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THE PHILOSOPHY OF *VĪRĀŚAIVISM*
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO *ANUBHAVASŪTRA*

A study of the main spirit of cultural and spiritual life of India reveals the fact that the vast Āgamic and Purāṇic literatures along with the Vedic tradition constitute both the source and substratum of Indian religion and philosophy. The word 'Śruti' denotes both Veda and Āgama, the two revelations of one and the same Truth leading to the same spiritual end.

Āgamas are encyclopaedic in nature. They intensively advocate the ritualistic aspect of religious life and elaborately deal with the scriptural sanctions and regulations of worship of the devotee. They emphatically assert the truth that is inherent in the philosophical teachings and the mystic experiences of the spiritual life.

Vedas are the treasures of the elite Āryas and to a great extent inaccessible to the common people, where as Āgamas preach the spiritual and philosophical doctrines along with the intensive religious sacraments for all which can easily be implemented in the life of the common man irrespective of caste, colour, creed and sex. Āgamas and Tantra, as it is commonly known and accepted as the synonyms, is the vast treasure believed to be revealed by the Lord of the lords Śiva. It is generally a discourse between the God Śiva and Goddess Pārvati and with the other manifestations of the divinities such as Rudras, Ṛṣis etc. Sanskrit lexicon Nighantu names the Veda as Nigama and Tantra as the Āgama and hence both have been regarded under a common caption as Śruti. Āgamas are believed to be emanated from God. 'Ā' denotes that which is originated, 'ga' signifies falling i.e. falling to the Goddess Pārvati, 'ma' means the religion or the doctrine for the devo-

tee. It is the exposition of the divine knowledge and the way to attain it through the means of prescribed procedures and meditation with the hymns. It is to be noted here that in Āgamas and Tantra emphasis has been laid down on the fact that human body (Aṇḍa) consists of the potentiality of the divinity and the Supreme Power inherent in the whole creation (Piṇḍa). Macrocosm is implied in Microcosm. That implicit Power can be awakened by being immersed in the unflinching deep meditation on the particular point in the body (Cakra) which are regarded to be the base of the power. Mantras tire the potent fire that kindle the consciousness-power within; religious rites and duties are the helping processes that prepare the ground and the congenial state to get the ultimate power manifested within. So, it is clear that unlike Vedic trend Āgama aims at invoking the divinity within one's ownself rather reaching Him. Āgamic tradition had developed on unique procedure of worship in which the worshipper identifies himself with the God by purifying the external gross elements, inducing the life-principle in the image to be worshipped by the process of nyāsa, mudrā, mantra, maṇḍal etc. The underlying principle is 'worshipping God by becoming one with God' (devo bhūtvā devaṃ yajet).

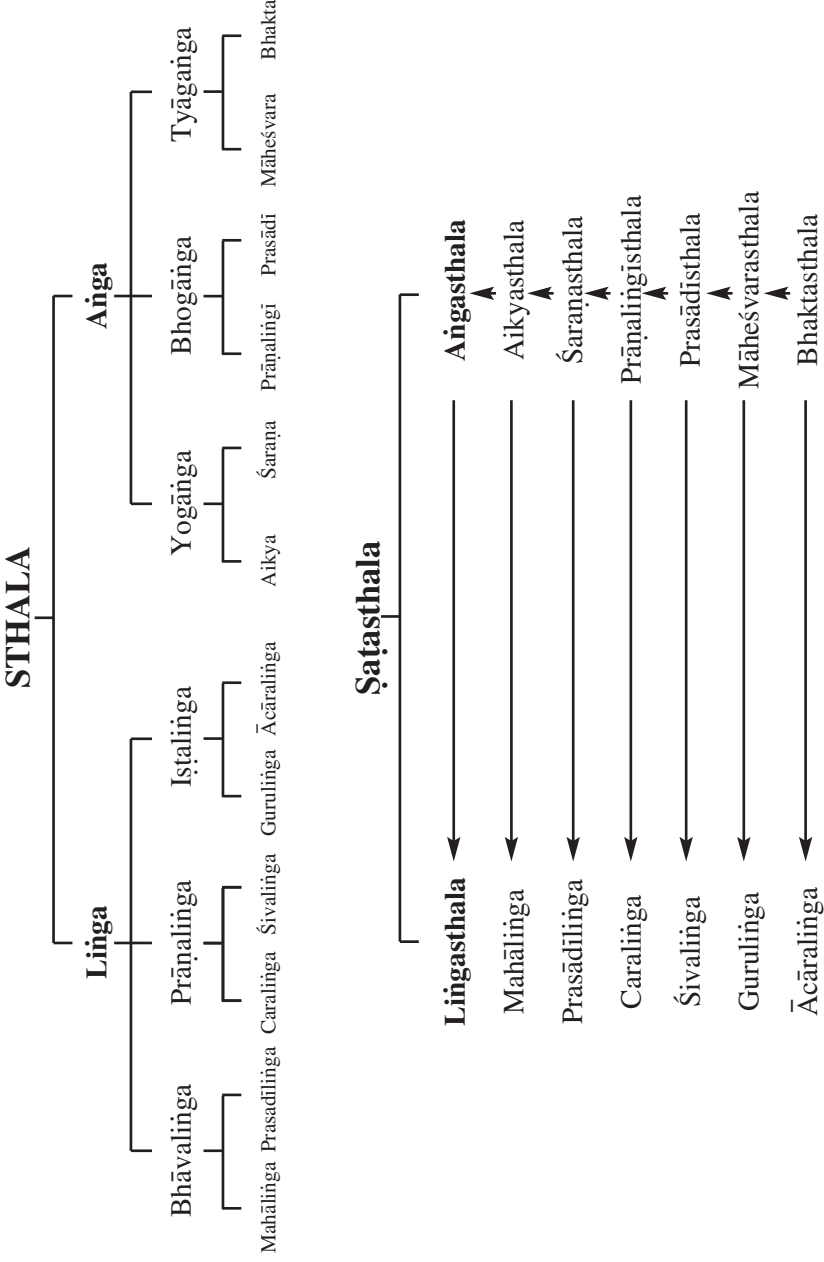
There are twenty eight Āgamas divided into two groups, namely, Śaivāgamas and Rudrāgamas. Sūkṣma, Kāmika, Yogaja, Cintya, Kāraṇa, Ajita, Dīpta, Sahasra, Amśumat, Suprabhedā are regarded Śaivāgamas and Vijaya, Nihśvāsa, Svāyambhūva, Anala, Vīra, Raurava, Makuṭa, Vimāla, Candrajñāna, Mukhabimba, Prodgīta, Lalita, Siddha, Santāna, Sarvokta, Pārameśvara, Kiraṇa and Vātula are the Rudrāgamas. These are advocated by the ten Śivas such as Praṇava etc. and the eighteen Rudras like Anādi etc.

In the later portion of Vātulāgama, the famous Śaiva discipline, namely 'Tantrottarapradīpa', is enunciated in which the concept of Ṣaṭasthala has been described by the Lord Śiva to the Goddess Pārvatī. The book Anubhavasūtra is the concise compilation of the aphorisms of Vātulāgama. The contents of the book contains the principal teachings of the Vātula Āgamas that supports the philosophical doctrines of the Vīraśaiva religion.

There are three prevalent Śaivism in India, namely, Kashmir Śaivism, Śaiva Siddhānta and Vīraśaivism. Vīraśaivism is mainly based on the later part of the Siddhāntāgamas as well as on Vedas.

The principal religious practices viz., wearing of Iṣṭaliṅga on the body, practising the religious austerities for the attainment of six stages of the spiritual goal and observances of the special rites and rituals of Viraśaivism have their support in Vedas, Purāṇas and Itihāsas. So, Viraśaivism may very aptly be called a doctrine of both Vedic and Tāntrik tradition. The syllable 'Vī' signifies 'Vidyā', the wisdom that the unity of the soul and Śiva and the letter 'ra' stands for the attitude of the worshipper who remains absorbed in that wisdom. Viraśaivism denotes the firmness of the vow for the fulfilment of the spiritual end. After receiving the Iṣṭaliṅga bestowed by Guru, after performing the prescribed procedures of initiation, the worshipper wears Iṣṭaliṅga till he attains the final stage of the unity with Śiva. This, technically, is known in Viraśaivism as Liṅgāṅgasāmarasya, enjoying the one-ness of the soul with the Liṅga, the form of ultimate Principle. This final goal is attainable only by the gradual maturation of devotion on the part of the sādḥaka who ascends the six stages of the spiritual attainments, namely, Bhakta, Māheśvara, Prasādi, Prāṇaliṅgī, Śaraṇa, Aikya by constantly observing the five virtuous disciplines – Pañcācāras i.e. Liṅgācāra, Sadācāra, Śivācāra, Gaṇācāra and Bhr̥tyācāra with the gracious help of eight-fold aids, Aṣṭavaraṇas i.e. the eight protective aura, namely, Guru, Liṅga, Jaṅgama, Pādodaka, Prasāda, Bhasma, Rudrāṣka and Mantra.

Anubhavasūtra, an important text of Viraśaivism, authored by Māyideva is a very significant and systematic exposition of the Ṣaṣṭasthalas, the ascending stages of spiritual life. The scripture describes the nature and characteristics of the six-fold spiritual attainments as have been enunciated in the Tantroṭtarapradīpa, a section of Vātulāgama while describing the mystic doctrine of the Śiva non-dualism. According to Viraśaivism the ultimate Reality Śiva which, in other words, is termed as 'Sthala', manifests Itself in two forms, namely, Liṅga and Aṅga. The non-dual ultimate Reality Śiva is named as 'Sthala' signifying the substratum of the world. The syllable 'Stha' indicates the base or substratum where as 'la' stands for the dissolution. So, 'Sthala' means that which is the origin, substratum as well as the absorber of everything.



Sthakāraḥ sthānavācī syāllakāro layavācakaḥ
tayoh kāraṇabhūtaṃ yat tadeva sthalamucyate.

Anubhavasūtra, 2.5

Transcendental Parama Śiva being endowed with His own power is known as ‘Sthala’. Since God and His power is one and the same, the power is also called the ‘Existence-consciousness-bliss’

Tadiyā paramā śaktiḥ saccidānanda lakṣaṇā.

Siddhāntaśikhāmaṇi 2.12

That power is divided into two, namely, the Liṅga and Aṅga sthala for the manifestation and realisation of his own nature. It divides Itself into two as the worshipper and worshipped for the enjoyment of Its own bliss. Kalā based on the Liṅgasthala, named Śakti, is the emanating power (pravṛtti) where as the power based on Aṅga, the soul is manifested in the form of devotion and of the nature of nivṛtti. The pravṛtti kalā of the Liṅgasthala emanates itself in the form of the world of manifestation where as the nivṛttikalā of Aṅgasthala expresses itself as the devotion, the most natural expression of soul.

That transcendental Principle being endowed with the power, known as Liṅgasthala, Śiva, Rudra is of the nature of existence-consciousness-bliss and is worshipped by the soul, the Aṅgasthala. As the pure consciousness is divided into two as Liṅga and Aṅga, so also the power of sthala is divided into two as Śakti and Bhakti. Śakti is that mystic power which is descending and aims at uniting the soul with the God by removing the bonds of the soul. So, it is called the pravṛttikalā. On the other hand the same power when is imbibed in soul is known as nivṛttikalā, the principle that causes the upliftment of the soul by dissolving the ignorance through the devotional power and kindles the awareness of the identity between the jīva and Śiva.

Saccidānandarūpā syād bhuktimuktiphalapradā
Śaktireva smṛtā bhaktirbhaktireva hi sā sadā

Anubhavasūtra, 2.26

So, Bhakti is considered to be better, pure, charming and subtle, since it is the means to be united to God and thus to attain the goal of life. One and the same thing functions in two ways and makes possible the sport (Līlā) of God. Śakti manifests the world of diversity where as Bhakti leads to the unified whole by dissolving all the differences. Śakti is associated with māyā where as Bhakti is devoid of māyā.

Samāyā Śaktirākhyātā nirmāyā bhaktiriritā
 Api tarkapramāṇābhyāṃ śakterbhaktirguṇādhikā.

Anubhavasūtra, 2.31

The same power manifesting in Liṅgasthala makes It the object of worship and on other hand prepares the Aṅgasthala as a true devotee and leads it to the final goal, unity i.e. the identity of Śiva and jīva, 'Liṅgāṅga-sāmarasya', the end of spiritual life.

Liṅgasthala firstly manifests Itself in three forms, namely, Bhāvaliṅga, Prānaliṅga and Istaliṅga. Bhāvaliṅga is transcendental, causal, partless and is dominated by the 'Sat' (existence) aspect of Brahman. From the point of view of Mahāvākya - 'Tat tvam asi', It represents the 'asi' aspect. Kalā is emanated out of It. The second manifestation of Liṅgasthala is Prānaliṅga which is inner, subtle, of the form of Mantra, both form and formless, dominated by the 'cit' (consciousness) aspect of Brahman. It represents the 'tvam' aspect of 'Tat tvam asi'. Nāda is emanated out of It. The third manifestation of Liṅgasthala is Iṣṭaliṅga which is the gross, outer, the perceptible form, is emanated out of bliss, of the form of 'kriyā', represents the 'tat' aspect of Mahāvākya and the element 'Bindu' is emerged out of It.

Niṣkalam bhāvaliṅgaṃ syād bhāvagrāhyam parātparam
 Sanmātram bhāvaliṅgam syāditi niṣṭhā mahātmanām
 Prānaliṅgam manogrāhyam bhavet sakataniṣkalam
 Tatprāṇeṣvantarmanaso liṅgamāha iti Śrutiḥ

Anubhavasūtra, 3.6-7.

Again these three Liṅgasthalas divide Itself into six, each in two, namely, Mahāliṅga, Prasādiliṅga, Caraliṅga, Śivaliṅga, Guruliṅga, Ācāraliṅga respectively from Bhāvaliṅga, Prānaliṅga and Iṣṭaliṅga.

Six corresponding powers (Śakti) are inherent in the six aforesaid manifestations of Liṅgasthala i.e. Śāntyatitottarā, Śāntyātītā, Śānti, Icchā, Pratiṣṭhā and Nivr̥tti.

Mahāliṅgam prasādākhyaliṅgam ca caraliṅgakam
 Śivaliṅgaṃ tathā caiva guruliṅgaṃ tataḥ param
 ācāraliṅgamityeva liṅgaṃ ṣadvidhamucyate
 Evam hi ṣadvidham bhūtam liṅgam paramakāraṇam

Anubhavasūtra, 3.21-22

These powers are also called as Cit, Parā, Ādi, Vidyā, Jñāna and Kriyā respectively. Thus there are six Śaktis inherent in and one with the God.

Now, a short discussion about the six manifestations of Liṅgasthala is necessary in understanding the spiritual attainments of the soul.

Mahāliṅga: Mahāliṅga is the first manifestation of the Bhāvaliṅga. It is transcendental, non-dual, subtle, unpoluted, devoid of all evil propensities of the phenomenal existence, unknowable, pure, Śivatattva associated with consciousness-power.

Prasādiliṅga: It is an effulgent light, eternal, indestructible, unknowable by the senses, accessible only through the knowledge, cause of the universe, Sādākhyā, endowed with his own power and transcends all characteristics.

Caraliṅga: Caraliṅga is of the nature of light and is manifested by both the inner and outer light, beyond the realm of Puruṣa and Prakṛti and endowed with his own power, knowable by mind only. Such subjective principle is called the Caraliṅga by the knower.

Śivaliṅga: that which is endowed with the knowledge, effulgent, calm, of the nature of will-force, concrete principle and is known as the Śivaliṅga.

Guruliṅga: Guruliṅga is manifested by the power of pure knowledge, firmly established in all the scriptures, possessing all powers, abode of all pleasures, an agent firm on the principle of Intelligence.

Ācāraliṅga: Though this Liṅgasthala is the principle of action but It is firm in Itself and is the substratum of all activities, knowable by Citta and inspiring towards detachment.

Thus Aikyasthala, Śaraṇasthala, Prāṇaliṅgiṣṭhala, Prasādīsthala,

Māheśvarasthala and Bhaktasthala are the six manifestations of the Liṅgasthala.

Corresponding to it there are six emanations of Aṅgasthala. A stands for Anādyanta i.e. that which is devoid of the beginning and the end, the self caused and 'ga' indicates that which goes to, approaches the Paramaliṅga - the highest Principle with the unflinching devotion. Thus 'a' means the pure consciousness, the Parama Śiva where as 'ga' denotes the soul, intrinsically Śiva and so is ever approaching towards the original nature. So, the syllable 'Aṅga' etymologically signifies One which is emanated as many and again merges into one.

This Aṅgasthala is divided into three - Yogāṅga, Bhogāṅga and Tyāgāṅga. The state in which the soul enjoys the bliss of eternal union with Śiva is termed as Yogāṅga. When the soul enjoys everything by being united with Śiva is known as Bhogāṅga and the state in which the soul abandons the illusory sense of the world is called the Tyāgāṅga. So, the Aṅgasthala that is divided into the three aforesaid manifestations are also called as 'Kāraṇa śarīra' - the causal state, Sūkṣma śarīra - the subtle state and the 'Sthūla-śarīra' - the gross state. Again Yogāṅga has also been described as the state of 'Suṣupti' - the deep sleep (dreamless sleep), Bhogāṅga as Svapna-dream and Tyāgāṅga as the Jāgratāvasthā - the waking state. The behavioural expression of the Yogāṅga, Bhogāṅga and Tyāgāṅga is that of Prājña, Taijas and Viśva respectively. The aforesaid three states of soul are having each a second phase and thus there are six Aṅgasthalas, namely, Aikya, Śarana, Prāṇaliṅgī, Prasādī, Māheśvara and Bhakta respectively. Causal body is associated with the Aikya and Śaraṇasthala, subtle body with the Prāṇaliṅgī and Prasādīsthala and the gross body with the Māheśvara and Bhaktasthala. The spiritual ascendance of the soul characterises with the attitude of detachment, approaches towards upliftment by eradicating or dissolving māyā through a deep, an unflinching devotional power. The ultimate aim of this spiritual journey is finally attaining the awareness of the identity of Jiva and Śiva.

Aikyaṃ tu śaraṇaṃ nāma prāṇaliṅgī prasādī ca
Māheśvaram bhaktamiti kramāt ṣaṣṭhalamucyate.

Anubhavasūtra, 4.17

1. Bhaktasthala: The first stage of spiritual life, namely Bhaktasthala, is a state in which the worshipper gets attracted to all the ritual, rites, virtuous dispositions and outward observances of religion. There are fifty subdivisions in this stage. Devotee performs all the prescribed injunctions regarding religious rites, penances, recitation of hymn, meditation and knowledge etc.

Bhaktikriyācaraṇayaiva sadā viraktam
Bhaktasthalam bhavavikāraavidūramāhūḥ.

Anubhavasūtra, 4.33

2. Māheśvarasthala: As the water of the sea is condensed and transformed into a pearl, so also the firm vow assumes the form of deep devotion and thus the devotee ascends to the second stage of spiritual life, namely, Māheśvarasthala. Firm devotedness brings forth the detachment from the worldly objects. There are nine subdivisions of this stage, namely, Māheśvara praśaṅgāsthalam, Liṅga-ṅiṣṭhāsthalam, Pūrvāśrayanīrasanasthalam, Advaitanīrasanasthalam, Āhvānānīrasanasthalam, Aṣṭamūrtinīrasanasthalam, Sarvāṅgatvanīrasanasthalam, Śīvajaganmayasthalam, Bhaktadehikaliṅgasthalam. Discriminatory knowledge of real and unreal, purity of heart, detachment from the enjoyment of life, absorption in studying and realising the Śaiva scriptures, prasing Śīva, egolessness, devoid of jealousy, greediness and anger, contentment and ever exerting for the welfare of all being are the main characteristics of the Māheśvarasthala.

3. Prasādīsthala: The Māheśvara yogī who attains the wisdom of the all pervasiveness of Śīva is called the 'Prasādī'. When the devotion is deepened and matured, the sādḥaka attains the realisation of the existence of God in each and every objects of the world. So, the whole being of sādḥaka is immersed in the love of Śīva—

Manaḥ prasādayogen prasādītyeṣa kathyate.

Siddhānta Śikhāmaṇi, II. 2

Prasādī sthalam, Gurumāhātmya sthalam, Liṅgamāhātmya sthalam, Jaṅgamāhātmya sthalam, Bhaktamāhātmya sthalam,

Śaraṇamāhātmya sthalam and Śivaprasādmāhātmya sthalam. By observing regularly the prescribed procedures of the scriptures and the instruction of Guru, the sādḥaka gradually ascends to the higher and higher spiritual stages and achieves many auspicious qualities worthy of proceeding to the next.

4. Prāṇaliṅgī sthala: In this fourth state of the ṣaṭasthalas the devotion becomes so intense that it assumes a new dimension of 'experiencing devotion'. As an insect remaining in the closest association of a bee, turns into a bee. So also, the sādḥaka obtaining the most intimate union with Śiva through an intense devotion becomes Śiva Himself.

Kīṭo bhramarayogen bhramaro bhavati dhruvam
Mānavaḥ śivayogen śivo bhavati niścayam.

Līṅgapurāṇa, 21.95

In this fourth stage there are five substages, namely, Prāṇaliṅgār-cana, Śivayoga samādhi, Liṅga nijasthalam, Aṅgaliṅgi sthalam and Pañcāvantara sthalam. Devotee endowed with Śiva-consciousness is enlightened with the luminous Liṅga in his heart is known as Prāṇaliṅgī Sādḥaka. By intense devotion with strong firmness when sādḥaka practices the penance with austerity, a light in the mulādhār cakra is illumined and gradually proceeds towards the anāhata cakra centred in the heart. The Liṅga of light of the size of a thumb is installed on the middle of the twelve petalled lotus. Since this luminous Liṅga is empowered with the energy of prāṇa, of the size of a thumb, śaiva devotee names this luminosity united with prāṇa as Prāṇaliṅga which is kindled like a lamp. All the mental faculties of the sādḥaka are gradually dissolved in the light of Prāṇaliṅga and he becomes immersed in the bliss of Śiva. First three sthalas namely Bhakta, Māheśvaras and Prasādi are dominated by action where as the fourth one i.e. Prāṇaliṅgi sthala is overpowered by yoga and jñāna. Awareness of the self as the consciousness and bliss in the form of Prāṇaliṅgasthala arises and consequently sādḥaka begins enquiring into the state of identity between Jīva and Śiva. The luminous prāṇaliṅga is meditated upon on the six centres of Mūlādhāra,

Svādhiṣṭhāna, Maṇipurak, Anāhata, Viśuddhi and Ājñā. In the Brahmaṇḍa thousand petalled lotus should be contemplated and within that an unblemished moonlight is to be assumed and then a subtle hole is to be meditated upon as the sacred mountain Kailāśa. The uncaused cause Śiva is adorned on the seat. The accomplishment of such meditation is known as ‘Śivayoga samādhi’. Prāṇaliṅgi sādha is fully immersed in the enjoyment of the consciousness-bliss produced on account of the unity of the soul and God in and through the Prāṇaliṅgi sthala.

5. Śaraṇa sthala: Realizing the nature of consciousness-bliss of the Reality within his self, sādha surrenders himself to the all pervading consciousness-bliss. He takes refuge in the highest blissful enjoyment with ‘blissfull devotion’, the ‘Ānand-bhakti’. Sādha is so immersed in the transemperical bliss that the analogy of conjugal intimacy is applied. Soul takes refuge and fully surrenders itself in order to attain the nondual state and perfection. Tāmasanirasana sthalam, Nirdeśa sthalam, Śilasampādana sthalam are the three subdivisions of the Śaraṇa sthala in which the sattva guṇa excels and the rajas and tamas are subdued. So, the dispositions arising from the sattvaguṇa, namely, śama, dama, viveka, non attachment to object, unflinching meditation, forgiveness, compassion, faith and devotion to Śiva predominate. Thus the surrendered soul becomes full of sattvaguṇa and completely devoid of rajas and tamas. In the last phase of Śaraṇasthala, the devotee attains the knowledge of the unity of the Jiva and Śiva and remains in incessant meditation on Śiva.

Proktā’ nandātmikā bhaktiriti vedāntavedibhiḥ
Asyātmanastayā bhaktyā śaraṇasthalamāgatam.

Anubhavasūtra, 5.79

6. Aikyasthala: In this final stage of spiritual life, Jiva realises the complete identity with Śiva. The soul is immersed in the blissfull consciousness of Śiva and so is known as ‘samarasabhakta’ like a river becoming one with ocean. Aikyam, Ācāra-sampatti, Ekbhājanam, Sahabhojanam are the four subdivisions of this final stage. In this stage, the Sādha becomes devoid of sensuous pleasures, detached, pure, unblemished and attains the state of ‘Śivoham’.

This is the state of complete unison or identity with God transcending the duality of Paśu-Pati and 'sati-pati' attitude. No sense of discrimination remains.

Jale jalamiva nyastam vahnau vahnirivārpitam
Pare brahmaṇi līnātmā vibhāgena na dṛṣyate.

Siddhānta Śikhāmaṇi, 20.61

As the sādḥaka is fully renounced and so beyond the state of affirmative and negative sanctions, perceiving Śiva in everything and everything in Śiva, considering Śiva as substratum and enjoying equanimity with Śiva. Therefore he is called Śiva-yogī and is known as Jīvanmukta. In the last stage, named, sahabhojana, all discriminations are vanished and Guru, disciple, Śiva and the world etc. seem to him as the manifestations of his own Self.

ūham bhṛtyāḥ śiva svāmī śiṣyo'haṃ gurureṣa vai
Iti yasya matirnāsti sa cādvaitapade sthitah.

Siddhānta Śikhāmaṇi, 14.37

Aṅga, the second manifestation of the ultimate Reality is endowed with devotion. As one and the same fire takes different forms as per the various base and condition of the lamp, so also the same power is manifested in accordance with the base and condition. The power that is based on Liṅga is known as Kalā where as the power imbibed in Aṅga is named as Bhakti. Śakti of Liṅga, namely, kalā emerges as the universe and Bhakti, in soul, develops a sense of detachment towards the universe. So, Śakti is considered as downward where as Bhakti is the principle that inspires the soul upward. According to the Vīraśaiva religion Bhakti is the most appropriate means for achieving the final state which is attainable only through the three kinds of Dikṣā i.e. Vedhā, Mantra, Kriyā that Guru bestows in accordance with the spiritual upliftment of the disciple.

Thus a Vīraśaiva devotee fulfils his spiritual journey and attains the end of life.