this land was in my possession, it was like an infertile land. But now, it has given a bonanza to this person." He burns with jealousy. So long the connection of 'mine' was there, the good yield provided happiness. Later, the feeling towards a good yield changed completely.

Let me give you another example; you have all witnessed some parents, bringing their children with deranged minds and requesting me to cure them. There was one father who behaved just the opposite. He got married the second time. The second wife could never tolerate the first wife's son. The family separated after a miserable fight. This father was in favour of his second wife and disowned his son. One day, he told me, "My son (through the first wife) placed '*billy sunyam*' (black magic) to hurt my second wife. Luckily, the black magic forces turned back and hurt my son." In the earlier case, all the parents were worried and wanted to cure their children. But here is a father, who is happy to see his son suffer. Why? Because the father has lost the feeling of 'mine' with his son. However, he has the connection of his second wife as 'mine' and is happy that she is not harmed.

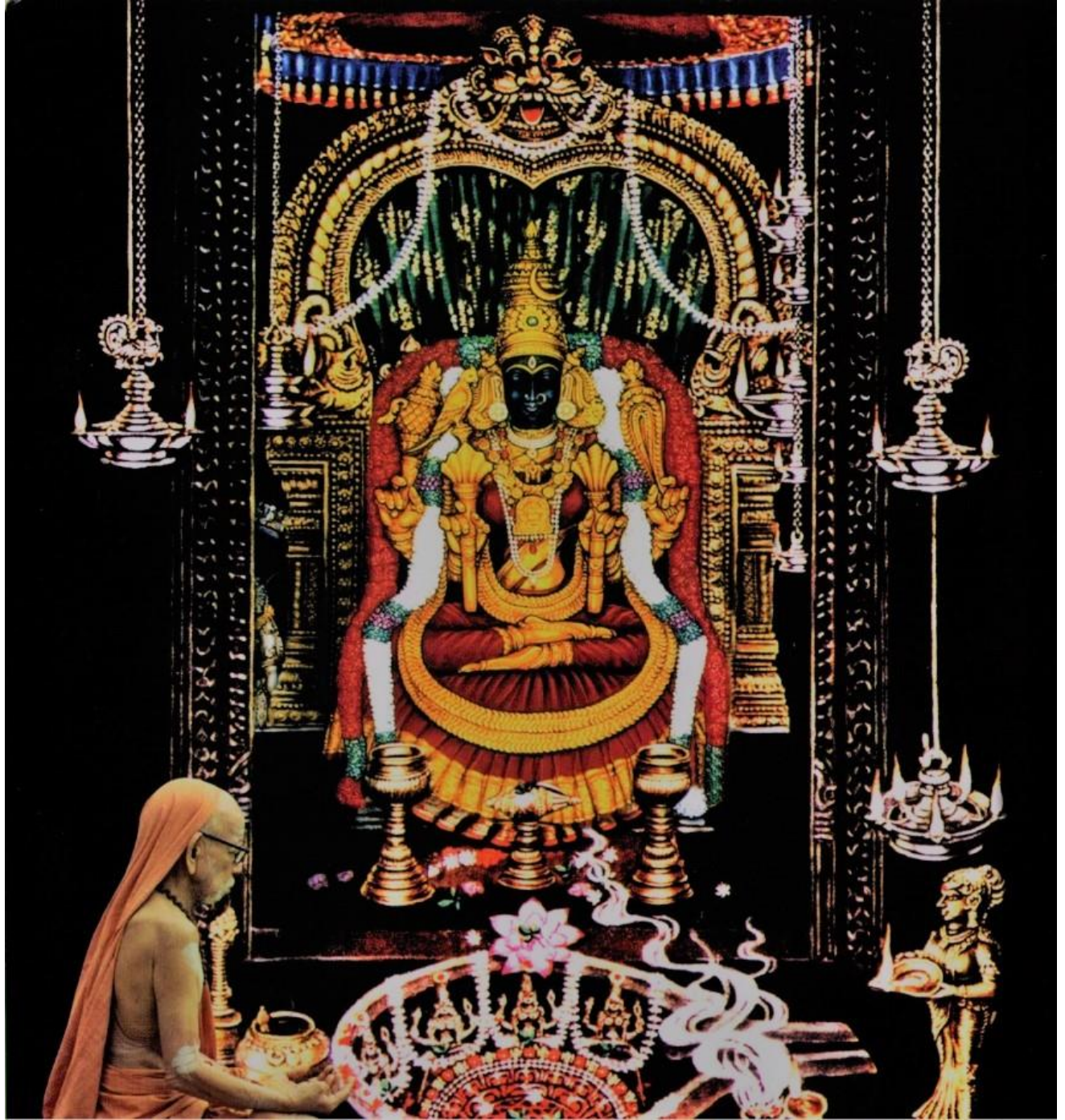
If this is the happiness for the illusion or māya of 'mine', then how happy will be the real 'I' that has no attachment. If we add jaggery to bitter gourd gravy, we will experience slight sweetness in the gravy, even though the bitter gourd itself is bitter. Here the sweetness in the gravy comes from its combination or mixing with the sweet – jaggery, now it is imperative to imagine how sweet the jaggery itself will be. Similarly, bitterness in the life, gets attached or combines with the illusion of 'I' and 'Mine' and experience happiness through its association. Now by excluding the māya or illusion, if we experience the fullness of 'I', we can experience complete happiness. If we cover a lamp with a mud pot with small holes all over, we can see the small rays of light from lamp through the holes in the pot. Similarly, our Ātma deepam is covered with the illusion or māya, and we

experience small spells of happiness through the openings of the Indriyas. The moment we break open the illusion or māya covering the Ātma deepam, this Ātma deepam will shine brightly.

Here it important to note that, the light rays will shine depending on the varying shapes and sizes of the holes in the pot. Similarly, once we break open the earthen pot of mental illusion, we will give up the discriminating mind, and experience oneness in everything.

How can we break open the pot of illusion? We can do this by putting a ceiling on our desires through self-discipline or control. As long as we have a mind, there is going to be desires. Controlling our desires does not mean withholding our desires to death. Here it is important that we put a ceiling on our desires, not block our desires completely. Because desire is the reason for many good things happening in this universe. A physically challenged person, let's say is not able to use her or his right hand. But they make good by using their left hand and legs to do their work. In fact, these alternate body parts are far stronger that the right hand itself. Similarly, if we block the flow of a water stream from one side, it will find other ways or directions to flow even stronger. Our Ātma shakthi or mental strength is constantly challenged by penetrations into our mind from all the opening of the indriyas. If we master the technique of blocking these outside influence, our Ātma shakthi gets more powerful and we can spread goodness everywhere.

The rishis who achieved Ātma gnana are explicit example of this procedure. And this Ātma gnana helps them to transcend to different worlds and time, and gain divine knowledge. They are able to listen to sounds of the space and beyond, and get knowledge of Veda mantras. This is not possible by lay men like us. Everyone keeps asking – "How can we put a ceiling on our desires? How can we control our minds from fluctuations? How can we attain eternal bliss"? The answer to this is to tread the path of Vedas, and we can finally achieve eternal bliss. Let Lord Paramēshwara bless and lead us to thee.



Jaya Jaya Shankara; Hara Hara Shankara!

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