 Sparxan*: ‘Seeing’ Menstruating Goddess Kamakhya through the ‘ritual touch’

Prerna Pradhan
Theatre and Performance Studies, School of Arts & Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

Abstract: This paper discusses how the conceptualization of menstruating goddess Kamakhya revolves around sparxan, the ritual act of touching the goddess. Here, the conventional mode of worship darxan (seeing/viewing the goddess) is effectively replaced by sparxan in order to ‘see’ and communicate with the goddess. However, to understand the complexity of worshipping Kamakhya, the paper explores two contrasting situations where Kamakhya is worshipped by performing and unperforming sparxan-nitya puja (the daily worship) and Ambubachi festival believed to be her menstrual period when she becomes inaccessible in sight and touch. In doing so, the paper argues that the act of sparxan subverts the traditional mode of worship prioritizing the elemental idea of auspicious touch over auspicious sight. But at the same time it also brings into question the ambivalence of how the same goddess becomes touchable or untouchable and both the modes are accepted ways of ‘seeing’ the goddess albeit in two different events.

Key words: Kamakhya; sparxan; darxan; Ambubachi; menstruation; auspicious touch.