



## Glory of Bharath » Santh Darsan

### Sri Annamacharya



Sri Tallapaka Annamacharya was the official songmaster of the Tirumala Venkateswara Temple, and a Telugu composer who composed around 36000 keertana songs, many of which were in praise of Venkateswara, the presiding deity of the temple. The musical form of the keertana songs that he composed have strongly influenced the structure of Carnatic music compositions, which are still popular among Carnatic music concert artists. Sri Annamacharya is remembered for his saintly life, and is honoured as a great Bhakta/devotee of Bhagavan Govinda by devotees and saintly singers. He is widely regarded as the Pada-kavita Pitaamaha (grand old man of song-writing) of the Telugu language.

#### Personal life

A rhyming couplet of poems called "Dwipada" written by Tallapaka Chinnanna, grandson of Annamacharya, enabled us to learn about the Saint Annamacharya, his life and works. Annamacharya was born on Vaisakhapoornima in the year Sarwadhari (May 9, 1408) in Tallapaka, a remote village in Andhra Pradesh, and lived immaculately for 95 years until Phalguna Bahula Dwadasi (12th day after full moon) in the year Dhundhubhi (February 23, 1503). Annamacharya is believed to be the incarnation of Lord Venkateswara's Nandaka or Sword. The evidences supporting the fact that Annamacharya is the incarnation of the Lord are found in Chinnanna's Dwipada.

It is believed that in the 10th century a big famine broke out in Varanasi and scores of scholars migrated to southern part of India for earning their livelihoods. Some of them concentrated in a town called "Nandavaram" in Andhra Pradesh which was ruled by the then king Nanda. These immigrants were called "Nandavarikas" and Annamacharyas forefathers were the so called Nandavarikas and hence Annamacharya.

In the Dwipada the story of Annamacharya goes back three generations to his grandfather Narayanayya. As a boy Narayanayya was not keen in studies and it was customary in those times for the gurus to subject the students to different kinds of torturous methods to create concentration on studies. When nothing worked for the young boy, he decided that death would be better than the life filled with torture, humiliation, and shame. He heard about the venomous cobra in the snake hole at the temple of Chinthamma the village Goddess. In an attempt to take his life away, Narayanayya put his hand in the snake hole at the temple. To his surprise, the village Goddess appeared before him and advised him not to take his life away since a boy with an element of Hari or Vishnu would be born in the third generation of Narayanayya.

Narayana Suri, the son of Narayanayya, did not have children for a long time. Narayana Suri and his wife Lakkamamba visited Tirumala Temple and while they were prostrating in front of the Holy Mast (Dhwaja Sthambha) a dazzling brilliance from the sword of Lord Venkateswara struck them like a lightning. Eventually a boy was born to them and they named him Annamayya. Annamayya became Annamacharya when the sage Ghana Vishnu at Tirumala converted him into a Vaishnavite at the age of 8.

#### Literary career

Annamacharya is said to have composed as many as 36,000 sankeertanas (songs) on Lord Venkateswara, of which only about 12,000 are available today. Annamacharya considered his compositions as floral offerings to Lord Govinda. In the poems, he praises Venkateswara, describes his love for him, argues and quarrels with the Lord, confesses the devotee's failures and apprehensions, and surrenders himself to Venkateswara. His songs are classified into the Adhyaatma (spiritual) and Sringaara (romantic) sankeertanas genres. His songs of the "Sringaara" genre, worship Lord Venkateswara describing his amorous and romantic adventures of Venkateswara and Alamel Manga, while others describe the Bhakti of his devotees.

In his later keertanas, he espouses subjects such as morality, dharma and righteousness. He was one of the

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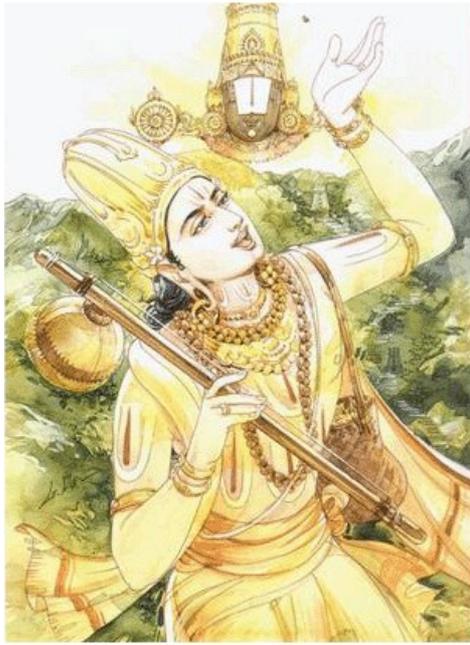
first few who opposed the social stigma towards the untouchable castes in his era, with his sankeertanas explaining that the relationship between God and human is the same irrespective of the latter's color, caste and financial status, in beautiful yet powerful usage of words in his songs.

His choice of words gives a mellifluous tone to his songs, charming the listener. His prodigious literary career earned him a place among the all-time greats of Telugu literature.

During his long and prolific career, Annamacharya composed and sang 32,000 Sankirtanas, 12 Satakas (sets of hundred verses), Ramayana in the form of Dwipada, Sankirtana Lakshanam (Characteristics of sankirtanas), Srugaara Manjari, and Venkatachala Mahatmamyam. His works were in Telugu, Sanskrit and a few other languages of India.

Chinnanna called the 32,000 Sankirtanas as 32,000 Mantras or Sacred Hymns. It was also recorded in Chinnanna's Dwipada that Purandara Dasa, who was 70 years younger to Annamacharya, heard about the miracles of Annamacharya and visited him. Purandara Dasa paid his respects to Annamacharya by calling him the incarnation of Lord Venkateswara and his Sankirtanas as Sacred Hymns.

Annamacharya wrote the sankirtanas on palm leaves and later his son Tirumalacharya got them engraved on copper plates. But for reasons not known, most of these copper plates lay hidden in a rock built cell opposite to Hundi in the Tirumala temple unnoticed for over 400 years. In 1922, twenty five hundred copper plates, comprising of about 14,000 sankirtanas and a few other works, were found in a rock built cell, later named as Sankirtana Bhandagaram, opposite to the Hundi (donation box). Ever since the discovery of this lost treasure, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) and other organizations in India are working hard to promote the music and literature of Annamacharya.



*“Om Namo Venkatesaya”*