

Literary and Cultural Disability Studies: An Exploration
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Lecture – 12
Conversations with Prof. Chithra
Exploring the Theme of Disability and Hagiography via Tamil Literature

Hello, welcome all of you, very good morning. Today's topic is “Disability and hagiography.” The main archive of the theme of disability and hagiography will be Tamil literature across the time periods. I do not have expertise in this area, therefore we have here in our studio Prof Chithra. She teaches English literature at Bharati Women's College. She is the head of the department there. She not only is interested in literary theory, culture theory and language studies but has an active interest in disability studies and my previous course on disability studies she translated it to Tamil and it was a splendid translation. Briefly about disability and hagiography, well hagiographies are biographical sketches on spiritual evolution usually of saints and people with saintly orientation.

Perhaps one can call Gandhi's biographies innumerable of them as hagiography. Usually hagiographies walk us through the pitfalls of people, their spiritual evolution and so on, but usually at the level of holiness, I mean the holy, the pure and the saintly. So that is the name of the genre. So, professor Chithra will walk us through the genre across literary traditions and ages. Thank you.

At the outset, I would like to thank professor Hemachandran Karah, IIT Madras for giving me this opportunity to give a lecture on disability and hagiographies. I also thank IIT Madras and NPTEL for this great opportunity. This paper which I am going to present now has disability and punishment in the context of hagiographical accounts especially the hagiographies that are produced by the Shaivite and the Vaishnavite sects during the 11th and 12th centuries.

And I am going to focus on the hagiographical account of the Vaishnavite Saint and Savant Kooratazhvan or Kuresar as he is known and his life account is actually traced within the biography of Sri Ramanuja's life story in the Vaishnavite hagiography titled Guruparampara

Prabhavam and for this lecture, I am using the Arayirappadi that is the 6000 edition of Guruparampara Prabhavam.

And the life of Kuresar is actually traced as I told you within the life of Sri Ramanuja the greatest social reformer and saint who established the Vishishtadvaitam theology as well as Sri Vaishnavism. This particular account has its historical background set in 12th century Tamil Nadu where Saivism and Vaishnavism sectarian rivalry was at its peak. The Chola kings were staunch followers of Saivism and coerced Vaishnavites to follow their sect failing which they were punished severely.

The Vaishnavite hagiography Guruparampara Prabhavam in turn narrates how the king is punished for his wrong deeds with a worm-infested neck again another form of disability for a wrong deed that he commits against the devotees of Vishnu. Further, an interesting turning point occurs during the miraculous cure of Kuresar by the divine intervention of Lord Varadaraja of Kanchi.

When the Lord restores Kuresar's lost sight the seer asks for only an inner spiritual eye to see the Lord and his guru Ramanuja and rejects the physical one. Yet again disability is considered as a spiritual accomplishment especially in this case renouncing the material world. These diverse conceptualizations of disability in hagiographical accounts are explored in this lecture. To move on to the emergence of bhakti movement and the emergence of sectarian rivalry.

I quote from historian Champakalakshmi who traces the growth of the bhakti movement in South India especially in the Tamil region and she divides it into two specific periods. The first one will be the 7th to 9th centuries when the Pallava and Pandya kings were ruling and the most important aspect of this particular period will be both the Shaivites as well as the Vaishnavites where they had common animosity towards the Buddhists and the Jains.

But later on, when we move to the Chola period that is the 11th and 12th century in which our particular study is actually rooted, we are able to see that the Chola kings were more pro-Shaivite towards the Shaivite sect and as a result of that, the Vaishnavite saints and seers were punished

with disability as retribution for not following the Shaivite what can I say the religion of the Shaivites.

So it is in the 11th and 12th century we are fixing this particular incident of Kuresar to have taken place because it is during this time that Ramanuja had come as a social reformer and he had started establishing the Vaishnavite theology of Vishishtadvaitam as well as Sri Vaishnavism as a religion mainly institutionalizing it through the temples and especially his activities were around the famous Srirangam temple at that point of time.

And if you look into the 7th and 9th century they were propagating bhakti both the Shaivites as well as the Vaishnavites and they were equally opposing the non-orthodox sects like Jains and Buddhists and the stories of conflict and persecution leading to royal conversions and change in patronage are referred to in the bhakti hymns and more systematically narrated in the hagiographical literature of the 11th and 12th centuries.

While Buddhism declined Jainism survived as an important factor in the South Indian religion. The Vaishnava and Shaiva sects shared common animosity with the Buddhist and Jain sects and we can look into the difference between these two periods. First I am going to just read out an English translation of the Vaishnavite saint Thondaradipodi Alvar whose period is fixed somewhere between the 7th to 9th centuries.

In his very famous Thirumalai where he calls the tenets of the Buddhists and Jains as low heretic cults and declares even if they behead him he will not die as he had taken refuge under Lord Vishnu and he will readily chop their heads if they talk ill about Lord Vishnu and in that moment their life will be doomed. This is a rough translation from which I am quoting Thondaradipodi Alvar, a Vaishnavite saint.

Similarly, Nambiyandar Nambi a Shaiva hymnist in Thiruthondar Thiruvanthathi increases the level of gore and writes in praise of the child saint Gnana Sambandar impaling 8000 Jain monks in Madurai but when you come to the 12th-century hagiography Shaiva hagiography Periya Puranam by Sekkizhar he just shies away from this particular episode.

As he does not want to focus Gnana Sambandar the child saint for having impaled 8000 Jain monks but he makes the king of Madurai responsible for this punishment. So, we are able to see the amount of animosity that existed between the various sects in the Tamil region during these periods. And moving on to the 11th and 12th century we are able to see the deliberate choice of Shaivism by the Cholas after Paranthaka Chola 1 from 907 to 955 AD.

And it proved to be instrumental in creating a wider popular base for Shaivism. And the sacred hagiography of the hymnists of Tevaram and Divyaprabandham shows Tondainadu that is the modern Kanchipuram and the areas that surround, Pandya Nadu referring to the modern Madurai region at the maximum and a few including Srirangam in the Chola Nadu. Chola Nadu actually refers to the modern Thanjavur, Tiruchirappalli and other regions.

The Vaishnava hymns were collected by the late 10th century and the Shaiva hagiology received particular attention in the periods of the great Rajaraja the first 985 to 1014 AD and Kulottunga 1133-1150. These periods are very important because we are going to discuss the Shaiva-Vaishnava sectarian rivalry that existed during this period. The Shaiva movement was intensified and consolidated at the expense of Vaishnavism.

The neglect of Vaishnava institutions or more active persecution of the latter under the Cholas under Kulottunga 2 led to a social crisis. Stories of persecution of Ramanuja by a Chola king identified as Krimikanta Cholan or Kulottunga the second and attempts to eliminate Vaishnava worship from Chidambaram temple may also be interpreted as the evidence of the crisis.

Sekkizhar's Periya Puranam the Shaiva hagiographical account written during the reign of Kulottunga was to supersede the Jain Jeevaga Sinthamani written by Tirutakkatevar and one can witness the Shaivite-Vaishnavite rivalry which is very clearly portrayed in Ramanuja Nootrandadi another hymn written in a hundred verses in praise of Sri Ramanuja by Thiruvarangathu Amudanar in 11th and 12th century who happens to be a contemporary and disciple of Ramanuja.

In this hymn, we are able to see the inclusion of the Shaivite cult also as a lower heretic cult. After our golden Kalpaka wishing tree, our Ramanuja Muni was born the polemic Sramanas, the soulless Sakyas and the lazy nihilists of Shaiva agamas. The wrong interpreters among the Vedantins all have been vanquished from the earth, this is from Ramanuja Noottrandadi.

Where Thiruvarangathu Amudanar states that Ramanuja had been instrumental in demolishing or destroying the Shaiva agamas and the nihilism which they practised during that particular period. So when you compare this with Thondaradippodi Alvar's 7th and 9th-century hymn you can witness the difference between the two and how the sectarian rivalry between the Shaivas and the Vaishnavas had reached its peak now.

This illustrates the fact that Shaivites and their tenets too were considered low during the period of Ramanuja as he was establishing Vaishnavism with full vigour during this period. In fact, the Guruparampara Prabhavam and other Vaishnava hagiographies narrate one of the earliest incidents in the life of Ramanuja, the disciple of an Advaitan philosopher and he challenges his guru of wrongly interpreting a Sanskrit sloka which leads to a secret conspiracy by the teacher to put an end to Ramanuja.

Ramanuja escapes this attempt by the Shaivite guru and the sectarian rivalry is evoked by the famous novelist of the 20th century Kalki in his magnum opus Ponnaiyin Selvan and the character of Azwarkadiyan Nambi and Veerashaiva Padhathuli Bhattar are classical examples that narrate the rivalry between the Shaivites and the Vaishnavites. In quoting a very light-hearted anecdote in fact Kalki writes about a very elderly Vaishnavite old man who was walking along the walls of Thiruvanaikaval temple.

A very famous Shaivite temple and very closely built near the Srirangam temple as the old man was walking by the temple near the Thiruvanaikaval temple wall suddenly a big stone hits his head and he was just suffering from pain, but when he looked up he saw a crow that was pecking at the dilapidated gopuram or the tower of the Thiruvanaikaval temple and he was happy at that moment.

In fact, he tells the crow you even peck the gopuram in a faster manner and bring it down. So this anecdote actually shows how far the sectarian rivalry had penetrated into the society during the 11th and the 12th century. So keeping this background in mind I will first trace the legend of Kuresar or Koorathazhwan and then again we will move on to disability and hagiography and how the different contours of disability work in this particular hagiographical account.

Koorathazhwan or Kuresar as he is celebrated is a Vaishnavite seer scholar and great disciple of Sri Ramanuja who established the Sri Vaishnavite religious sect and its dualistic philosophy of Vishishtadvaitam which differed from the monotheistic Advaita philosophy of Sri Adi Shankara. A senior to Ramanuja in age Kuresar or Koorathazhwan became a devotee and disciple of Ramanuja whose brilliant Sanskrit composition and astonishing memory made even his master awestruck.

The episode related to both their visit in search of the Brahma Sutras at the Sharada Peetham in Kashmir is of great importance. Ramanuja had access to the text of the Brahma Sutras which Kuresar studied overnight and the rivals of Ramanuja want only made the text disappear the next day denying Ramanuja the opportunity to write his commentary on Sri Bhashyam but Kuresar could recite the Brahma Sutras verbatim from his incredible memory.

And Ramanuja wrote his commentary Sri Bhashyam the fundamental text of Vishishtadvaita, such is the greatness of Koorathazhwan or Kuresar and his memory power. Born in a rich family of landLords at the village Kooram near the modern Kanchipuram, Koorathazhwan renounces wealth, palatial house and luxury in search of spiritual enlightenment.

Once Ramanuja blessed an unknown deaf person signalling to fall at his feet behind closed doors. Kuresar witnessing this through a crack developed on the closed-door felt that he could have rather been born deaf as he felt being a great scholar is of no use unless a person is blessed by his guru. When the sectarian rivalry between the Shaivite and Vaishnavite was at its peak, the Chola king a staunch Shaivite summoned Ramanuja through his courtiers.

Sensing persecution of Ramanuja, Kuresar instantly robed himself in ochre like a saint though he is a grihastha and he took Ramanuja's sceptre and left for the king's palace in the disguise of his guru. Ramanuja forced to attire himself in white left Srirangam to a place in Karnataka called Melukote and with a heavy heart, he moves to that particular place. Days before Ramanuja reached Thondanoor near Mysore.

He accursed the Chola king to suffer from a worm-infested neck for the abominable acts committed upon Vaishnavites. In the king's quote, Kuresar and Periya Nambi refused to accept the supremacy of Lord Shiva over Lord Vishnu and the king orders to pluck the eyes of both as punishment. While Periya Nambi's eyes were pulled out by the soldiers Kuresar refused to be touched by the sinners that are the Shaivites plucks his own eyes with his nails.

While the former writhes in pain and dies on their way back the latter with the help of some Vaishnavites performed the last rites of Periya Nambi and leaves for Thirumalirumsolai near Madurai. In this paper, I will focus on hagiographies which serve as a source of understanding the various aspects of disability especially the Tamil regional hagiographies that are fraught with episodes of disability.

The sectarian rivalry between the Shaivites and Vaishnavites led to the propagation of bhakti cult through hagiographies. Many bhakti saints of the Shaivite cults came to be canonized and included in the hagiographical works of the 11th to 12th centuries namely Thiruthondar Thiruvanthathi and Periya Puranam. The hunter saint Thinnan, also popularly known as Kannappar scrapes out his eyes to heal the bleeding wound on a shiva image.

This accounts for the fact that in an ecstatic state of bhakti a devotee is ready to self-inflict disability on himself to show his religious zeal. The present analysis will be based on the Tamil Vaishnavite authorized hagiography Guruparampara Prabhavam compiled by Pinpazhagiya Jiyar the study will consider three different texts which narrate the same episode of the punishment of Kuresar.

The decree of the king and Ramanuja's reaction with varied perspectives. The Guruparampara Prabhavam that is the hagiographical text, the Koil Ozhugu will be a semi-historiographical text or it is known as the chronicle of Srirangam and also the modern play Ramanuja by the known Tamil writer Indira Parthasarathy and so this being a literary text this is juxtaposed with the other two.

While commenting on Parthasarathy's treatment of the court scene in the critical introduction hagiography revisited C. T. Indra is of the opinion that the rational approach of Indira Parthasarathy as a writer is evident in his handling of the crucial events in Ramanuja's life and he refuses to indict the Chola king as the sectarian hagiographers did for persecuting Ramanuja.

In fact, nowhere in the play do we find the Chola king condemning Ramanuja and his sect. Indira Parthasarathy uses this chunk of Ramanuja's life story very objectively to demonstrate that religion appropriates political power. He does present in the court scenes the war of the righteous Vaishnavas against the petty fogging schemers in the god of religion. In fact, he makes the king a sort of Pontius Pilate who did not know where the truth lay.

This analysis attempts to illustrate that the socio-cultural structuring of our society considers disability as a stigma and even the most radical Tamil writer like Indira Parthasarathy does not want to show either Ramanuja or the Chola king in a bad light. The reason being Ramanuja's disciple Kuresar bears the brunt of visual impairment as a punishment by the Chola king.

Ramanuja in turn curses the king to suffer from a worm-infested neck which the king is believed to have suffered and died. The lack of historical evidence to identify the Chola king as Kulottunga the second is not only discussed by historians and this discrepancy in the timeline of Ramanuja and Kulottunga the second is manoeuvred tactfully by Parthasarathy in the play by tempering the episode to his convenience.

Exonerating both from the burden of disability as a curse that is for Ramanuja and the Chola king from disability as punishment. Moving on to the hagiographical analysis, this intertwined twin episode is treated at its extreme in the Guruparampara Prabhavam. Ramanuja not only

curses the Chola king but is also delighted to learn that his curse had inflicted the king while at Melukote Ramanuja deputed his disciple Siri Aandan to meet Kuresar now living in Thirumalirumsolai a place near Madurai.

Kuresar tells that the Chola king who punished him and Periya Nambi was afflicted with a worm-infested neck, a cancerous growth wart under it the king left for Gangaikonda Cholapuram. These words fell like honey drops into the disciple's ears. On his return to Melukote when he narrates this to Ramanuja, the news about Kuresar's well-being, I quote from the Guruparampara Prabhavam.

The news about Kuresar's well-being and more so the tragic end faced by the king fell like a heavenly delight into his ears. Ramanuja raced to the mountain which templed Lord Narasimha and spoke to the Lord that the fatal end of Hiranyakashipu the demon king who tortured Prahlada the child devotee of the Lord is meted out to the worm-infested wretched Krimikanta Cholan who tortured his children Periya Nambi to death and made Kuresar visually impaired.

Later Ramanuja leaves for Srirangam from Melukote and from there to Madurai where the reunion of the master and the disciple takes place. A twist in this episode occurs when Ramanuja asks Kuresar to compose hymns and seek the blessings of Lord Varadaraja of Kanchi who is known for his divine miraculous restoring eyesight for many of his devotees. Kuresar turned down the suggestion, but Ramanuja persisted.

He sang the famous Varadarajastavam seeking the benediction of Lord Varadaraja. He requests the Lord to bless him with meaning the inner spiritual eye, the incorporeal one. The Lord appears in Kuresar's dream and grants him vision as he wished. The next day Kuresar recited the hymn to Ramanuja whose ecstasy knew no bounds. I am just doing a translation of this. The great healer who grants us Srivaikuntam his spiritual abode blessed me with the spiritual eye.

The inner eye of knowledge and wisdom. With this inner eye I can eternally witness the Lord of Srivaikuntam. Ramanuja turned down this blessing and took Kuresar by his hand leading to the Hastigiri hillock the bode of Lord Varadaraja. When Ramanuja left Kuresar in the Lord's

presence for a while Kuresar requested the Lord to comply with his yet another wish to wash off the sins of the diabolical Naluran who betrayed them to the Chola king.

The Lord too granted his wish. Meanwhile, Ramanuja rushed back and was apprehensive about the divine exchange. The Lord reappeared and blessed Kuresar with a spiritual eye which can see only the Lord and Ramanuja his guru. Now looking at disability and hagiography from this context, I conclude that this highlights the pains and sacrifices endured by the Shri Vaishnavites during the 12th-century sectarian rivalry with Shaivism and portrays the Chola king in a bad light.

The punisher ruined in turn glorifies the Vaishnavites and also the spiritual powers of Ramanuja and collectively the whole sect. Kuresha's decision to negate the material and embrace the spiritual vision adds yet another dimension to viewing disability with pride and as a blessing to renounce mundane existence. So, disability becomes the sight for punishment, torture, curse, healing, miraculous cure and also pride.

Such hagiographies not only institutionalize religious sects but establish ideas in society about faith and traditional outlook considering disability as a taboo or stigma. At the same time, a true follower of the Vaishnavite sect, like Kuresar has to endure suffering that is disability here and take pride in sacrifice. Moving on to the historiographical analysis the arguments under this section are based on the chronicle of Srirangam known in Tamil as Koil Ozhugu.

The Kuresar episode as represented in this document with mild variations is to be discussed here. Though the Koil Ozhugu cannot be considered to be a perfect factual historical record or documentation. It definitely gives a different perspective and to a certain extent objective in its approach. Some of the deviations in the Kuresar episode found in the Koil Ozhugu are Kuresar under the command of Udayavar or Ramanuja assumed the Vaishnavite ascetic robes.

The trident staff whereas in the Guruparampara Prabhavam Kuresar and Periya Nambi leaves for the king's court without the knowledge of Ramanuja. The second deviation is the method in which Kuresar disabled himself. In the Guruparampara Prabhavam he pokes his eyes with his

nails whereas here Kuresar thinking that his eyes which had seen such a sinner should not exist, poured pachai karpooram a medicated camphor into his eyes.

The Koil Ozhugu further records that Ramanuja uttered mantras to punish the evildoer known as the abhicharagya pradhanam. The Lord of Tirupati stabbed the Chola king with his discus or the chakrayudham. Immediately there arose an ulcer in his neck which without getting healed blackened. From that time he is known as the Krimikanta. This is how the Koil Ozhugu records the black neck or the canker necked Krimikanta Chola's episode.

This does not find any mention in the Guruparampara Prabhavam. The extended account of this episode about Kuresar getting the divine side or darshana from Lord Varadaraja is not found in the Koil Ozhugu, instead, the repenting son of the Chola king parts with his entire authority of the temple to Ramanuja when he visits Srirangam along with Kuresar. So, this gives an objective approach to the king not focusing on the king as a villain or an administrator who is against the Vaishnavites totally.

So, considering the hagiography and the historiographical accounts the Vaishnava hagiography uses disability and punishment as a tool to establish faith and at the same time, the importance of sacrifice for a Vaishnavite is made very clear. The semi-historical Koil Ozhugu is partially objective in its approach and talks about the repenting son, which serves as a relief removing the stigma of being cursed forever.

Disability suffering becomes the site for sectarian loyalty, faith and sacrifice even in trying circumstances to the opponents of the sectarian ideologies whether Ramanuja curses or performs certain tantric chants to make the king suffer from a disability. It again becomes a site delineating the power of an acharya and also the disastrous results which any opponent of the Vaishnavite sect will face if he challenges it.

Thus disability has a bearing on the followers, faith as well as a warning to anyone who opposes this faith. Thus, the fear instilled in the minds of the followers and opponents proves the fact that disability is considered as a stigma or taboo in societies out of which a religious discourse takes

advantage. Moving on to the last section of my argument is the literary text which will focus on the Tamil play Ramanuja by Indira Parthasarathy a radical Tamil writer who won the prestigious Saraswati Samman award for this play.

As mentioned earlier Parthasarathy exonerates both Ramanuja and the Chola king of any undesired action. Instead, he operates upon the scene of punishment with the diabolical Naluran who betrays Ramanuja and he pronounces the punishment on Kuresar and Periya Nambi. The king exits the scene halfway almost innocent of the impending disaster likely to befall the two.

Also, Naluran decides the cruellest mode of punishment by burning their eyes with torches. Here again, Kuresar himself does the burning of his eyes. This court scene does not seem to have any recorded historical source, although all the hagiographic narratives make a dramatic situation out of the Chola persecution of Kuresa and Mahapurna that is Periya Nambi.

The important departure by Indira Parthasarathy from all such sources is that he does not present the king as a wicked, rabid, religious fundamentalist. In Indira Parthasarathy's view, the king is neutral like Pontius Pilate who was compelled by the Jews to persecute Jesus Christ. Naluran is the judas who betrays Ramanuja. The playwright tries to suggest that no king can afford to antagonize the powerful religious groups in his country.

When the king comes to know that Ramanuja had fled the country he is not inclined to pursue him. The departure from the hagiographical account establishes the fact that the dramatist does not want to portray the king in a negative manner. This arises from the punishment mode adopted by the king as the hagiographical account claims. The punishment disables a person's eyesight.

But Parthasarathy did not avoid the whole episode but simply shifts the blame from the king to a common villain Naluran. The fact that the modern perspective of a Vaishnavite saint-like Ramanuja highlighting him as a social reformer more than a religious head makes Parthasarathy create this play objectively. Ramanuja neither curses the Chola king nor does he delight if his curse becoming true though Parthasarathy exonerates both the king and Ramanuja.

The retention of the punishment scene is at another mode indirectly establishing Vaishnavite faith through the sectarian rivalry illustrated in the most offensive manner. The scene also established the fact that Kuresa had attained glory in the history of Sri Vaishnava religion as one who gave his darshana that is a sight for the sake of darshana that is vision and faith.

The GPP narrates that is Guruparampara Prabhavam narrates how he scrapes his eyes using his blessed nails feeling happy that I am fortunate to give up my sight for the faith which is verily my vision. And renowned critic C. T. Indra is of the opinion that the epigrammatic brevity of the Tamil utterance darshana and the profound play on the word by repetition cannot be however captured in English.

Juxtaposing the three texts valorized the fact that disability in socio-cultural structuring is considered undesired. Hagiographies as religious and cultural texts like epics and myths create situations of divine intervention for blessing and cursing for which disability is used as a tool. The religious model of disability in a multi-faith society thus operates upon the moral code of establishing faith and also retribution for non-believers in a particular faith.

Thank you. Thank you professor Chithra for such a remarkable paper. From your paper, I infer the following three strands about when it came to disability and hagiography. The first strand seems to be disability as an opportunity for or an instance or a great field for devotion, bhakti to flourish, so that seems to be the first strand. The second strand seems to be a disability as a site of retributive justice.

Broadly two strands of justice, restorative justice where you want to not focus on punishment of the perpetrator of violence but as a way to an opportunity to reform and transform the social order so as you achieve mutual transformation but that is not what we are talking about. We are talking about retributive justice where the punishment of the perpetrator or perceived perpetrator of violence is an important strand.

And the third strand in your paper is about new historicist's projection in the 20th century and 21st century we talk about the past, say 10th century, 11th century, about 5th century. No way we

can overcome the past completely. The past is modulated by our 21st-century conditions maybe our caste consciousness, religious consciousness, global order, gender sensitivities and so on. So, they get revised in hagiography and disability cross-connection.

Here some kind of disability becomes some kind of a place where a mirror if you like where one can achieve some objectivity about the past. So, these three strands methodologically speaking seem to emerge from your paper, maybe we can focus one by one. What do you like to say a little more on the first strand, to begin with where we can talk about disability as a chance or instance of devotion or bhakti.

Yes, that is one of the most important aspects keeping in mind the 11th and 12th-century background in fact Kuresar or Koorathazhwan feels so elated for having given his eyes or say plucking his own eyes exactly like how Kannappar gouges his own eyes in order to fix it upon the bleeding image of shiva. So, this sort of self-infliction though it comes upon Koorathazhwan as retribution for being a Vaishnavite in the Shaiva court.

He considers that to be a great opportunity to show his loyalty to the godhead Sriman Narayana and also his guru Ramanuja he is very happy to have saved his guru. So in the bhakti cult this type of disabling oneself or self-inflicting or taking upon the retribution of the king or the administrator of that particular time is viewed as part of devotion and the hagiographies insist upon the fact that being followers of say, the Vaishnavite sect or the Shaivite sect you should also try to sort of imitate such acts.

Such acts. Yeah, such moral codes or moral values are being say, given to the public or the followers of the particular sect through such high sacrifices. In fact, in one of the dialogues from Ramanuja Koorathazhwan does not want Ramanuja to even mention it as a sacrifice (FL) the particular thing. He says it has come out of him just inadvertently, not deliberately.

It comes being a true Vaishnavite the concept of devotion had just come out of him and the thing is to save his guru as well as to show his loyalty towards his godhead. So both happen simultaneously. So disability gives that particular say it is premised on that, devotion and loyalty

are premised on disabling oneself. So, it cannot be called a sacrifice or it cannot be called proof but it is just an act that is spontaneously happening.

Yes, a bhakta or a devotee. It can be treated as a normal thing to do. Yes, so that is why he says darshana, the play on the word darshana. By giving up darshana that is his eyesight he has the vision of the Lord and his guru through the inner eye. Oh, a kind of a transition from physical modality of living to otherworldly modality of living. Yeah, he transcends. Transcends there to that, transitions also to that mode of living, yes.

Where you see the bigger picture. Bigger picture yes. The god, the divine, the world, order of the god. Yes. So that vision is bigger than normal vision. So it is a kind of opportunity for that transition. So the second strand that emerged from your paper was the retributive justice and the violence, would you like to clarify?

Yeah, in this context I would like to bring in the analysis of Anne E. Monius who talks about how retributive justice took a violent form in the Shaivite sect because her basic analysis is about Periya Purana. Already we have spoken about Kannappar, but I just like to mention two more devotees of Lord Shiva from the Periya Purana. One is Santeshwara and the other one is Kalaya Nayanar. They are very crucial from the point of disability and hagiography. Santeshwarar in fact builds a sand image of Lord Shiva the Shivalinga and when his father disrespectfully kicks off the sand image of Shiva he cuts off his father's feet and this becomes a retributive justice or violence becomes part of the Shaivite hagiology and Monius traces it back to the concept of veeram.

That emerges from the Purathinai or from the Purananuru hymns which talk about battlefield, valour, bravery and other things of the soldiers and the kings. And it is in contrast to Agathinai right. Yes. The internal. Yeah. Normally Krishna bhakti focuses more on that. The personal godhead and love and all those things whereas the Shiva bhakti is more violence oriented. Valour oriented that is what Monius actually brings in the contrast between the two. Though it is believed that Sekkizhar had written Periya Puranam the Shaivite hagiology to contest Jeevaga Sinthamani the Jain text which was written by Tirutakkatevar at that point in time. This focuses

more on veeram and violence. So a lot of bloodshed, gore and other things happen to these Shaiva bhaktas.

In various ways, they show their devotion to Lord Shiva. They are not even bothered whether it is their own father or mother, they just cut off arms and limbs and they want to establish their faith in Shiva through these violent acts. In a sense, in the modern term, we can use that particular word violent, but for them, it is not so. I think for them it is more of valour. Valour, where you restore bhakti through this act which has to be done for the sacrilege, yeah, for his father accidentally.

Yes, and the Kalaya Nayanar episode also tells us that he has this habit of being lighting the lamps every day for Shiva and he runs out of money and oil. He has almost become a beggar and one day when he is not able to light the lamp what he does is he just slits his throat and blood starts dripping and using that blood he starts lightening the lamps and immediately Shiva comes over there and that process, he just takes over his devotee.

And at the end of that particular episode about Kalaya Nayanar how Sekkizhar ends that a particular episode is very important. In this vast world, slice away the tongues of those whoever they are that slander the servitors of hara. So the slicing of the tongue is also another type of say, a punishment that is given to non-believers of hara that is Shiva. So whenever Sekkizhar describes each and every episode which is full of blood.

And valour or violence or whatever it is he brings in the concept of what will happen to the non-believers also. It is not only the devotee or the bhakta how he does that great sacrifice, but it is also about the non-believers and what sort of punishments they will face in case if they are not practising that particular Shaiva religion. So it runs span. And also their demonstration of it.

They not only need to be of devotion but they also need to show or perform devotion, otherwise, they will be subjected to retributive justice through mutilation or slitting or slitting violence on the body corporeal sense. The third strand that emerged from your presentation was the contemporary revisiting of these ancient texts. So a new historicist construction you cited Indira

Parthasarathy where disability seems to be like a mirror of objectivity is that a fair description of your paper?

Yes in a sense that he just wants to exonerate, Parthasarathy wants to exonerate both the Chola king whether it is Kulottunga 1 or 2 there is a slight historical controversy in that. So I feel that he plays upon that and not only that his focus in writing the play Ramanujar itself is to present Ramanuja as one of the greatest social reformer because he was trying to build a casteless society.

And we always know that the Kuresar episode had been an inbuilt sort of a very small episode within the hagiography of Ramanuja. That is right. Even in the Guruparampara Prabhavam. So by not showing Ramanuja as becoming so delightful of cursing the Chola king and that curse really becoming true and he became the Krimikanta Chola he just shies away from that particular episode of focusing both the king as well as Ramanuja in that negative light. Correct.

So, I think that gives a new historicist reading in the modern sense where we try to bring in only objectivity in this particular Kuresar episode where Parthasarathy also tries to establish the Vaishnava faith and the positive aspects of the faith rather than dwelling into these highly what can I say sensitive area about the king subjecting the Vaishnavites to retributive justice or Ramanuja cursing the king with the disability he does not want to go into that part of the hagiography. So this happens to be accidental exercises and not central to the movement. And also the lack of historical evidence. Well, so what is evidence available, the new drama the new dramaturgy seems to be working on what is available as evidence and not these acts of omissions and commissions and exercises and the focus on the retributive justice also shows one fact like he wants to establish say the positive aspects of Vaishnavism. This is what I felt when I read the play.

Again, bringing the character of Kuresar and making him stand on that big pedestal of the greatness of being a true Vaishnavite that focus is there in that particular scene. Coming back to disability studies perspective on religion we had this, you also mentioned in your paper the moral

model and the religious model. So it looks like there is more to it than merely saying that the moral model is negative and it is dismissive of disability.

There are many nuances, such as those involving disability as an opportunity for devotion, retributive justice, new historicist reconstruction these are the frameworks that seem to be connected to the moral model or religious model of disability. Your paper seems to successfully bring those nuances to the table. Thank you, madam. This is a very useful insight for everyone and looking forward to learning more from you on your research in Tamil literature. Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you.