Akka Mahadevi was a devotee of Shiva. She looked upon Shiva as her husband and had completely given herself to him right from childhood. One day when she had grown into a young woman, a king saw her. She was so beautiful that he wanted to marry her. Akka refused, but then the king threatened her, "If you don't marry me, I will kill your parents." So she married the man, but she kept him at a physical distance. He tried to woo her and did many things, but she kept saying, "I married Shiva long ago, my heart belongs only to you." After some time the king's patience wore thin, and he got angry. He tried to lay his hands upon her, but she refused and said, "I have another husband somewhere. He visits me and I am with him; I cannot be with you." This was too much for him to take and one day he decided, "What is the point of having a wife like this? How does one live with a wife who is married to some useless man, somewhere? There was no formal divorce in those days, and he was just distraught—he did not know what to do. So he brought her to his court and asked the court to decide. When the court asked her, she kept talking about her husband elsewhere. This was not just hallucinatory; it was 100 per cent real for her. The king got really angry because in front of all these people, his wife was claiming that her husband was elsewhere. Eight hundred years ago, socially, it was not a simple thing to accept for a king in India. Whatever may be happening within her, socially it was not an easy thing to handle. So the king said, "If you are already married to somebody, what are you doing with me? Leave." Akka said, "Fine," and began to walk out. In those days, in India there was no way a woman even thought of leaving her husband's house at all. But she walked. When he saw the ease with which she was walking away, he got a little mean because of the anger within him and said, "Everything that you wear, the jewels, the clothes, everything is mine. Leave it here and go." In the full assembly of the court, the young woman of maybe 17 or 18 years of age—just took off all her clothes and walked naked. She refused to come back from that day onwards. So many people tried to convince her to wear clothes because it would bring trouble for her, but she walked naked all her life and she was recognised as a great saint. She died very early but within this short span of time, she wrote hundreds of beautiful poems about Shiva and her devotion. Her devotion was such that everyday she begged Him, "Shiva, let no food come my way. Let my body also express the longing and anguish that I am going through to become part of you. If I eat, my body will be satisfied. My body will not know what I am feeling. So let no food come towards me. If food does come into my hands, let it fall down in the mud before I put it into my mouth. If it falls in the mud, the fool that I am, before I pick it up, let a dog come and take it away." This was her daily prayer.

The writer is a well-renowned spiritual leader