Akkai Padmashali is a male to female Transwoman, social activist. Her journey is one of courage and determination. From begging on the streets and participating in sex work for two square meals a day, she is now an activist that has inspired many. Born a male in a middle-class family, she discontinued her studies after 10th grade due to gender discrimination. She took up sex work to make ends meet.

In 2012, Padmashali was invited by the President of India to attend the swearing in ceremony of the Hon'ble Chief Justice Shri Altamas Kabir, Supreme Court of India, and was invited by His Excellency Governor of Kerala to attend the swearing in ceremony of the Hon’ble Chief Justice Smt Manjula Chellur of the Kerala High Court. In the same year, she became the first male to female transgender in Karnataka to complete her sex reassignment surgery counseling process and underwent a sex change surgery. In 2013, she joined Radio Active CR 90.4 MHz, a community radio station licensed to Jain University to head the project “Out of Shadows”. The project was aimed at strengthening advocacy for women, sexual minorities, and sex workers. In 2014, she co-founded Ondede, an organization of feminists, activists, thinkers, and academics who recognized the need to converge the interests of three movements in the country – children’s rights, women’s rights, and the rights of sexual minorities. The organization is called Ondede, which means “convergence” in Kannada, the regional language in Karnataka. By recognizing the existing movements as distinct but interrelated, Ondede endeavors to link these groups to various media platforms to foster productive community discourses, conduct research, and instigate action on dignity-voice-sexuality. In October 2014, Padmashali was the only one person from India to be invited by the International Bar Association to address the social and legal status of sexual minorities at the national conference in Tokyo, Japan. A full year later, Padmashali became the first transgender awarded the Karnataka Rajyotsava Award, the second highest civilian honor presented by the Karnataka state government for her work in Social Sector. At Ondede, Padmashali has conducted many workshops on sexuality and gender at colleges across Karnataka and few parts of the country and she has held seminars on sexual minorities for government workers and officials. She has worked closely with community members, politicians, bureaucrats, and judges to advocate for policy supporting gender equality, sex worker rights, and the empowerment of the transgender and sexual minority community. Padmashali is a member of the Karnataka Sex Worker Status Committee- Government of Karnataka, and she was the member of the drafting committee to bring policy for Transgender through planning committee of Karnataka, and the planning committee for Karnataka’s Commission for Transgenders, which is the first government commission of its kind in India.

In her free time, Akkai practices singing and has recorded “Lakshmi Stuti-Bhagyada Lakshmi Baramma” ( a Kannada prayer dedicated to the goddess Lakshmi) for the album, Songs of Caravan and it plays on the popular show “Jeeva Diary – Rethinking Perspectives: Queer Issues, Views and Stories” on The Life of Uma on Radio Active.

Monday, March 14, 2016
5 - 7 pm
10 Stephens Hall (ISAS Conf. Room)

Event Co-sponsors: Sarah Kailath Chair of India Studies, Department of Sociology, and the LGBTQ Cluster at the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society (HIFiS)

Event is free & open to public. Information at 510-642-3608 or southasia.berkeley.edu