

## PADAKAVITHA PITAMAHA ANNAMARYA

“Jo achyuthanatha jo jo Mukunda” a lullaby sung way back in 2005 by Dr. Bala Murali Krishna in Dorothy Winston Centre Aucklanad, everybody in the hall almost felt asleep. “Chanda mama ravo jabilli ravo” is another song listening to which we all grew up. Do you know who wrote all these songs? It is THALLAPAKA ANNAMACHARYA an illustrious devotee of Lord Venkateswara and a poet, composed it.

Annamacharya is the first Vaggeyakara whose compositions gave birth to the musical form Krithi or Keerthanam in the world of Carnatic Music. Lord Venkateswara woke up with his songs and slept when he sang a lullaby. Goddess Alamelumanga danced joyously to his songs. Should we not know something about this great devotee?

Annamayya was born in 1408 in Thallapaka village in Cuddapah district in Andhra Pradesh,,India. He was born to Narayana Suri and Lakkamamba and was named Annamayya because he was born by the grace of ‘mandrake’ the sword of Lord Vishnu.

As a boy of five years Annamayya was gifted with intuitive perception. His teachers soon realised that they had nothing much to teach him. He would go to the local Chenna keshava temple and address the lord as “my little Kesava”.

Annamayya’s visit to Tirupathi was a miracle that happened in his life. Narayana Suri, his father was head of a large family. The family members started raising a hue and cry as Annamayya was only singing and not doing any work. As a result of this Narayana Suri had to force Annamayya to do some work in their paddy fields. As Annamayya was not used to hard work, he felt tired very soon. He sat under a tree and took his Tambura to sing and relax himself. He wanted to sing for a while but he was reminded of his work when he saw the sickle. He started singing while he was working when he cut his little finger and started crying. He groaned in pain. His parents and relatives came to his mind at once. ‘It is all an illusion. There is no one for you now. You have nothing to do with these earthly bonds” he said to himself.

At the same time he saw a group of pilgrims going to Tirumala. Annamayya threw the sickle and joined them. They were singing and dancing and playing drums out of happiness that they were going to Tirumala.

Annamayya reached Tirupathi in their company. “Adivo Alladivo Sree Hari Vasamu” is the first song he composed when he reached the Tirumala hills. He was just 8 years old when he did this. So, when he started climbing the Tirumala hills he felt tired and slept in the bushes without even taking his shoes off. It was at this time when Goddess Alamelumanga appeared before him and started calling him “wake up my little son wake up”. Annamayya felt like his mother Lakkamamba was calling him. He could feel her touch but he could not see her which he expressed to her.

Alamelumanga fondled the boy and said “My son, this Tirumala hill is made up of holy Salagrama rock. Remove your footwear and see”. He could see all the surroundings once he removed his footwear.

Alamelumanga gave him food to eat. He was inspired spontaneously and recited hundred poems called 'Alamelumanga Shatakamu' (a group of 100 verses is called a Shatakamu in Sanskrit).

### *Visiting temple:*

Annamayya then went to the temple of Venkateswara on seven hills. He experienced a rare joy the moment he saw the lord. Slowly his ecstasy found expression into the form of a sweet song.

“PODA GANTIMAYYA MIMMU PURUSHOTHAMA MAMMU  
NEDAYAKA VAYYA KONETIRAYADA”

Meaning:

Lord! You are our ancestral property. You are the dark cloud to quench our thirst. and you are present in our heart of hearts. We beseech you, do not leave us anymore.

He stayed in the temple from then and started composing so many songs including BRAHMA KADIGINA PADAMU etc. He had the principle of writing a composition a day to the Lord which made him compose 32,000 songs.

### *Contribution to music:*

Annamacharya is honoured with the title “Pada kavitha pithamaha” (meaning Grandfather of the form of poetry called 'Padam') by his grandson China Tirumalacharya. The padam is a difficult form to handle, being bound by strict rules of poetry and meant to serve the purpose of both poetry and song.

The composition that is called Krithi or Keerthanam today was termed as SANKEERTHANAM or PADAM during those days. Padam means a song and is one of the geya prabandhas described by several Sangeetha Lakshana karas including Bharatha.

In simple terms Padam is a poetic composition, which has Pallavi and 3 charanas with occasional Anupallavi, bearing the mudra in last stanza. Mudra means the mark of the composers which is “venkatesa” for Annamayya.

Since the saints songs are devotional in nature they are called SANKEERTHANAMS.

Annamacharya's profound treatise “Sankeerthana Lakshanam” in Sanskrit, has the description of the characteristics of a sankeerthanam. According to him, the words in a Krithi or Sankeerthanam should be set in such a sequence that the order itself should increase the beauty and that forms the pallavi of the song. In other words, Pallavi of the song should be attractive and appealing which characteristic is immediately obvious in all Annamacharya keerthanams.

Another character he explained is that the words should be in common language so that everybody should be able to enjoy the songs which also he followed in his songs, where in we can find the several proverbs and duets incorporated.

Annamacharya along with Purandara Dasa has the credit of starting Bhajana Sampradaya to evoke divine thoughts in people. Thodaya Mangalam is one such example. Both of them did Padayatras to evoke spiritualism among people.

Salva Narasimha Raya, the governor of Penugonda, Andhra Pradesh, honoured Annamacharya with Saptha Lanchanas. He also established a library to preserve Annamayya's works called Sankeerthana Bhandagaramu.

His sankeerthanas can be divided into Adhyathma Sankeerthanas, Sringara Sankeerthanas, Manipravala Sankeerthanas and folklores. He started the group celebrations of Krinashtami. He started the Kalyanotsavam for Lord Sreenivasa on Tirumala.

He also wrote Shringara Manjari as a Dvipada Kavya. Dvipada is a kind of literary work in Telugu grammar. He also wrote Dvipada Ramayana. He wrote 11 Shatakas which are not available today.

The music of Annamacharya is not notated which is very unfortunate. According to Rallapalli Anantha Krishna Sharma, a well known scholar, perhaps two songs namely JO ACHUTHANANATHA and CHANDAMAMA RAVO are still sung in the same tune as he did. The copper plates having the songs only mention the raga name but not the talas.

Of the 32,000 songs that he is said to have composed, 14,000 keerthanams are available today but only 80 ragas were mentioned out of which only 29 are frequently used.

The copper plates bearing the sankeerthanams were found in 1922 in a small hole in Tirumala temple which we can see now when we visit the temple. This bhandagaram is opposite to the Hundi, In the temple.

This made TTD to promote Annamacharya Project in 1978 which included the research and musical renovation of the Sankeerthanams through recordings by M.S Subbulakshmi, Dr. Balamurali, Nedunuri Krishnamurthi and others.

Dr, Shobharaju is working through her Annamacharya Bhavana Vahini which includes training young children to sing Annamacharya songs and giving scholarships for those who win the competitions conducted by her.

There will be no end to this discussion of music and compositions of Annamayya. His poetry enchanted both learned and common. Each and every song from his repertoire is a delightful stroke of NANDAKA, the divine sword of Lord MahaVishnu-of which Annamayya is believed to be an incarnation.

He preceded the Trinity of Carnatic Music by more than 300 years.

He lived immaculately for 95 years and attained moksha in 1508.

“OM NAMO VENKATESAYA”.

Abridged from thesis to University of Madras submitted by Mrs Padma Govandhan for her MA, Music.