The Singing Saint

(A Novel based on the Life of Tallapaka Annamacharya)

R.L.N. Raju
The Singing Saint
By RLN Raju

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MESSAGE

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The renowned Tallapaka Annamacharya who wrote more than thirty two thousand keerthanams praising the divine qualities of Lord Venkateswara Swamy needs no introduction. He was a great singer, composer, un-aspiring devotee and above all a great human being who cared for all and all sections of the society. The sankeerthanams of Annamacharya are not only enjoyed by the Telugu knowing people around the world but also continue to enthrall music lovers of all languages. Apart from Telugu sankeerthanams, Annamacharya also composed many in Sanskrit and rose to the highest level of literary accomplishment.

I am happy to note that a book in English, ‘The Singing Saint’ on the life of Annamacharya is being published with the financial assistance of the TTD. I sincerely hope that this book will be highly useful to the non-Telugu speaking people to know more about Annamacharya and his sankeerthanams. It is more gladdening to note that the author, Sri R.L.N.Raju, also belongs to Tallapaka, the birth place of the legendary composer and singer.

I wish Sri R.L.N.Raju all success.

- APVN Sarma.
It is heartening to note that a novel in English is being published on the life of Tallapaka Annamacharya, undoubtedly the greatest singing poet in Telugu Literature. So much has been thrown to light on the literary genius of Annamacharya in Telugu but bringing out, in English, a full fledged book on Annamacharya’s life and personality, is a rare and commendable work. Sri R.L.N. Raju, the author, deserves all appreciation and encouragement.

Many know Annamacharya as a composer and singer but after reading this book, the other side of his noble personality is revealed. This book will certainly help the non-Telugu people know and appreciate Annamacharya’s spirited personality.

Factually speaking anything on Annamacharya is my obsession. All this while, I read many books on the saint singer with a passion to know more of his life and erudition. However Sri R.L.N. Raju did his best, I sincerely believe, to bring to light the incidents and the men who influenced him to pen such memorable sankeerthanas and left for the posterity. The writer has laid way; I feel it is imperative, for the more in depth research and documentation of the great sons of Telugu Thalli, which is the need of the hour.

The present generation should befittingly honour the doyens of our society of all fields, particularly the literary greats by remembering them. We have organized a festival in Tirupathi recently to remember and commemorate the literary icons and it was a roaring success. Since my college days I had been nurturing the idea of organizing such events to honor our illustrious predecessors.

After reading this book, I am really impressed by the writer’s imaginative power and his characterization. Whenever I listen to Annamacharya’s krithis like,
I feel great about Annamacharya’s efforts to enlighten the contemporary society towards universal brotherhood. Imagine the indomitable spirit of Annamacharya six hundred years ago. In this regard the writer’s recreation of such scenes and characters is really appreciable. The character like Mani who represents social backwardness and oppression, and Annamacharya’s deep attachment with him by making him a member of his family, the author ennobled Annamacharya’s character to greater heights.

Annamacharya is a multi-faceted literary genius. He makes us think about life by his Adhyathmika sankeerthanas, at the same time his Sringara krithis are full of romance and beauty. One is tempted to dance by his rhythm in his folk songs and the descriptions are so vivid that the one feels gods and temples are before one’s own eyes. Whatever is the genre and content, his aim is to glorify his Ishta Daiva Lord of the Seven Hills.

For centuries the temple of Tirumala has been the landmark of reverence for millions of devotees. There is such an irresistible fascination for this holy shrine, day by day and year by year this reverence for this temple is increasing. Annamacharya’s dream and ambition is thus being fulfilled. The sankeerthanas of Annamacharya will reverberate not only in the seven hills but also in the minds and hearts of all the devotees of Sri Venkateswara. ‘The Singing Saint’ tries to recreate before us the serenity and greatness of the temple.

Manava seve Madhava seva
(Service to man is service to God)

Annamacharya whole heartedly practiced this precept in letter and spirit. He practiced what he believed. When poor people suffer from hunger god cannot ignore them nor do his real devotees. I was really moved when the situation was described where Annamacharya spontaneously fed the poor in rain or hugging and leading the social outcasts into the temple. It surely might have been a revolutionary step in those days.
I tried to list out one or two such incidents for the readers. This novel contains many such heart moving scenes and situations. I wholeheartedly appreciate the TTD, though it may sound self appreciation, as I am also a member of the governing board of the Devasthanam, for helping the writer to publish this book. In fact the TTD has been doing much to propagate the keerthanas of Annamacharya to the world. Also I sincerely hope many more such good books from Sri R.L.N.Raju.

Annamacharya profoundly believed in,

"Trikaranasuddhiga chesina panulu
Devudu mechu lokamunu mechu."

As this work is also done with such devotion and dedication, this book will be surely appreciated by all who read it and understand the sincerity of the writer, who also belongs to Tallapaka like Annamacharya, with the sole aim to highlight the greatness of the Padakavita Pitamaha to the world.

Tirupathi
30-5-2006.

- B. Karunakara Reddy
MESSAGE

I am very happy to note that Mr. RLN Raju, Asst. Professor of English and Head of the Department of Humanities and Sciences of our institute, wrote a novel, 'The Singing Saint' in English on Annamacharya, the Padakavittha Pithamaha and the Singing Saint poet, who composed nearly thirty two thousand songs on his ishta daiva, Lord Sri Venkateswara.

The Lord of the Seven Hills Sri Venkateswara Swamy (popularly known as Balaji all over the North) is highly revered and known almost all over the world. The fame of the Singing Poet increased only when his sankeerthanams came to limelight a few decades ago, though they were composed in the 16th century. Many do not know about the life and literary milestones of Annamacharya though most of the Telugu and non-Telugu people are familiar with his sankeerthanams. The Telugu film 'Annamayya,' made all the Telugu people know about Annamacharya, until then, only a few Telugu literates know about him through some books in Telugu. This book in English on the great poet will be a successful one in making him known all over the world. Already Annamacharya Project of Tirumala Tirupathi Devasthanams did publicize considerably and made the sankeerthanas world famous- thanks to the TTD. It is really a fitting move by TTD to support this book in English by Sri. RLN.Raju.

The author, Mr. Rudraraju Lakshmi Narayana Raju, born in Tallapaka, the birthplace of Annamacharya, is a humble scholar. Though he is specialized and qualified as an Assistant Professor of English, he is highly conversant with Telugu literature and Annamacharya sankeerthanams. In almost all the Annamacharya sankeerthana programmes
conducted in our institute and in the places nearby, Mr. Raju acts as a commentator and narrates the hidden meaning of the sankeerthanams to inspire the audience to follow the sankeerthanams in toto and relish. For the proficiency in Telugu exhibited in such occasions by Mr. Raju, the management felt like offering a simultaneous position in Telugu faculty (in spite of being an Assistant Professor of English). However, there is no scope for a Telugu faculty in this Engineering College wherein the medium of instruction is English.

Mr. Raju, being proficient in both these languages did a commendable job in writing about Annamacharya in English. He must be appreciated a lot for this job. I am confident that this book will certainly become a best seller soon.

-Prof. G Prabhakara Rao

Sri R.L.N. Raju always takes pleasure in reading and likes to lead a simple life. He is not only my brother-in-law but also a wellwisher. Though I am a software engineer and a business man, in his company I learn a lot regarding literature and simplicity in life.

On this occasion I convey my best wishes to my sister Indira, Ajayendra and Priyanka.

I wish the book all successes.

- C.P.S. Bhupala Varma
FOREWORD

Saraswati putra & Avadhana Chakravarthy

Dr. Medasani Mohan, M.A., Ph.D.
Director, Annamacharya Project
Tirumala Tirupathi Devasthanams.
TIRUPATHI.

The reading of the novel ‘The Singing Saint’ written by Sri RLN Raju depicting the saintly life of Annamacharya has really left a memorable and refreshing experience in my mind. It is a commendable venture to bring to light the real life sequences and the characters related to the life of the saint poet, and deserves high appreciation.

Annamacharya is the first poet in Telugu Literature who had brought the ‘pada kavita’ into fore and earned the distinction as Padakavita Pitamaha (Father of prose verse) and Dravidagama Saarvabhouma. Annamacharya took all the essence from Vedas, Aagamas, Upanishads, Itihasas, Puranas and all other related kaavyas, which are the roots of Indian philosophical and academic heritage and composed thousands of songs, popularly known as sankeerthanams, to glorify the deeds of his Isthadaiva ‘Venkateswara’. Annamaiah is not only a great devotee but also a saint born with a mission. He composed sankeerthanams in simple and lucid language mainly to cater to the needs of commoners and of course, of the learned men. These sankeerthanams with a style, most lucid and simple, suited to all and can be sung by all. The three qualities, that influence human life towards super human stature; philosophical attitude, cultural heritage and social reformation, are the basic and high lighting qualities in the sankeerthanams of Annamacharya. It is the earnest duty of all of us to know about the life of such a great soul.

Sri RLN Raju has penned this novel, which contains the real life situations of Annamacharya with remarkable style and precision. This book contains dramatic and heart moving scenes and relevant and simple dialogues suited perfectly to the situations which are sure to captivate the minds of the readers. The pertinent usage of, some of the sankeerthanams like,
"Podagantimayya mimmu purushottama...
And another sankeerthana
"Brahmamokkate Parabrahmamokkate..."
and many more, is really noteworthy.

The characterization and situational dialogues are the assets of this novel. The mother-son bond between Annamaiah and Lakkamamba and the motherly affection of Matamma (a remarkable fictitious character) towards Annamaiah depict the noble human relations and bonds. Also the scene in which Alamelu Manga, the mother of the universe and ever generous, feeds the prasadam to the hungry and completely exhausted Annamaiah is heart-moving and sure to cherish our mothers of the society. The affection of Kaliyuga Prathyaksha Daiva and Saviour of all, Sri Venkateswara towards Annamacharya is portrayed with remarkable literary talent by the author.

This is a historical novel of the singing saint judiciously coupled with innovative ideas and fiction. It needs substantial ability to excel and Sri Raju has done his best to keep the tempo and interest up to the end of the novel. This novel depicts not merely a profile but brings forth the greater, nobler and reformative ideas of Annamacharya.

Another noteworthy aspect of this novel is the description of nature. The pilgrimage of young Annamaiah to the Seven Hills and the scenes and situations are so vivid and perfectly narrated that the readers are taken for a yatra on foot at least in their dreams. The readers are sure to have a virtual experience of a memorable journey to the Heavenly Abode through woods.

Annamacharya hails from Tallapaka and the writer showed more anxiety to bring eternity to this village through this novel along with its illustrious son Annamacharya. Sri Raju’s eagerness is understandable and justified also as he too hails from the same village.

I also sincerely believe that the writer has fully utilized the description of Tallapaka Chinna Tirumalaiah’s ‘Annamacharya Charitamu’ wherein the greatness and prosperity of Tallapaka of the day were described.
There are many such descriptions and situations and it is now for the readers who are eager to read ‘The Singing Saint’ and are sure to read it again and again and cherish the literary exploitations of the author in their hearts and keep it as a good literary possession in their personal library.

I sincerely wish Sri RLN Raju to bring out many such good works to glorify the rich cultural and literary heritage of Telugu and wish him to achieve laurels in future.

- Dr. Medasani Mohan.
A note by the author.

Who am I and what prompted me to write this novel? My conscience pestered me with such questions. An ordinary man like me, daring to recount the life and works of a literary giant of medieval Andhra! The only reason and strength to pen a book on such a monumental personality which I really feel proud and highly privileged to humbly announce that I am also born and brought up and still associated with the same village that had given birth to Annamacharya, certainly one of the greatest social reformers and initiators of movement towards social enlightenment and a genius in Telugu Literature. He was a poet, composer, singer and not only a selfless devotee but also a profound advocate of universal brotherhood and equality.

In Telugu Literature there are many great poets, who have enthralled the readers with their unbelievable poetic talents, and there were many who were immersed themselves in pure and unflinching bhakti, composed, sang and danced in ecstasy and there were many who sacrificed their lives and fought for the poor and downtrodden, and also there were many who defied eccentricities of some rulers and stood firmly, never surrendered their will nor submitted meekly, and never bothered to care for the consequences. Annamacharya was the only one who embodied all these rare and sublime qualities.

Though by birth Annamacharya hailed from a family of scholars, and himself being a scholar of high repute, he never showed any inclination to write to please the nobility nor to get the mundane rewards but sang to glorify his lord and also to enlighten the society. He purposefully chose the ‘padakavitha’ (The prose verse) the genre despised by the then literary circles with utmost low opinion.

When Annamacharya was singing, thousands might have sung with him. Though the Tirumala shrine was highly reverential and the lord of the seven hills was the household name, in my opinion, Annamacharya’s
contribution in making the shrine more sacred through his sankeerthanas is remarkable. He sang and made the devotees to sing with him. He danced in ecstasy and made all others to dance with him and he participated in all the temple rituals from dawn to dusk and surely was an incorporator of many revolutionary changes in the affairs of the temple, at which many eyebrows might have been raised in those days. He was humble and attributed everything to his god. See his philosophy through one of his sankeerthanas,

Puttu Bhogulamu memu- Bhuvi Hari daasulamu  
Nattanadimi doralu naakeeyavalena?

He might have been surely offered riches by many but he refused, some times politely and some times in total disobedience. In fact, he faced the severe consequences also. But no power on the earth could turn his mind away from his lord and his belief. He humbly says,

Naa naalikai pooni Naana keerthanalu  
Naache rachiempa chesitivi

Dachuko neepadalaku taga nechesina pujalivi  
Puchi neekeerithi puspamulu evi Ayya

Okka sankeerthane chalu Oddikai mamu rakshimpaga  
Takkinavi bhandarana dachivunchani.

I chose to highlight the humble traits of his personality as so much has already been thrown to light on his literary genius by great scholars like Veturi Prabhakara Sastry, Rallapalli Ananthakrishna Sarma, Gouripeddi Ramasubba Sarma and so many stalwarts in Telugu Literature.

"The Singing Saint" is based on 'Annamacharya Charitramu' (History of Annamacharya) a book written by China Thirumalacharya, the grand son of Annamacharya, in which many details of birth and deeds of his illustrious grand father were brought to light to the people. Except for a
few characters like Annamacharya himself, his parents Narayanasuri and Lakkamamba, the royal benefactor Saluva Narasimharaya, Ghana Vishnu, Ahobila Swamy and Members of Annamacharya’s family who include his wives Timmakka and Akkalamma and his children referred by their real names, the remaining characters and situations are of my pure imagination. I leave it to the readers to judge my creation of characters like Mani, Hari and Hari Sastry etc. and the situations like the tempest scene where Annamacharya provides food for the needy, and throwing open the gates of the temple to the social outcastes, and of course the scene of sati. My imagination is not totally baseless as his sankeerthanas reveal the fact that he contemplated on doing these remarkable and daring acts of social reformations of the day.

Annamacharya’s songs need no propagation in literary and music circles, yet there is a need to highlight his great personality, as his life is double-edged sword. Composing sankeerthanas was one side, which everybody knows. However, the other side, which was not lesser than his sankeerthanas, was his life and personality. I humbly intend to highlight his remarkable saintly life and personality among not only Telugu speaking people but also outside Andhra Pradesh by depicting it in English, with this noble idea, I have meditated upon writing this novel.

Having finished the book, I submitted it to the TTD authorities for publication, as my desire was to bring it out under the auspices of the TTD, which is doing yeoman service to propagate Annamacharya sankeerthanas, as a fitting tribute to the greatest singing poet in Telugu Literature.

* I sincerely thank Sri B. Karunakar Reddy, Chairman, Tirupathi Urban Development Authority and Member TTD Trust Board and Sri APVN Sarma IAS, Executive Officer TTD for their blessings. I also thank Sri K. Rama Pulla Reddy, PÔ, TTD and Sri C. Saila Kumar, Editor, the SaphTAGirI for their help in bringing out this book.

I owe a lot to Dr Medasani Mohan, Director, Annamacharya Project, TTD for his affection and for writing the foreword.

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I also express my gratitude to Dr Smt C. Mrunalini, Director, Dept Of Comparative Studies, Potti Sree Ramulu Telugu University, Hyderabad, who is also my research supervisor and Dr G. Prabhakara Rao, Principal Annamacharya Institute of Technology and Sciences, Rajampet for their blessings.

I also take this opportunity to thank Dr C. Ramachandra Reddy, Chairman, Sri SV. Radhakrishna Reddy, Vice Chairman, Sri C. Gangi Reddy, Hon. Secretary and Sri C. Yella Reddy, Treasurer and other members of Annamacharya Educational Trust, Rajampet, for their help and encouragement.

I thank Sri CP Govindu Raju and also Sri CPS Bhupala Varma, the Managing Director, Varma Industries, Tirupathi for their cooperation and my friend Sri V.J Satya Raj, Kadapa for his constant help and my well wisher and printer Sri P.Dwarakanatha Reddy of Adisri Screens Tirupathi for his painstaking work.

R.L.N. Raju
To

Indira
Ajayendra & Priyanka.
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GLOSSARY

PHOTOS OF TALLAPAKA.
BOOK - ONE

The Singing Saint
THE DREAM

It was a beautiful winter evening. As the Sun was slowly making his way behind the western clouds over a small hill, the twilight seemed bright and illuminating Siddulaiah Gutta, as the hill was popularly called was on the western side of the small village Tallapaka. In a few minutes the Sun slowly disappeared behind the hill. The mighty shadow of the hill fell first on the calm and deep waters of the lake and then spread on to the temple and crept on to the houses of the village. The small lake looked deep with full of water. The waves of the lake made a hissing sound and touched the outer wall on the western side of the temple.

The ancient Chennakesava temple stood in the middle of the village. The villagers worshipped the temple deity, Chennakesava with reverence. It was believed that the temple was built by Janamejaya, an illustrious descendant of the Pandavas. It was small but artistic, with mighty walls around the garba gudi. Inside those mighty walls a variety of flower plants with beautiful flowers make the temple colourful and captivating. Most of the inhabitants of the village were Vishnavaites and the temple was the centre for all the religious and social activities including marriage ceremonies. It was almost dark. The temple priests had finished the distribution of the evening prasadam. The children of the village thronged the temple when they heard the temple bells. It was the signal for them for the distribution of prasadam. The village elders too liked to have a small portion of it. Delicious food items like pulihora, chakkara pongali, payasam and daddodhanam would be prepared and kept as nivedyam before the Deity and distributed in the morning and evening after the prayers.

There were very big neem trees before the entrance of the temple along with Sudarshana chakram or the Vishnu chakram, as it was commonly known. If people wanted to enter Chennakesava temple, they had to pass before this sacred stone idol carved on a slab stone carving.

The Vishnu Chackram was believed to be older than the Chennakesava temple. Before this small structure there was an open space with steps to climb from the eastern side. This open space was used as dais for all the religious and cultural activities in the village.
After eating the Prasadam, the people took their seats comfortably under the neem trees very close to the dais. They were waiting eagerly for the daily religious discourse. Within a few minutes there was a very big assembly of people. As four torches were lit, the dais of the Vishnuchakram was blazing. Whenever the light of the torches became dimmer, they poured oil on the tightly wound cloth at one end of the torches. People were waiting for Hari Sastry to arrive there.

People were free from all work during that season. With the culmination of Sankranti, the very important festival, all the agricultural work was almost completed. That year it was a bumper harvest. The barns were full in all the houses. The monsoon was vigorous and all the wells and ponds were still looking full with water. The festival season was full of merry and enjoyment. The houses were still colourful. The new sons-in-law in the houses were still the guests of the village and they wanted to spend some more days in this village. Tallapaka, seemed to be the centre of attraction for all the people in the surrounding villages.

The village of Tallapaka was itself was situated amid picturesque surroundings and natural beauty. It was bordered, on the eastern side by paddy fields and also a lake nearly a mile from the village. The banks of this lake, with mango, coconut and other gigantic trees, made the spot a happy exploring destination for the children. On the west there was a majestic hill. A river, nearly two miles from the village flowed on the northern side making the lands fertile and always green. Three ponds on the southern side of the village provided water for the adjoining lands. People coming from other places had to cross these three ponds on a bund. On one side of the bund, the glowing waters of the ponds with full of lotus flowers and on the other side vast area of green fields made the journey on this bund, really enchanting.

The village was famous for the three Chennakesava, Siva and Vishnu temples and for the religious festivities throughout the year. Also the enthusiasm of the people for arranging literary activities was well known among the many villages around Tallapaka. Whenever people from other places came to this village, they wished to remain here forever. The waters in the wells of the village were sweet and refreshing and made the villagers
strong and healthy. Many believe that the village of Tallapaka was founded with noble purpose and bound to remain in human history forever.

A Siva temple, towards the north of the village was bigger and more spacious compared to the other two temples. A Nandi, artistically carved out of a single black stone was the special attraction of the temple. The mighty and broad stonewalls around the temple were useful for the children to sit and play. Many big trees outside these walls provided cool shade and throughout the day and small children play around these walls. Except during nights, these mighty walls were always occupied by the people. The walls were of eight feet high and nearly five feet wide and anyone can sit on these walls comfortably. After day’s tiresome work men clean themselves and leave the muddy clothes and assemble there on these temple walls to talk about many things ranging from personal problems the villagers to village festivals.

The daily religious discourse was started by Hari Sastry. The saintly man was returning from Tirumala and was on his way to some of the places of worship on the northern part of the country. He spent nearly ten days on the Tirumala hills. He had arrived to Tallapaka almost a fortnight back to worship Chennakesava, Siddeswara and Vishnu in the temples of Tallapaka. He heard a lot about the temples and the people of the village. And truly, he was quite impressed by the behaviour of the villagers. They persuaded him to stay in their village for some more days and tell about the holy shrine of Tirumala and also stories from the holy books. He was a well-read person and had visited almost all the temples on the southern part of the country. In Tallapaka, he was put up in a small mutt and during the day, villagers visited him to discuss many religious matters. After the daily prayers, at the Chennakesava temple, he sat on the dais and spoke on the Vedas, Puranas and the Bhagvad Geetha and also vividly portrayed the importance of many shrines he had seen.

Hari Sastry was nearly seventy years old. Locks of thick black and white hair covered his forehead. A few patches of silvery grey hair made his appearance more respectable. With saffron cloth covered around his stiff body, rudrakshamalas around his neck and wrists and vibhutinamas on his forehead, he looked like a sage. With an ever-smiling face and wide
and big eyes and a sharp nose, there was a definite glow on his face, which could spellbind thousands of people at any time. His voice was authoritative, clear and sharp and can speak fluently for hours with ease and comfort. As days progressed, more and more people from nearby villages also thronged Tallapaka and listened to these lively discourses with rapt attention. Not only elderly people but young men and women with small children in their arms were also attending in the evenings daily.

On that day people were eagerly waiting for his magical words. As usual, Hari Sastry began with a beautiful Sanskrit sloka, with his mesmerising voice, about the greatness of Tirumala and the Lord of the Seven Hills, Sri Venkateswara,

"Venkatadri samam sthanam
Bramhande nasti kinchana
Venkatesa samo devo
Nabhuto nabhavishyati"

He also described the meaning thus,

"There is no place on this earth as holy as Venkatadri
And there is no God equal to Lord Venkateswara
In the past, present and in the future also"

He then went on describing vividly the enchanting tales of Tirumala and Lord Venkateswara vividly and the listeners were totally immersed in these wonderful tales. Most of the people in the crowd only heard the stories about Tirumala but never had the opportunity to visit. For them, visiting Tirumala was a dream of the lifetime. Whenever they happened to meet a person returning from Tirumala they eagerly listen to the wonderful stories from him.

Among the crowd, Narayanasuri and Lakkamamba, a middle aged brahmin couple, presented themselves daily to listen to these discourses along with their only son Annamaiah who had developed a fascination for the Lord of the sevenhills from his childhood. On that day, as all the listeners, Annamaiah too was totally spellbound. He not only listened with rapt attention, but visualised the descriptions narrated by Hari Sastry and was able to see with his mind's eye and preserved the entire descriptions in his mind.
Though, Hari sastry mainly focussed his attention on describing the importance of the shrines he had visited, he also cleverly mingled in his presentations, tales from the Bhagavatam, Bharatam and other Puranas and explained the essence of the Bhagwad Geeta. His listeners were moved when they listened to the stories of Prahlada, Bali, Shravana and Muchikunda. He was an authority on the Bhagavad Geeta and went on for hours. He explained every sloka as if the entire epic was preserved fully in his mind. He even never took the help of either any book or notes as most of the preachers put the relevant texts before them while giving commentary. Such was his authority and understanding of the Holy Scriptures. Most of the times, he liked to give his own views on the life and the way it should be led. For him, human beings could be happy if they lead a contented life and submit themselves before the will of the God.

While presenting his own views, he said,

"Nothing in this universe is, as celestial as the name of God, as delicious as His prasadam, as beautiful as His smile, as generous as His looks and as precious as His blessing. That is the greatness of Him and once a person submits himself, he will be a highly enlightened person."

Hari Sastry went on.

"Accordingly a person should try to lead a very simple and contended life. A person, who submits his life whole-heartedly and praises God's ways and deeds, is a saint. Such life will, ultimately lead to unlimited happiness," he concluded.

Hari Sastry's stay at Tallapaka was coming an end. On the last day he took more time to finish. But that was really an enchanting day for the people of Tallapaka. After he finished the day's discourse, Hari Sastry thanked the villagers for their keen interest in conducting such social gatherings. He was honoured as per the tradition of the village by offering a shawl and a few fruits. He politely accepted these as they were presented to him with reverence and admiration. The villagers requested him to visit Tallapaka whenever possible. Hari Sastry too replied in a philosophical manner. "Oh, certainly if God is willing. Presently I am on my way for the pilgrimage of north to see Kashi to have a holy dip in the Ganga and also wished to visit the Himalayas. If I return, certainly I will come to your
village. There is some magical power here. For sure, this place too will be as holy and as famous as Tirumala.” Thus saying he took leave of the villagers. Of all the programmes arranged so far in the village, this was one of the most highly attended. The villagers were a little bit disappointed that the programme had come to an end so early. In the beginning they thought that it was only a religious discourse rousing interest in elderly people. But as the days progressed, Hari Sastry’s eloquence and lively presentations attracted people of all ages and every evening Vishnu Chakram had become a centre of activity. The houses of the villagers were full of relatives who came from far of villages and stayed for the religious gatherings conducted by Hari Sastry. He became the most revered person and after the completion of the discourse, many people fell at his feet to seek his blessings. During the daytime, they visit his place of stay and revealed many of their woes and get solace from him. He took only Spartan food consisting of a few fruits and milk. When people offered him sweets and other items, he accepted them with a smile and fondly distributed them to the children.

Hari sastry’s entry into the village brought a new turn to Narayanasuri’s household in that season. One day Hari Sastry saw Annamaiah while playing with other boys, called him to his presence and examined him as Annamaiah’s face was bright and calm. Hari Sastry was also a good face reader and foresaw a great future for the boy. He also revealed the matter to Narayanasuri also. Narayanasuri was not at all surprised at the great man’s presumption. He did not pay much importance to this, as he already knew that his son was destined to become great one day as per the wish of the God. But as a father, Narayanasuri, felt very happy to listen some thing encouraging about his son. Lakkamamba, Narayanasuri’s wife was a lady really believed in her son’s great future. On the previous day Narayanasuri invited Hari sastry to his house. The powerful discourser, after only spending some time in the house, knew about the literary enthusiasm of the household and also realised that Narayanasuri was a great scholar. Before leaving the house he told Narayanasuri and his wife,

“For me, it seems your clan and your family would certainly be achieving great name and fame, but it is not so easy. We should try to
develop our attachment with the God and that is permanent and all our human bonds are temporary. We may have to face certain trials and tribulations. But it is all in the life.” The great man concluded. What could be the meaning of these words? The humble couple did not understand the hidden meaning of these words. They thought that he turned more philosophical.

After the concluding day’s programme, all the people had left for their houses. Annamaiah too followed his parents silently. While going the villagers were admiring the knowledge and simple presentation of Hari Sastry. The minds of all the people were filled with the beauty and holiness of Tirumala. Narayanasuri’s house was very near to the Chennakesava temple. So in a few minutes they reached their house and after finishing their supper, went for sleep. Annamaiah’s mind was full of thoughts on Tirumala. The words and the descriptions made a huge impact on his young mind. So with mind full of thoughts on Tirumala, he slept. That night Annamaiah had a wonderful dream.

THE BIRTH

Narayanasuri was a niyogi Brahmin and hailed from a renowned family of vaishnavites. His ancestors were learned men and great devotees. Lakkamamba was also a devotee of Vishnu. They lived happily with their simple livelihood. As most all of the villagers depend on agriculture, Narayanasuri also, though a scholar, continued to earn his livelihood on farming. They lived in a small ancestral house near the Chennakesava temple.

As the legend reveals, Narayanaiah, the father of Narayanasuri was not a scholar by birth. There was a wonderful story about Narayanasuri becoming a scholar. He could not grasp a single word from his teachers and was branded as dull during his childhood. His parents tried their best, but all their attempts were futile. The teachers, after all their efforts proved to be ineffective, turned to violent methods, the ultimate punishments for dull and inactive pupils. He was beaten up severely and subjected too much corporeal punishment. But even these threatening tactics bore no fruits. At last for a change, he was sent to Utukur, a village five miles south of tallapaka, his maternal grand father’s dwelling place. Even there, under his grand
father, he could not learn anything. He was termed as hopeless and totally a dull head. This was a great shame for the boy as he was subjected to all sorts of humiliations repeatedly.

The ten years old Narayanaiah could not face this indignation anymore and wanted to end his life. He had heard that there was a deadly cobra in a mound near the Chintalamma temple in Utukur. One day he went there and thought for a moment, closed his eyes and put his palm into that big snake hill. He waited for a few minutes but he did not feel any bite. But to his great surprise the Goddess appeared before him and consoled him and said, "Boy, Go to Thallapaka and by the grace of God Chennakesava, you will learn everything to become a highly learned man. Also let me make this prophecy. In your third generation, a great devotee will be born and your family and the village also will be glorified." Thus saying the Goddess disappeared. Accordingly Narayanaiah went to Thallapaka and with renewed confidence he worshipped the God Chennakesava. Soon he began to learn all the lessons and went on to become a renowned scholar.

Narayanasuri inherited his Narayanaiah’s scholarship and was highly respected in the village. He married Lakkamamba, a woman from a highly religious and cultured family from Madupur. She worshipped God Madhava of her village. The couple began their life happily.

But alas, they were not blessed with a child. This made them depressed mentally and physically. One day while Lakkamamba was looking sad, Her husband called his wife, consoled her and in a soft voice said, "Lakkamamba, don’t be depressed so much. There is the Almighty to look after us. A day will come. Our prayers will be rewarded. So be cheerful never lose hope." Lakkamamba was also a woman of high devotion and bestowed faith in God. But she was a woman. Women, in particular, knew the condition of being childless and have to face indignations more than men. So she was more depressed than her husband.

When Narayanasuri wanted to console his wife, she started crying, and said,

"My master, I don’t know what sins I have committed to be childless like this. Whenever I see children, my heart beats for them. Can I ever lift a child in my arms?" Narayanasuri understood the situation and left silently.
Many relatives even suggested Narayanasuri to marry another lady for children, but he never paid any attention to such ideas.

One day just after the morning prayers Narayanasuri returned to his house from Chennakesava temple. He was about to sit for his breakfast. He asked his wife to serve early lunch to him. He heard a voice from outside and that was so familiar that he immediately rushed to the door. A relative of their family and close friend Ranganatha and his wife were talking to his wife. When Ranganatha saw his friend, he came forward and embraced him. Ranganatha was almost of the same age of Narayanasuri. A month back he had gone on a pilgrimage to Tirumala. They were also childless couple and they had been continuously visiting all the places of worship. Now they returned from Tirumala. The friends started chatting.

“Ranganatha. How was the trip? Narayanasuri began the conversation.

“Oh; quite memorable”

“Where did you put up yourselves for all these days?

“Actually most of the time we were travelling. We stayed on the hills only for three days. It was really unforgettable”

“Are there facilities for devotees?

“It is really the Heaven on earth there. Earlier we heard a lot about the seven hills. We had the darshan of the God daily. How can I describe the holiness? Thousands of devotees chant the name of Govinda in their ecstasy. The prasadam of the Lord is distributed to all the pilgrims. We made our offerings and returned.” So saying Ranganatha handed over a small portion of the prasadam to his friend and suggested Narayanasuri to make a trip to Tirumala with Lakkamamba.

“Oh, We are highly pleased dear friend. You are so kind to us”. He then turned to his wife and said. “Lakkamamba, Ranganatha brought Tirumala prasadam. Keep it in the Puja griham. Tomorrow is Dasami. After morning prayers we shall take the prasadam” Lakkamamba took it with utmost care and entered the house.

Ranganatha and Narayanasuri were immersed in a deep conversation. They discussed mostly about their personal problems. Their conversation went on like this,
“My wife is really so much disturbed these days Ranganatha. You have
given us a very good suggestion. We are now thinking seriously, about
visiting Tirumala. “
Ranganatha bent his head very close to Narayanasuri and whispered.

“More over I want to say one thing too. Since our marriages, we
have not gone on any vacation. A trip to such places makes our minds fresh
and happy. This is a wonderful season. Right from our place, we have
passed through beautiful surroundings. Everywhere there was greenery
and full of water. Spending along with wife amid such surroundings freely
will definitely be fruitful. “ Ranganatha told in very close friendly manner
and they enjoyed close intimacy and Ranganatha was in high spirits. Then
Ranganatha told many things about his trip to Tirumala and also suggested
his friend to make trip at the earliest so that his ambition will be fulfilled. The
last words of Ranganatha made a deep impression on Narayanasuri. On
that moment he made up his mind. Once Narayanasuri decides to do anything,
nothing can stop him.

Actually, Narayanasuri also had the desire to go on a pilgrimage to
Tirumala from so many years. But it was not possible. He believed in the
destiny and reconciled to himself. He strongly believed that it was our fate
that decides everything and time should come for the fulfilment of any
activity.

The next morning the couple performed puja with utmost devotion.
Then they tasted the prasadam. They believed firmly that Sri Venkateswara
would bless them with a son. Narayanasuri and his wife prostrated before
the small idol and vowed to go to Tirumala and fixed the next Monday to
start their journey.

The couple started their journey before the start of summer. It was
really pleasant journey. Their eagerness to reach the abode of Sri
Venkateswara, and their single-minded devotion made it quite enjoyable.
For nearly five days, they were alone and were very intimate. Normally it
was very difficult for a couple to be very close in the houses which did not
have separate rooms and also all the houses were full of people in joint
family system. So all these years, their conjugal life was not so exciting.
Lakkamamba brought sweets of two or three kinds and other tasty things for the journey. Generally, when people go on pilgrimages, they carry such eatables. The couple ate them heartily and during nights they slept in totally secluded places. They were totally free from all mundane thoughts and fully tasted the bliss of conjugal life. They moved like newly-wed couple. When they were crossing forests, they found many kinds of fruits and Narayanasuri plucked those fruits and affectionately gave them to his wife. Soon they crossed the Sevenhills and entered the dwelling place of Sreenivasa by the evening of Friday. On reaching the sacred place, they felt as if they were relieved of all their mundane problems. After finishing their quite supper, they rested under a tree nearer to the temple.

They got up very early the next morning and had a holy dip in the pushkarini and entered the temple. On that day there were hundreds of devotees, waiting patiently for a glimpse of Sreenivasa. By the afternoon they were before the Lord of the Hills. It was a grand spectacle never seen before, with all floral decorations and golden ornaments; the idol of the Lord was like a lightning among dark clouds. They were blessed with the darshan for a few seconds only. Both of them closed their eyes in reverence before the idol and prayed for a child. They heard the sound of a big bell and they thought that their wish would be fulfilled soon. Lakkamamba’s heart was filled with divine thoughts at that moment. Strangely she felt a thrilling sensation within herself. They left the sanctum with refreshing memories.

Before leaving the garbhagudi, when they came near the holy Mast, as people called it Dwajastambham, they prostrated before it. What happened next was one of the greatest and unforgettable experiences in their lives. While they closed their eyes, they had a vision in which they saw the sword of the God being presented to them in a dazzling brilliance. It was surprising that both of them had the same experience. Narayanasuri first opened his eyes and narrated this, to his great ecstasy, his wife also told the same. They believed that it was an auspicious sign and thought that they would be blessed with a son by Sri Venkateswara, under the influence of Nandaka, the sword of the Lord. Delighted with this wonderful turn of the events, they returned to Tallapaka.
After this trip there was a change in their household. No longer they were a depressed couple and now their minds were brimming with hope. Well, it is hope that cures all woes of people. They worshipped Chennakesava and, in particular, Narayanasuri spent most of his time in the temple. Lakkamamba, on every Saturday, prepared sweet pongali as nivedyam to the deity and distributed to the children. Whenever she saw children eating the sweets, her heart melted with motherly affection.

Their prayers were answered and beliefs turned out to be a reality soon. Lakkamamba delivered a boy when the position of the stars was high and favourable. There was joy in the entire household of Tallapaka. The joy of Narayanasuri knew no bounds. It was a celebration and festive occasion for him, not only for the birth of a son but he firmly believed that his son would be a scholar and bring name for him as told by his grand father. He consulted many scholars and all of them were of the opinion that the boy was born under high auspicious moments. The boy was named Annamaiah.

As a child, Annamaiah behaved in the way as was expected of him. He took the food when they said it was the prasadam of Sri Venkateswara. When Lakkamamba sang a song on the Lord of the Seven Hills, he would sleep. Venkanna was the first word he uttered when he started talking. It was really great pleasure for his parents as he uttered more and more words as he was growing. Annamaiah pronounced every word correctly and his voice was sweet and musical. He looked attractive and active. As a growing child he never bothered about food and other eatables and ate only when his mother served it to him. Never, he asked for anything from his parents and made his parents rebuke him. He looked so happy whenever he was taken to the Chennakesava temple and asked for the prasadam. As a child, he took delight in hearing the temple bells and walking around on the temple premises.

Annamaiah was never a mischievous boy and a prankster in his childhood. He never bothered his mother over silly things. Most of the time he was in his mother’s lap and mostly talked to her only. He listened to the stories from his mother attentively and repeated them whenever asked for. Narayanasuri sometimes wondered at his son’s extraordinary memory power. Annamaiah learnt the poems considered difficult even for the older people and recited with meanings clearly.
The Singing Saint

Narayanasuri celebrated Annamaiah's upanayanam after the completion of five years. As the years progressed, Annamaiah started singing in his own style. Under the influence of his father, he spent most of his time in the village temples. The elders of the village strongly believed that he was really a blessed child of Sri Venkateswara. He respected the elders and mixed freely with all the children. He liked the sound of temple bells and watched the devotees passing before his house. He never missed the opportunity to take the prasadam of Chennakesava temple.

Parents are the first teachers for the children and Annamaiah was no exception. He was considered very bright and extremely sensitive. As years progressed, his literary and musical talents also developed. As the only child, he was looked after well, particularly by his mother. He developed a special reverence for Sri Venkateswara and extreme fondness for all aspects of raga, tala, melody and rhythm. He grasped music from nature and played on the flute melodiously. On festivals and other occasions people gathered in the temples to sing devotional songs and bhajans. Annamaiah took part in all such gatherings and observed the rhythm. As a child he danced to the beating of drums.

Narayanasuri himself taught the basic lessons of music to his son. Annamaiah grasped all the lessons very fast and started singing many songs, composed by his father. He never missed any opportunity to attend mythological plays and discourses. One such religious discourse he attended with his parents during the fine winter, in which Tirumala was vividly described and the holiness and beauty was glorified wonderfully, poised to be a great turning point in his life.
HAUNTING MEMORIES

It was really a wonderful dream. In that dream Anmaiah was slowly walking in a beautiful place amidst trees, lakes and temples. He heard melodious tunes far from the hills. Thousands of people were chanting "Edukondalavada", "Venkateswara" "Apadamokkulavala" "Anadarakshaka" and moving silently. He was singing a melodious song in which he was praising the Lord in a temple bedecked with gold. The fragrance emitting from the temple was sweet and refreshing.

Anmaiah woke up and was utterly disappointed as he was lying in his own bed in his house. When he saw around, his mother was sleeping. He felt thirsty but did not want to disturb her. He slowly entered the other room and took a glass of water. It was midnight. He could not get sleep and his mind was full of thoughts.

The words of Hari Sastry were haunting in his mind. "How lucky" he thought, "the people who had seen such a wonderful temple". "Can I go there? Where is the golden temple that I had seen in my dream? What are those sweet melodies?" He again fondly recollected the words of Hari Sastry while explaining the bhakti of Prahlada in the Bhagavatam. In the discourse he had said,

"Sravanam keerthanam Vishno,
Smaranam Padasevanam,
Archanam Vandanan Dasyasm,
Sakhya Atmanivedanam"

"There are nine ways to worship The God. Among these nine. singing beautiful songs in praise of the God is the way to get supreme pleasure. Great sages like Narada, Tumbura and others followed this method and attained salvation and acquired supreme stature as his devotees.

Anmaiah was in his sixteenth year. He learnt the essence of all the Puranas, Vedas and religious scriptures and had excellent music knowledge of music. Apart from learning the Holy Scriptures, he had a practical knowledge about all the things around him. He had a wonderful memory power and watched everything precisely and evaluated perfectly.

Anmaiah enjoyed all the pleasures of childhood. He mingled with other boys and played all kinds of games with them. Swimming, in
The Singing Saint

particular, was his favourite sport. Along with the boys of his age he swam in almost all the wells and lakes in and around Tallapaka. Summer was the most enjoyable of all the seasons. They went to the lake, east of the village in the morning and returned for the late lunch. On the banks of this lake the lands were fertile and full of groves and crops. Sugarcane, in particular, was grown in plenty there. For about three or four hours they spend time in the water playing “hide and seek” and when they were tired and felt hungry, they wander in the groves and eat whatever they liked. Being a Brahmin boy, and also the son of Narayanasuri, a scholar, Annamaiah had a free access to any of those groves. As the garden keepers never objected Annamaiah, the other boys also enjoyed the same privilege. So, all of them liked the company of Annamaiah.

There was a place, just before the graveyard, with full of gigantic banyan trees. The shadow of these was cool and dark all the time. The place was fearful and children, enter there only in groups. Parents warn their children not to play there, as they believed it was a haunting place for evil spirits. The area was called “Marri chettlu” which literally means banyan trees. Children gather in large number and play different games. They play with a kind of hard nuts called “gaccha kayalu”. Annamaiah would play with boys for some time and sat under the cool shade of the banyan tree brooding over celestial matters.

In the evenings, the boys gathered on the lofty walls of Siddeswara temple. Young people sit inside the temple for chitchatting and gossiping. Towards the South Eastern side of this temple, in the Raccha, as they call the structure, the village elders sit and discuss certain matters of importance.

Occasionally Annamaiah went to gather sweet and sour berries on the hill to the west of the Siddulaiah gutta along with his friends. They have to cross the pond with full of water to reach the place. They plucked lotus flowers blossomed in plenty in the waters of the ponds. Annamaiah’s daring acts, sometimes caused anxious moments to his mother. Whenever Annamaiah was out of the house, Lakkamamba would wait eagerly for him. Even at the age of sixteen, his mother with her own hands always fed Annamaiah. Narayanasuri sometimes would remark sarcastically,
“Lakkamamba, how long will you feed your son with your hands, till the marriage of your boy? Will not your daughter-in-law laugh at this? You are making him lazy”

“My master, I feel it quite happy to feed my son Why not, I will continue, I may even feed both of them.” Lakkamamba retarded with a hearty laugh.

“What if Annamaiah is away from you?

“Oh for God’s sake Don’t say such words” Lakkamamba closed her ears.” I can’t bear such a situation even for one day”

“No body can say what is going to happen in future,” Narayanasuri told philosophically with an expressionless face.

But how long this routine and pleasant life of Annamaiah would continue? Nobody knows. How long Lakkamamba and Narayanasuri would have the joyful association of Annamaiah? The twists and turns of life make it sometimes unpleasant and sometimes memorable. But the ways of God are always justifiable and noble.

Thus, Annamaiah had a disturbed sleep and he brooded, “What is this life? What for we live? To eat in time and to play with mates all the time? The life of human beings is noble and very short. It should not be wasted with all these mundane affairs. Time is passing. Each hour is so precious and will never be regained. So the available time must be utilised fully not for earthly things, but for celestial and matters which remain eternal.”

The heavenly beauty of Tirumala hill and the glory of Lord Venkateswara, perceptible to his mind’s eye was alluring and becoming irresistible. For him the place seemed a Heaven and he must be there as early as possible. Annamaiah, with all these strange thoughts in mind slept almost at the dawn.

There was a change, which was clearly visible in the behaviour and habits of Annamaiah from the next day. He almost confined himself to his room and appeared to be pensive. Though many of his friends tried to locate him, he was not interested in meeting them. He would simply nod his head whenever his mother asked him to come over for food and took it merely as a ritual.
A week passed in this way. One morning, Lakkamamba came to him and to her utter dismay; Annamaiah was lying in his bed. She hurriedly leaned over him and found that he was running high temperature. Immediately she rushed to her husband, who was in the courtyard. He observed her anxiety and tried to know the matter.

"Lakkamamba, why are you in such a hurry, what is the matter?

"Ayya, The boy is not well. See him and call for Achari"

"Is it so? Let me see him first" Narayanasuri went inside the room and found that Annamaiah was not in his senses. Immediately he came out and asked one of his cousins to go and put a word to Achari.

Achari resided on the opposite lane of his house and regarded as a physician in the village. People had good faith in him. He was called to attend all kinds of physical ailments of the villagers. He was also of the same age of Narayanasuri and they were good friends.

Achari came and examined the boy. "Nothing to worry. It is normal fever. Let him take rest for two days. I will come again tomorrow and see him." He handed over a few pills and told his friend that Annamaiah would be normal in two days. Then they discussed certain religious matters, particularly the celebration of certain rituals in the village for the coming festival.

Even after three days the condition of the boy remained the same. Lakkamamba was worried much. Achari too could not understand the condition. After all a doctor can cure physical ailments. Annamaiah's case was totally different. It cannot be cured by medicines. When will Annamaiah's condition improve? Only time can answer.

Lakkamamba remained with the boy all the time. After a few days Annamaiah's physical condition improved slightly. He was able to eat normally and was moving. But he was weak and inactive. He liked to remain alone all the time and was always pensive. "What happened to the boy? Lakkamamba always was filled with this single thought. She was unhappy and puzzled with her son's condition.

There was a big well near Vishnu chakram and opposite to the Chennakesava temple. Ladies of all the Brahmin families assembled there for water in the morning and in the afternoon. They carry water with mud and brass pots. When they meet here, the women normally discussed
matters of their families. Observing Lakkamamba not well, an elderly woman asked her the reason of her worry. After knowing from Lakkamamba that Annamaiah was not well, the elderly lady said “Ammma why don’t you call Gangaiah this evening? The boy might have been affected by evil spirits. Let Gangaiah come and put a bit of ash on the boy’s forehead. Let us see what happens. My grandson was also ill and after a long treatment of Achari proved to be ineffective, we called Gangaiah. After three evenings he is fine now.”

Lakkamamba knew about Gangaiah. Gangaiah was considered to be famous in the craft of driving away evil spirits, not only in Tallapaka, but also in all the nearby villages. Lakkamamba too perceived that her son might have been affected by some evil elements, she decided to get treatment by Gangaiah. But she did not reveal this to her husband, as he may not like the idea. So she herself took the initiative and sent a word for Gangaiah.

Gangaiah lived on the Patigadda towards the north of the village. A big man with large moustache, dark complexioned with long and black curly hair and with a big pot like belly, he appeared ferocious and children feared when he was seen. He was nearly sixty years of age but looked healthy and active. Though he looked to be harsh, he was really mild and liked children so dearly and distributes sweets and fruits to children whenever they were seen near his garden.

That evening Gangaiah reached Narayanasuri’s house. When he saw Narayanasuri at the door he greeted him with all respect. Narayanasuri too reciprocated in a courteous manner and enquired about his children. Gangaiah said,

“Ayya, amma had sent a word to me that your son is not well. I was on my way to the town to see my elder daughter. After a long time my daughter is blessed with a daughter. I have postponed my journey and come here to see Annamaiah”.

“Oh, Gangaiah, so nice to hear. I know you are so affectionate for Annamaiah. Of late he is not well. Go and see him. Let your magic work on my son.”

Gangaiah went inside the house. He enjoyed freedom to enter any house in the village. He can talk freely with affection even with the womenfolk
in the village. He never accepted anything from the villagers for his
treatment. He worked hard in his fields and lived a contended life.

Lakkamamba was waiting eagerly for him. It was late in the evening
and time for lighting the lamps in the house. Gangaiah saw Annamaiah
lying on the bed. He affectionately lifted the boy from the bed and examined
him in his usual manner. With all his experience he perceived that the boy
was weak and disturbed mentally. It needed psychological treatment.

“Amma” he told Lakkamamba, who was waiting nearby, “Something
scared him. At odd hour he might have gone near secluded places. That
made him to fear. Nothing to worry.” The best way to cure any patient is to
create confidence in the mind first. Gangaiah knew this very well.

“Oh my brother, he has been not well for the last ten days. We
don’t know what to do with him” Lakkamamba revealed the condition of her
son.

“I am applying Vibhuti on his forehead now” So saying he firmly
 lifted the boy and did some chanting of verses. He also closed his eyes for
some time and started waving bunch of neem twigs over his face. He asked
Lakkamamba to bring some live coal and put some powder on them. The
fragrance coming from it has spread the entire room. Then he asked
Lakkamamba to leave the room and asked the boy to open his eyes and
took a lemon and put it on the boy’s forehead. Again he did some chanting
of verses and then asked Annamaiah to close his eyes. While leaving, he
again told Lakkamamba not to worry and advised her to take the boy to the
Gangamma gudi for three days. “Amma I will come tomorrow and see him.
Let me take leave now, I am in a hurry to see my daughter”. Lakkamamba
went inside and brought a new saree and few coins and said, ‘Brother, give
this to your daughter as gift from us” Gangaiah was moved very much by
this, and accepted the gift with gratitude.

The people who were believed to be possessed by evil spirits
made daily visits to Gangamma gudi, a small stone structure before the
marrimanlu, the grove of gigantic banyan trees. On certain occasions,
particularly, during the mid summer a festival is celebrated for this goddess.
Ammamaiah, accompanied by her mother, daily visited the temple in the
evenings. Gangaiah visited Narayanasuri’s house daily at the twilight and
applied ash on Annamaiah’s forehead.
There was considerable change in Annamaiah. He was almost normal and his parents, particularly Lakkamamba was happy. In spite of this, Annamaiah did not move freely with anybody and preferred loneliness. His body was present in the house but his mind was somewhere. He was eager to reach that heavenly abode. No body can predict the turns and twists of the life, but God only knows.

**OUT OF THE HOUSE**

Narayanasuri, though initially, thought that his son was physically not well, soon realized that it was not so. Then he consulted some of his relatives about the condition of his son. Some of the elders, after close observation, concluded that the boy was alone in the house, with out any work and that made him so inactive. They suggested that Annamaiah be given some work so that he could put his mind on it.

Narayanasuri saw some merit in that idea. But Annamaiah had never been assigned any work before. So Narayanasuri thought that he could not entrust any agricultural work straightaway. Even Lakkamamba may not like that idea. He should be asked to do some simple work. Narayanasuri went to his son who, was as usual, was silently looking through the window towards the Siddulaiah Gutta.

“Annamaiah” Narayanasuri deliberately put on a serious face and tried to keep his voice as firm and steady as possible, said to his son,

“Why do you always sit in the house alone? You are becoming lazy. See the boys of your age and how much work they do to help the house. Go and bring some darbha from Siddulaiah Gutta.” In what seemed a commanding voice.

Actually there was no need with darbha. It was a particular grass, which grows long and was used for certain rituals. Narayanasuri cannot ask his son to go and play with his friends but thought that Annamaiah would go to the hill along with his friends and spend time happily. He concealed his soft inner thoughts but pretended to be a bit harsh. He thought he was correct. But Annamaiah understood otherwise.

There was absolute silence for sometime. Lakkamamba was in the backyard doing the morning domestic work. She was completely unaware of the happenings in the house. Annamaiah, thought silently for a whole
and searched for something. He found a sickle in a corner. He picked it up and left the house, much to the surprise of his father. Narayanasuri never, even in his dream, imagined that his son would leave the house with a sickle. He cannot stop him at this stage, though he wanted, as he himself asked his son to do the work.

He felt that he was rather unkind and haste.

Annamaiyah, with a sickle in his hands, moved out of the house and started towards the south. First, he looked back to get a view of the Chennakesava temple, folded his hands in a raised manner. Then he saw his house just for a while and turned his face. In a few minutes he was near the Nagalamanu. This place was on the bank of the pond, very nearer to the village. Images of snakes are carved on stones and placed beneath a very big neem tree. This tree, known as Nagalamanu, was the entrance for the village from the south. People while entering and leaving the village respectfully bow and fold their hands to this tree. It was believed that this tree and the snake idols would eliminate evils.

On approaching the Nagalamanu, Annamaiah left his slippers, put the sickle down and folded his hands with eyes closed in reverence before the tree. After a while he was on the road towards the Siddulaiah Gutta. He was walking slowly. The waters of the ponds were glowing and sometimes the waves touching the banks with a flip flap sound seemed wonderful. He was walking slowly and full of thoughts.

Lakkamamba, after finishing her work, wanted to feed breakfast to her son. She took some rice, cooked the night before, in a bowl and poured buttermilk on it. She brought the bowl with her and in a raised voice twice called Annamaiah. Instead she heard the voice of her husband from within the house.

"Lakkamamba, Annamaiah is not in the house. Wait for some more time""

"Till now he was here. Where has he gone so suddenly? Lakkamamba enquired.

"I had sent him to the gutta to fetch some darbha for me"

"Ayyo." Lakkamamba was aghast. She could not understand what had happened actually. "The boy did not eat anything even last night also"
Narayanasuri patiently explained how he wanted to divert the attention of Annamaiah and wished him to move with his mates again. Lakkamamba was unhappy, as the boy had left the house with empty stomach. Immediately she rushed out of the house but there was no trace of the boy. She also felt unhappy, as her son did not even say a word to her when leaving. So with the bowl in hands she returned to the house, dejected.

Soon Annamaiah crossed the Mukkata. He almost approached the foot of Siddulaiahgutta. It was full of trees and shrubs. Annamaiah did not show any interest for the different kinds of fruits and berries available around him and was only searching for the darbha. When he found it in plenty, he stopped there. He wanted to cut the grass but did not know how to handle the sickle properly. But he has seen people cutting the grass and with that idea in mind, he held a fist full of grass in his left hand, began to cut with the right hand.

Though he was slow in cutting the grass, his mind was active. He was only cutting in an animated manner. Now and then he was looking back at his village. He began to think,

"Who are these people around us? Who are Mother and Father? What is all this life? Who are these relatives and friends? Are these bonds permanent? No. Not at all " He was philosophical.

"Time is moving fast. The life of human beings is small. What have I achieved so far? The time is passing. Is this, which we call a life? No, I was swamped by all these emotions all these days. I have to come out of all these trivial bonds. Thousands of creatures are born and die. What is the use? We have to come out from this routine life and should look for the eternity." His mind was bogged down with these thoughts.

Lakkamamba waited for sometime but was becoming increasingly restless. Never before she had experienced such a situation. On so many occasions in the past Annamaiah had gone out to play with friends and returned sometimes by the evening. But strangely now her mind was anxious. She asked her husband many times and was moving in and out.

Narayanasuri also was not in good mood. He even could not answer properly to his wife's queries. With a huff he came out of the house on to the road. Watching this, Lakkamamba also came out. Narayanasuri saw two
boys under a neem tree before the Vishnu Chakram. He called a boy by his name,

"Venkatayya, have you seen Annamaiah?"

"No sir," he respectfully replied.

"I had asked him to bring grass from the hill. He has gone there with a sickle. You and some other boys go there and look for him. He has not eaten anything from last night.

Go, go run," Narayanasuri hurried them. The boys dashed towards the south.

Two miles away, Annamaiah was involved in cutting the grass. His cutting of grass was only a physical activity not putting his mind. Suddenly he felt unbearable pain and moaned and cried, "Amma" It was natural. When he looked at his left palm, blood was oozing on the small finger of his left hand. He realized that he cut his finger. He did not know what to do at that time but still blood was oozing drop by drop. It was blood, Red and hot, on the green grass. Annamaiah had never seen blood in his life. It was a terrible sight. His eyes were slowly closing down. He swooned and slowly fell on the green grass. The oozing of the blood did not stop. It continued as he was lying on the grass.

Meanwhile the boys sent by Narayanasuri, after crossing the Mukkatla, went straight and they crossed two ponds. They asked some other boys who were gathering berries, about Annamaiah. But they replied that they had not seen any boy there. They too started to pluck fruits and were soon totally forgot of their assigned work.

The boys, after eating heartily, collected some more and kept them in their pockets. They suddenly remembered their duty and again started looking here and there for their friend. But they could not find him as they were on the other side of the hill. They knew that there were two or three ways to reach the hill and also can be returned from any of these. So they concluded that Annamaiah might have gone from the other side to his house. With this idea in the minds, they were soon on their way back.

Soon Annamaiah regained his consciousness and looked around slowly. He was weak and hungry. He did not bother even to look at his wound. For a few moments there was absolute silence. He wanted something to eat. The children, particularly attached to their mothers, never bother to
eat on their own and eat only when persisted. Annamaiah too never felt hungry in the house as his mother used to feed him many times in a day with milk, fruits, fried nuts or some other sweets. But now he realized what the real hunger was. At that moment he thought of his mother.

Ammamaiah heard some sounds from a distance. The sounds were slowly became louder and louder. A group, of nearly twenty people, was walking towards him. They were singing merrily. In a few minutes they came very near to him.

They were a group of pilgrims going to Tirumala. They were people belonging to the countryside and dressed deer and tiger skins around their bodies. They wore peacock feathers on their heads. Two persons were beating drums rhythmically to the flute, melodiously played by a young man. All others were singing in chorus, rustic songs in praise of Sri Venkateswara. There was bhakti and devotion in those songs.

An elderly looking strongman with big, curled moustache and long beard was their leader. He did not carry anything with him. Two or three men were carrying big bundles and the things tied in a big cloth. Along with them they were taking all the essential items to prepare food on the way itself. It seemed that each of these persons was given something to carry.

They were singing and playing the drums merrily. While singing they were raising their folded hands and sometimes dancing to the rhythm. So far they have covered nearly half of their destination. People sing and dance while travelling to forget their fatigue. These People seemed fresh and healthy in spite of their long journey.

The leader, Chenchaiah was leading the way. For this elderly man, this was the third trip to Tirumala. His wife, Matamma accompanied him for the first. In the group Chenchaiah's newly married son and daughter-in-law were also new to the pilgrimage. They were a happy family. Why not? They led simple lives with eating whatever they got from the forest. For them a trip to the shrine of Tirumala was a lifetime ambition.

Matamma took a vow before the marriage of her son that they would pay a visit to Tirumala with all the members of the family and tonsure their heads. It was a custom for many families to visit Tirumala after the celebrations in their household. With only four members that included two
ladies, Chenchaiah felt that it was not safe on a very long journey through thick forest areas. They readily agreed when some of their near relatives expressed their desire to accompany them. Altogether, it was a big group with folk singers and drummers.

The group almost crossed Annamaiah, but a woman in the group saw a boy lying on the grass silently. She in a loud voice said,

“O Wait, wait, stop for a while. Some body is lying there. Let us see “

The people waited there under a tree. She alone came forward and looked at Annamaiah.

She was frightened when she saw the boy lying on the grass. Blood was clearly visible on the green grass. A sickle was also lying beside him with strains of blood. Instantaneously she lifted the boy and tied a cloth tightly around his finger. She called her husband and asked him to give water. Both of them helped Annamaiah to take water and made him feel comfortable. He was able to open his eyes and looked around.

Matamma noticed that the boy was weak. So she asked him,

“When did you eat? You look so weak. Are you hungry?”

Annamaiah nodded his head to say that he was hungry. They had finished breakfast already. They brought some savouries with them in a big copper bowl. Matamma took a little bit and sat beside Annamaiah. She herself slowly fed these eatables to him. A strange feeling crept into his heart while she was serving the pieces of sweetmeat carefully into his mouth. He felt that she was not a stranger but his mother Lakkamamba herself feeding him. After eating, he took some more water. It gave him strength and he looked fresh. The affection that the woman showered on him made him look so, not the merely food.

Unmindful of these happenings, under a tree nearby, the members were singing folk songs. The beating of the drums was rhythmic and the sound of the flute, melodious. They were really enjoying it. Annamaiah heard these rustic songs and though he could not understand the meaning fully, he liked the songs as many times Sri Venkateswara was repeated continuously in them. Looking at them, Annamaiah too raised his folded hands and uttered “Sri Venkateswara” a bit loudly. This was the first word they heard from the mouth of Annamaiah. Chenchaiah and Matamma
thought that the boy was also on the way to Tirumala and also a devotee of the Lord of the seven hills.

This was the twist of life. Annamaiah's utterance of the name of Sri Venkateswara did the trick. That made them to firmly believe that the boy was also a pilgrim like them. The deeds of the Almighty are always just and unarguably justifiable. He alone knows what is right and makes it happen at the right time. The ordinary mortals are mere puppets in his hands. The Almighty is above everything, the human bonds, happiness and sorrow. Only saints and sages can, to some extent, understand the ways and deeds of God.

Chenchaiah came forward and also sat beside Annamaiah, and asked,

"Are you also going to Tirumala? And without waiting for a reply he said,

"You are alone. We are also going the same way. We take you along with us." For Annamaiah it was like a dream come true. He was only dreaming all these days about Tirumala and the Lord of the Sevenhills. On hearing the words of Chenchaiah, his eyes illuminated. For him, they appeared like the angels from Heaven to guide him.

THE JOURNEY

Annamaiah got up. Strangely he looked fresh and there was a definite glow in his face. For all these days he was under deep mental agony and distress. It seemed that it was the beginning of the end of his miseries. He felt immensely relieved as he got the opportunity so unexpectedly and suddenly to visit Tirumala. He was not an ordinary mortal to ponder over relationships and human bonds. Any boy who is in his sixteenth year, would, naturally think of his parents and home before leaving so suddenly. Instead he was elated and took this unexpected chance in a natural manner as a highly matured individual.

Chenchaiah and his wife really did not, in their wild imagination, think that they were taking a boy away from his parents. But that was exactly what they did. But it was the mere turn of destiny that initiated a great turning point in the life of a boy. But as human beings, more so as parents, they certainly would have dissuaded Annamaiah, if they had known
the condition of Lakkamamba. After all, no mother on this earth can tolerate the separation from her child. Matamma, in particular, being a mother of a son, would never have asked Annamaiah to come with them, had she known his parents were actually searching for him.

They started their journey again after this unexpected, remarkable and eventful halt, and of course, with a new member. It was almost midday. They were on the main road in a few minutes. Annamaiah was simply following them, as he was new and a bit shy. But this was the beginning only. But how long? Annamaiah could not resist the temptation of joining the chorus whenever they utter “Govinda, Govinda“ repeatedly.

Having observed Annamaiah walking aloof, Chenchaiah and his wife slowed down a bit and joined him and they started talking.

“Boy, what is your name and where are you from?” Chenchaiah said,

“Ayya, my name is Annamaiah.” And looking back, he showed his village,

“ That is our village in the midst of those tall coconut trees.”

“ Oh, very near. We thought that you were from far away place. How did you start your trip alone? Were you lost in the journey and got separated from your parents? Or did you start the journey alone?” Chenchaiah said.

“Ayya, I am the only son to my parents. I have a great desire to see Tirumala. I heard a lot about the holy place and the God. I did not really expect that I would be going there so soon. For me the God himself has sent you to take me to his abode.” Said the young man.

“Oho, you are coming on your own without informing your parents. Matamma intervened. (She perceived that the boy did not have the approval of his parents.)

“My parents are also great devotees of Govinda. I will distribute prasadam to them after I return from the trip. They will be very happy” said Annamaiah.

“Anyhow small children should not leave the house without their permission”. Matamma observed.
"Amma, my mother knew well that I would be leaving any day. She always says that I was born with His blessings" Said Annamaiah convincingly. (Chenchaiah and Matamma were pleased.)

During the conversation, they understood that Annamaiah was from a highly traditional family of scholars. They were also surprised by the knowledge of the boy, particularly in all puranas and religious books. They even felt happy to learn many things from him.

Meanwhile they covered three more miles and reached a village. There was a pond full of water and on the bank a very big tamarind tree. They stopped and wanted to prepare lunch. During journeys, people, on the way, prepare simple food. They only carry rice, few chillies and salt and few vessels. Whenever they rest in a village, usually villagers provide food or butter milk. For the villagers it was a sort of privilege to offer something to the devotees.

Chenchaiah asked his people to halt for lunch. Immediately they were at work. They collected some firewood and lit the fire. Matamma put rice in a big bowl on the fire. They brought water from the well near the bank of the pond. In a few minutes lunch was prepared. It was very simple with only rice and a paste of chilli, tamarind and salt.

All the people were merry and playful. They were joking and laughing. But Annamaiah was away under a tree. He sat alone and thinking about his parents. But he was firm and determined to go to Tirumalai. Only people of such will power can do any thing they want. Annamaiah had such a strong mind and determination.

When the lunch was ready, the people sat in a circle. The two women in the party served them rice in the plates made of banyan leaves. They were hungry and hunger knows no taste. The rice was hot and when it was mixed with the chilli tamarind paste it was tasty. The ingredients of the paste are simple but the ratio in which they were mixed gives the taste. After eating they drank water brought from the well. Normally Chenchaiah and his wife eat only after it is served to all. For them food is served by their daughter-in-law. Chenchaiah was methodical and principled. He looked after all the members as his own children. That affection made all of them to call him fondly "Peddaiah".
They were about to sit and Matamma searched for Annamaiah and found him under a tree simply looking at the sky. Matamma approached him and said,

"Annamaiah, it is already afternoon. You ate only a little bit in the morning. Get up and wash your hands and feet in the pond. Join us for the lunch. Go... go." There was motherly affection in that voice.

Annamaiah slowly raised his head and in a low voice,

"Amma, I am not feeling hungry. You carry on" but really he was hungry and Matamma knew this, as she herself was a mother. So she lifted him by his shoulder and made him to sit beside her husband. She gave water to wash his hands. That was totally a new feeling for Annamaiah. He sat with Chenchaiah squatted on the floor. Rice was served to him along with chilli paste. He himself mixed the rice and began to eat. He was hungry and that simple food tasted good for him.

What a change it was! Annamaiah was eating that simple food himself. While in the house he never ate himself. Necessity prompts anybody to do anything. He ate happily and after the eating he himself folded the plate and threw it away. That is life, full of twists and surprises. For Annamaiah, being mature, these developments did not cause much worry. And truly, he was above, all these mundane activities.

After food they rested under the cool shade of the big tamarind tree for about two hours. Chenchaiah hurried them to get up and they washed their faces in the pond and again started walking. After crossing another village, they waked through green gardens and sugarcane fields. Throughout the journey they were singing merrily and loudly uttering "Govinda,... Govinda" Annamaiah now almost became a member of the party.

By the evening they were passing through a thick forest. Annamaiah had never undertaken such a journey. It was almost restless walking for him. But that did not discourage him. While walking, they found an abandoned stone structure with pillars and they decided to halt there for that night. This structure was built for pilgrims to take rest. It had become a routine for them as again they gathered some firewood and cooked the simple food. This time Annamaiah too helped them by bringing water from the nearby well. It was really a strange experience for him in a place far away from his village. After dinner they slept in the old satram. A satram is a
wayside structure for the travellers to take rest. Such structures were there along the road to the pilgrim places. Kings, landlords and philanthropists built such structures and usually named after the sponsor. In these satrams there were stone benches to sit and relax and also to sleep. Any traveller can come and relax, drink water or take bath, chat with the resting people. Annamaiah and the troupe of singers rested on the open floor outside the satram, while Chenchaiah and his family members slept inside.

Being so tired, Annamaiah immediately fell asleep. After so many weeks it was a good sleep though he slept on the floor. Slumber is an activity for the mind. When mind is fresh and happy one can enjoy fully the comfort of deep sleep. Even the heavy snoring of the drummers was not heard. It was a pleasant night with the winter has gone the wind was not chill. Also the summer had not set in fully.

What a change this! Annamaiah was sleeping on the floor in a deserted forest area with rustics. And he was sleeping so happily. He could not get sleep in his comfortable bedroom all these days while his mother sat beside him fanning. Annamaiah’s body and mind were totally concentrated on the God of the Sevenhills.

After a while, Annamaiah woke up to a melodious tune. A boy, nearly of the same age of him was playing the flute under a nearby tree. He was also a member of the pilgrims. He was totally immersed and it was really a sound of the soul. All others were sleeping heavily. It was total silence in that moonlit night. Even the birds were silent as if they were listening to these melodies. Music and melody have that irresistible power. Annamaiah was spellbound and for him the sweetness of the melody seemed celestial. For the people whose minds are filled with noble thoughts every thing seems heavenly. He was listening to the music while lying on the bed of grass. He wanted to sit, but it might disturb the boy.

Actually the boy also did not want to disturb the sleep of others, with this intention he sat under a tree a little away from them and started playing his flute. Annamaiah wondered at his devotion for music and he thought he was practising.

After a while, when the playing was over, the boy kept the flute in his bag and laid himself on the grass to sleep with others. Annamaiah got up and sat on the grass. The flute boy observed this and he did not expect
that there was a fond admirer for his music. Taking this opportunity Annamaiah came near and said,

"You played the flute wonderfully, have you ever learnt music?"

"I like music and my grand father taught me the basics and I myself practising on them," the boy said politely. The boy was polite as he thought that Annamaiah knew music well. For a rustic, Annamaiah looked polished and seemed highly cultured. Annamaiah began to develop an affectionate liking for the boy. It was natural as both liked music and were fond devotees of Sri Venkateswara.

Ammamaiah's knowledge of music was excellent and he had wonderful power to grasp anything once he heard. He had the innate perception to distinguish one ragam from the other. But what he had acquired was purely out of personal interest. So when he found a person of same interest he was delighted. They talked for a while to know about each other.

"What is your name?" Annamaiah said.

Flute boy replied, "My name is Hari. My grand father brought me up after I lost both of my parents. We lived in a small hamlet with only four families. Chenchaiah is our close relative and when they were going to Tirumala, I too accompanied them."

"What about your grand father? Is he too old to come along with you?"

"I am unfortunate. He too died a few weeks ago." When he was saying so, tears rolled in his eyes. Annamaiah felt quite uneasy to know the misfortune of the boy.

The boy continued, "Chenchaiah was so nice to me. After the death of my grand father, they are looking after me. They treat me as their younger son."

Annamaiah was greatly relieved to hear this. He too had an admiration for Chenchaiah and his wife. He too was experiencing their affection.

They continued talking in this manner for some more time. After a while, they felt sleepy and comfortably laid on the grass for sleep. Both were eager to see the sacred shrine as early as possible. New friendships are made and new relations, developed. This is human life. The new friends were happily sleeping.
Yonder, in a village, a few miles away, a couple were sad of a separation and sleepless.

**DARK HOUSE.**

The two boys, sent by Narayanasuri returned only to inform him that they could not find Annamaiah on the hill. Narayanasuri waited till the afternoon but there was no trace of his son. Where has he gone? Some more boys were sent to the eastern side with an idea that the boy might have gone for swimming. Within a few hours the word spread like a wild fire. By the evening everyone in the household of the village knew about the mysterious disappearance of Annamaiah.

By the night it was quite clear that Annamaiah had gone out of the house. There was a steady stream of visitors, and every one asked them to be brave as the boy would return but these words did not provide the necessary relief to the distressed couple. Lakkamamba was in tears. For her, everything seemed dark without her son. Her husband, always appeared philosophical was now almost dumb and pensive. They spent the night with a hope that the morning would bring happiness for them.

But it did not. Still, there was no trace of Annamaiah. The house, once seemed happy, was silent and gloomy. Narayanasuri feared to look into his wife’s eyes, as, he thought, he was responsible for this. She was tired of asking him repeatedly what had actually happened on that fateful morning when Annamaiah was sent from the house to bring grass.

How many times a poor husband can tell his wife the same conversation that had taken place between him and his son before he left the house when Lakkamamba was away. Lakkamamba had suspected that Narayanasuri was too harsh on Annamaiah that day, and it might have broken the mind of the boy.

Was really Narayanasuri responsible? It was only the will of the Almighty. Ordinary mortals are mere puppets in his hands. Nothing on this earth is against His will. Parents are only responsible for the birth not for their fate. They bring their children up with affection and love. But they should never expect the love and affection to be permanent. Narayanasuri and Lakkamamba were only, in a way, responsible for the birth of Annamaiah but not his fate, and it was already decided. Time, is the only solution and
The Singing Saint

every action of the individuals is pre-determined and everybody has to play one’s role perfectly, according to the destiny.

Father, mother, relatives, friends and all, they play their parts to a certain level and vanish after their roles are over. Narayanasuri’s role, in Annamaiah’s life was great, as a father he brought him up, as a first teacher he taught him the lessons, and finally showed him the way to which he was destined to reach, the last part, quite dramatically.

Narayanasuri, no doubt, was a great philosopher. Never, at any stage in his son’s life, he aspired much beyond the normal bonds. He knew well that his son was destined to become a saint. He also knew the truth that his son was not an ordinary mortal. Will such great souls bound by normal affections and bonds? Certainly, not. Narayanasuri reconciled himself to the truth and became stoic.

What about Lakkamamba? She was an ordinary mother, who was but only a mother. Fathers want their sons to be great, they feel elated to hear about their progress and cherish their elevation in life. A father can bear his son’s separation even for longer but a mother, certainly cannot. A mother certainly wish her son to be near all the time rather than returning after a long time as a matured intellectual.

A full day passed without Annamaiah in the house. The evening spread on them like a dark veil. The parents were almost sleepless the previous night. That evening, they went to Chennakesava temple. They prostrated in the temple and prayed for their son’s safe return very soon. The temple bells started ringing. They felt relieved a little bit and thought it was an auspicious sign. They firmly believed that Annamaiah was safe somewhere and will return soon. The priest served them the prasadam and they ate it. For a full day they were starving. Silently they made their way to their house, with full faith on Chennakesava. Before leaving for the house they prostrated before the Vishnu Chakram after making three pradakshinams.

The entire village felt unhappy for the sudden disappearance of Annamaiah from the village. They were puzzled and completely clueless. Particularly the womenfolk were sad for Lakkamamba. Meanwhile, some elements planted wild stories here and there that Annamaiah might have been drowned or bitten by snakes and such other wild animals at lonely
spots. Some others, openly started saying Annamaiah had gone insane and had run away to unknown, distant places. In the villages, it is common to discuss endlessly on the issues happened recently. On such occasions, two opinions always prevail, one sceptical attitude which thinks negatively and the other, optimistic and encouraging. For the sceptical elements, Annamaiah's behaviour all these days was a reason to conclude that he was becoming mad.

It was customary for the people to call on the affected and soothe and to make them to forget the disasters as soon as possible. The elders of the village were with Narayanasuri discussing many religious matters to make him to divert his attention from the event. The women spent the day with Lakkamamba saying her son would return very soon.

That night Ramavadhani came to their house with the help of his great grand son. He was nearly one hundred years old and a close relative of Narayanasuri. He was totally confined to bed and rarely goes out of his house. When he heard that Annamaiah was missing and the entire village was searching for him, also Lakkamamba was in total misery, he could not stay in his bed and in spite of his age, came to Narayanasuri along with three of his grand sons and his elderly daughter. With all these people, again there was some activity in the house after a subdued atmosphere from the previous morning. Narayanasuri and Lakkamamba just returned from the temple.

Ramavadhani had even seen Narayanasuri's grandfather and was very close to the family. He was frail and weak with age but was closely observing Annamaiah from time to time. When he heard that Annamaiah did not return to the house even after a full day and also learnt that Lakkamamba was totally not in her senses, he could not stay in his house. Narayanasuri's household never celebrated any domestic ceremony with out the presence of this grand old man.

When he entered the house there was absolute silence. Narayanasuri stood up when he saw this old man. Ramavadhani broke the silence and said,

"Narayana, what happened? I heard that our boy is missing. Don't fear my boy, Nothing will happen to our boy. Our Chennakesava swamy is always with us. Do you think our Annamaiah is away? No, He will be here soon."
The Singing Saint

Remember your great grand father's words. It is your son who is going to be a great soul and remember this was the prophecy of the Lord of Tirumala. Have you forgotten my boy? You only told me all this after your trip to the holy shrine." He put his arms on Narayanasuri's shoulders and cajoled him. Also turning to Lakkamamba he said,

"Ammayi, your son is destined to become great and it will be true. There is no doubt about this and why all of you are so bothered about him? I won't die without seeing the marriage of my Annamaiah. Do you remember my words at the time of your son's annaprasana, that this boy will get you two daughters-in-law? He recollected his words. "Get up and wash your face." He cheered her.

Old people command lot of respect particularly in the traditional households. On most of the occasions the words of aged people prove to be correct. There seemed some truth in the old man's words and the distressed couple were really touched by them. After putting confidence in their minds, the old man got up to leave the house; Narayanasuri came near to him with his wife. They helped him to stand, again Ramavadhani suggested them to be brave and keep faith in the God. He also advised them to visit Chennakesava temple and offer prayers everyday.

Lakkamamba and Narayanasuri respectfully touched the feet of the old man. He blessed them heartily and left the house. He cannot sit for longer time because of his age and failing health. His presence, even though was only for a few minutes, brought relief to the miserable parents. They were also moved by his encouraging words. The presence of the children, who came with the old man, also lessened the loneliness of the couple.

Yes, it was true. Narayanasuri began to recollect the words of the old man. His grand father used to say that his son would bring laurels to their family and the village too. Also he remembered the heavenly voice at Tirumala echoing the same, when they were before the Garuda gambham. "Yes, my son will be great and surely return". That idea itself gave him strength and moral support.

Largely relieved, Narayanasuri went near his wife and said,

"Lakkamamba, remember those heavenly words we heard when we closed our eyes in the temple at Tirumala. Our boy is not an ordinary mortal. He will surely return to us soon. This is the testing time for us and we have to bear
this for some time. Let us leave every thing on the God. He will never let us
down. Our prayers will protect our boy.”
Lakkamamba was also, to some extent, relieved by her husband’s words.
That night they spent their time before the idol of Sri Venkateswara, praying
till mid night. The lord, it seems, moved by their prayers, made them to
sleep, at least for a while.

Narayanasuri and Lakkamamba started to worship the God
Chennakesava daily. Even after two days Annamaiah did not return. Where
was he? Who knows?

THE JOURNEY CONTINUED
The touring party members woke up with the beautiful sounds of
birds in the forest. Chenchaiah hurried them, as early hours are the best
time for the journey. More miles can easily be covered in the early hours.
Also Chenchaiah wanted to move out of the forest area as soon as possible
for they feared trouble from wild animals and also there was the possibility
of missing the way. They were coaxed to move in a group and also to cover
as more distance as possible. While moving, they were shouting at the
peak of their voice, “Govinda, Goovinda”.

It was a strange experience for Annamaiah. After three hours of
tiresome journey, they reached a reached a small village. They ate simple
breakfast with cooked rice and buttermilk provided by a generous villager.
Again they started walking. By that evening of that day they were nearer to
Tirupathi, the beautiful city that lies at the foot of the Sevenhills.

That night they rested under a huge banyan tree. Physically,
Annamaiah was totally exhausted. But he did not show his fatigue to others,
particularly to Matamma. As others were totally busy preparing supper for
that night, Annamaiah silently stood near Chenchaiah, who was relaxing a
little away from them. Chenchaiah observed Annamaiah and thought that
the boy was hesitant to ask something. So he himself started the
conversation.

“Emayya china guruva, are you tired?”(Chinna guruva means little
master). For the last four days he had been observing him closely and they
found that Annamaiah was a Brahmin boy. They started calling him little
master, usually Brahmins command lot of respect among the villagers.
Annamaiah looked straight into the eyes of Chenchaiah and began,
“No sir, I am happy in your company. You are looking after me very well. But
sir, how long will it take to reach Tirumala?”

Chenchaiah was happy to learn that the boy was really enthusiastic
and eager to see the God of the seven hills. He was pleased with the
inquisitiveness of the boy. Though the boy was tender in age, he encouraged
other pilgrims with his cheerful countenance.

“My dear little master, today is Guruvaram and by the morning of
Sanivararam, we will be before the God. By tomorrow evening we will surely
be in Tirupathi. So be happy. You and our Hari have become good friends.
Haven’t you?”

“Yes sir, we have, Hari plays the flute wonderfully,” Annamaiah
told him about their friendship.

Indeed, friendship knows no boundaries, no other barriers and
once it takes roots, it grows beyond limits. Both Annamaiah and Hari
worship the Lord of the hills, adore his great deeds and in particular, both
love music. Basically it was music that made them be blossomed into a
history in making.so closer and who knows, this friendship will

While they were talking like this, Matamma loudly called out at
everybody to join for the supper. Annamaiah as usual sat beside Hari and
finished his meal and both took their places under the tree to sleep. After a
while Annamaiah turned towards Hari and said, “Hari, peddaiah told that
by Saturday we will be reaching Tirumala, I am quite excited to listen to this
and I am nervous. Will we be there? Is it true?”

Annamaiah was really excited and eager to reach Tirumala and
when he knew that they were near and it was only a matter of one more
night, he was so overwhelmed with joy.

Annamaiah was the first person to get up the next morning and
woke up Hari also. That day the journey seemed more relaxed as they were
nearer to Tirupati. On the right side they were able to see the mountain
ranges. They travelled through thick and green forest area and by the twilight
they were at the outskirts of Tirupathi. That night they rested in a roadside
satram along with many other pilgrims.
The next morning brought Ananamaiah totally a new and scintillating experience and his dreams turned into a reality. He woke up and saw the Sun rising in the east. Slowly he turned his eyes towards the north. Oh! It was exhilarating to see the mountain ranges spread like a huge cobra. He fixed his attention on the rocks, it appeared like thousands of hoods of the great Adisesha. The mountain rocks appeared to be calm, serene and beautiful. He could not turn his eyes and his heart filled with thousands of inexplicable thoughts. For quiet a few minutes Ananamaiah was only looking at the mountain rocks till his friend Hari brought him back to his senses.

"Anna, where are you? You were only looking at the hill for so long," Hari got up late in the morning as he played on his flute till late in the previous night. Normally Ananamaiah used to wake him up every day before the dawn.

Ananamaiah looked at him and said, "Hari, see those mountain ranges. How serene and beautiful they look, for me they appear like the dwelling place of all the Gods of this universe. The hill is lofty, majestic and celestial." Ananamaiah went on. Meanwhile Chenchaiah and others were ready for the journey. Ananamaiah and Hari followed them as usual. While walking also Ananamaiah was only looking at the hill. Many other pilgrims joined them and it soon became a very big group. They were merry and were singing happily. It was really colourful and joyful as they were almost at the footstep of the Lord of the sevenhills.

By midday they entered Tirupathi. The town was full of people and was bustling with activity. There were big shops on either side of the wide roads. Many people with shaven heads were buying colorful articles for their children. There were many shops under the trees and the shop owners were shouting at the pitch of their voice to attract the attention of the pilgrims.

Ananamaiah and Hari were moving slowly looking either side. Soon they were near a small temple under a big tree. There was a big crowd near the temple. It was Gangamma temple. Pilgrims, from far away places visiting Tirumala made it a custom to worship Gangamma first before they climb the hill.

Chenchaiah led the people to this temple and they worshipped the Goddess and every one of them applied kumkuma on their forehead. Women
collected pasupu and kumkuma from the priest and preserved it to distribute in their village. All of them bowed before the stone idol with reverence and walked towards the hill.

By lunchtime they were near the foot of the hill. Pilgrims from all directions gathered there and the place was called Alipiri. Here they worshipped Lord Narasimha, the incarnation of Vishnu in the form of a lion. Nara means human and Simha means lion and with this ferocious form, Lord Vishnu killed Hiranyakashyapa a highly feared king of rakshasa. Annamaiah prostrated before the idol with reverence.

There were so many trees around and Chenchaiah asked his members to stay there for lunch. Soon lunch was ready and all the members ate the simple lunch and took rest under the green trees for some time. This was a really very pleasant place with cool breeze blowing in the mid afternoon under the trees. They stayed there only for some time, as they wanted to reach Tirumala by the evening. Along with them there were hundreds of pilgrims resting under the trees. Other pilgrims were also in a hurry to reach Tirumala before night.

They began the journey again. They were near the steps to climb the hill. Annamaiah was excited as he was climbing the steps. After climbing few more steps, he saw the big stone idol of Anjanaeya. He stopped and touched the feet of the Lord Anjaneya with his head along with other pilgrims. It was believed that the pain would soothe by this magic touch. He also prayed the He also prayed to God Hanumantha to follow him throughout the journey and infuse enthusiasm and drive away pain and fatigue. The pilgrims, particularly those undertake journeys to hill shrines have their own beliefs. These beliefs not only provide them to forget their fatigue but undertake the journeys with more reverence. Perhaps with this in mind there were many small temples dedicated to many gods and goddesses throughout the journey. The pilgrims get a chance to seek the blessings and also rest for a while.

Annamaiah was climbing the steps amidst the chanting of “Govinda” by the pilgrims. He was alone and his mind was filled with thoughts on the Lord of seven hills. He did not even look around and only memorizing the words of Hari sastry. The mere thought that he was almost reached the
sacred hill created ripples in his mind. He was nervous and also excited as he was climbing the steps one by one.

It was really the most difficult and tiresome journey particularly at the beginning of the climbing the hill and Annamaiah was sweating profusely. Some of the steps were steep and while climbing these steps he felt breathless. Still he was climbing and as the cool breeze coming across touched his body, it was relishing. He stopped for a while under a tree to wipe away his sweat. There were trees all along the way. The devotees could sit and relax. There were earthen pots arranged at convenient intervals. People could quench their thirst even from the flowing mountain streams.

He saw many pilgrims pass before him when he was at rest. In a few minutes he was ready again to begin the journey. Some pilgrims were carrying their children on their backs and some others, bundles wrapped in a piece of cloth put on their heads. They were all with a mission, a mission to fulfil their ‘mokku’ to Sri Venkateswara. Most of them were sweating and some who were moving very slowly are really relishing. Annamaiah got up, and after a heavy breath, started the climbing.

After climbing nearly half of the hill, Annamaiah turned to see the wonderful landscape around him. He saw the town Tirupathi with many temples and buildings. Somewhere he heard the sounds of water rushing and flowing as streams. The chirping of birds was heard from distance and sometimes the breeze turned to wind and became so strong that the trees seemed trembling.

Suddenly Annamaiah looked around and lo, where are the people with whom he travelled all these days? Where are Chenchaiah and Matamma and his friend Hari? Have they already climbed the hill? Or were they still in Tirupathi? Annamaiah was absolutely clueless. For the first time he felt he was alone.

**MOTHER’S BLESSING**

Annamaiah became anxious and even waited for some more time to find Chenchaiah and his members but did not find them. Have they gone already? He was terribly upset. He again realised the irony of life. There is nothing in our hands, it is all in the destiny and we, and the ordinary mortals feel all these obligations. The God only knows the time of separation and when to unite. His ways and deeds are always justifiable.
He remembered his father and mother. As long as he was under the protection of Chenchaiah and Matamma, he did not feel that he was alone. Suddenly he found himself orphaned and felt uncared for, as they were sympathetic and highly caring. Under the care of Matamma he never felt hungry. Within minutes he realised the truth and reconciled as a matured man. Obviously so, for a boy who wished the abode of lord Venkateswara to be the ultimate place for the enlightened individuals than parents and their affection.

Annamaiah thus remained under a tree and brooded. He could not move as he missed the company of Hari. Their friendship, though developed in a very short time, was beginning to blossom beyond limits. Where did he miss them? Was he slow or did they overtake him? Nothing can be achieved by probing deep into the follies.

Many pilgrims were passing before him. He joined them and started climbing the steps. Now he was very slow and was covering very few steps only. What happened to him? He did not know exactly. His mind was alert and wished that he should reach the abode by the twilight. But physically he felt he was tired and sleepy. Some thing is overpowering him without his knowledge, he felt. Loneliness is something that always pricks and makes people totally powerless and inactive. Annamaiah was in that state of mind, for all these days he was in the best company of real human beings who loved him and cared for him. Can he ever meet them again? He wished so, but when?

The journey was tiresome and needed rest quite often. He some how dragged on for some more time. By then he almost climbed the steep hill. It was a wonderful experience as he surveyed the land from that height. The steep hill appeared as if it was almost on his head. He felt swooning sensation and immediately sat on a stone bench in a satram at a turning. A sage, for providing rest, built this structure for the tired pilgrims. It was very cool inside the structure and Annamaiah felt relieved. The Sun has almost disappeared behind the western clouds, and it was almost dark.

Annamaiah felt thirsty. But how can he quench his thirst at this point where it was impossible to find water. He lied on the stone bench and looked below. It was getting dark. Yonder below at a distance he saw lights in Tirupathi. He could not see any pilgrim passing there. He wondered
where all these people were. No chanting sounds were heard and it was hushed and frightening silence. Suddenly he saw some one coming towards him. He felt relieved to see a human being at that odd hour.

He was an old man coming down from Tirumala. The old man had a small and round brass vessel with water in it. He saw Annamaiah and thought a pilgrim was holed up in the old structure due to night. The old man came nearer and too sat on the stone bench. He kept the vessel on the ground and began talking with Annamaiah,

"Boy, where are you from?" Annamaiah did not reply as he was exhausted and the old man, sensed the condition, and without waiting for the reply, offered water to Annamaiah. Nothing can be more precious than water at that time and Annamaiah, suddenly got up and nodded his head. After quenching his thirst, Annamaiah thanked the old man who sat almost very near to him now. Annamaiah felt drowsy and lied on the floor of the old gopuram, almost at the peak of the hill. It was dark and the night spread like a black cloud. Nothing was visible but strange sounds were heard from the nearby trees. All the birds were in their nests and somewhere sounds of owls from distance were heard. The old man, disappeared into the darkness and Annamaiah was not in a mood to observe him. Slumber had completely overtaken him and he, in a short while, immersed in a deep sleep. What a pity. The boy was sleeping in a deserted place in that darkness in a place inhabited by many night creatures.

It was in the morning Annamaiah woke up with the beautiful sounds of the birds. He saw the Sun rising from the east almost below him. It was memorable sight and completely immersed by the beauty of the dawn. He wondered how he was so drowsy and he could not remember any more. He felt it was not an ordinary sleep but was possessed by the Goddess of sleep the previous night. Again he thought of his friend and Chenchaiah and his band of pilgrims. He hoped that he would certainly meet them in Tirumala. With this hope in mind, Annamaiah started the journey again, first time knowing fully well that he was alone. He crossed the steep hill and the way now seemed steady and easier. He was in the midst of a beautiful landscape with very tall trees on the either side of the way. On the left side he saw a well. It was not provided with rope and bucket and the pilgrims have to
climb down into the well for water. Annamaiah boldly climbed down into the well for about fifteen steps to wash his face and drank water.

Not many people were seen on the way, probably it was not the right time to start the journey either upwards or downwards, it was too early. He has almost covered half of the way and now in the deep forest. Out of the seven hills he crossed three hills. He was slow and thoughtful. Soon he heard the chanting of Govinda from the opposite side. Pilgrims, with heads tonsured, were coming from Tirumala. Annamaiah wanted to know about the distance and time he would reach the abode. He stopped one of the pilgrims by a requesting gesture and asked him,

"Ayya, how much time it will take to reach Tirumala?

"Boy, you are almost in the midst of this beautiful Avva jhari kona, in about two hours you will be in Tirumala, you have completed the difficult part of the journey and today being Sanivaram, the temple will be full of devotees. Hurry up, you will be there by noon," an old man answered with considerable patience. Annamaiah felt relieved to hear this encouraging piece of information from the old man, as he was absolutely clueless about the journey after he missed Chenchaiah and his party.

Annamaiah started to walk briskly, and he wished to reach the abode by the noon and was eager to enter the temple of the Lord as early as possible. The Sun was almost above his head and as he did not eat anything from the previous night he felt hungry. It was scorching and he was sweating but continued his journey. The Sun was very severe and Annamaiah could not bear the fatigue any more, adding to that he was hungry and that made him weak. This was the irony of life, when food was available and mother persuaded him, he never felt hungry and now alone and tired, he knew about hunger. Annamaiah remembered his mother, at least hunger made him to think about his mother. He could not move further, finding a very tall bamboo grove with cool shade, he stretched himself and lied on the ground to rest for a while. It was very cool under the bamboo grove, made him to relish and the gentle breeze blowing through the tall trees provided the much needed respite for him.

Annamaiah was much annoyed with his condition. He thought, "This is strange, after I lost the company of Chenchaiah and others, I face lot of hurdles and the journey is not smooth as it used to be. Can I ever reach
Tirumala?" Strange thoughts engulfed his mind. But at the same time he did not know what to do and also nobody was there to advise and infuse confidence in his young mind. He was alone and helpless at this stage, he really needed some help, but from where can he get it?

With all these strange thoughts in mind, Annamaiah remembered the words of Hari Sastry in Thallapaka, that human beings should do their duty, without waiting for the outcome, as preached by Lord Krishna in Bhagvadgeetha. The influence of Hari Sastry was so great on Annamaiah, that he was so impressed by the description of Tirumala that he almost fled from his village and loving parents to worship his God in Tirumala. Soon heavy sleep engulfed him and the sleep relieved Annamaiah from all these thoughts at least temporarily and also from uneasy physical condition.

While in sleep, Annamaiah had a wonderful vision. He was in the lap of a Goddess. She was affectionately stroking him on his back and affectionately grooming his hair with her fingers. After a long time Annamaiah felt that he was in his mother's lap. The affectionate touch and the sweet words were causing him a great soothing effect. He fondly wished this to happen and oh! It is happening. What a lucky boy he was!

Annamaiah opened his eyes but could not see anything still he could feel the magic touch. He started talking to her.

"Amma who are you, and why are you so affectionate to me?

"My dear boy, I am Alamelu Manga and came to help you seeing your condition" Annamaiah heard from Hari sastry, the great discoursers about her and felt highly blessed to be in her lap. He also wanted to know from her the reason for his delay in reaching Tirumala. He said, "Amma, I came all the way from my village to see the Lord, the journey was good and now, in the last lap I face too many hurdles and my journey is not as smooth as it was. I am worried and help me to get out of this state." Annamaiah almost excited and fell at her feet. He touched her feet with his hands and tears were rolling from his cheeks. He felt the moisture on her feet. He was emotional and almost uncontrollable. When he found someone to listen to his owes, he opened his heart fully.

Alamelu Manga fondly lifted the boy and put him in her lap and said,
"My son, you have entered the sacred and celestial Tirimala Hill. This hill is full of holy salagrama rock and it is not proper for a devotee like you to come here with footwear. Remove and see to feel the serenity of the hill." Annamaiah immediately removed his footwear and threw them away. Oh, what a change! The hill was shining in a great splendour. He saw a saint in every tree and a God in every animal in that holy hill. He saw all the incarnations of the Lord appeared one by one before him. He was bewildered and awe struck with joy and fear. He also heard the chanting of all the Vedas. Alamelu Manga sat beside him and whispered something in his ear. Annamaiah experienced an instantaneous transformation and felt he was highly blessed and fortunate. With this few words, he felt that he had grasped the total essence of all the Vedas, Puranas, and Holy scriptures and learnt the all the notations of music. She then looked into his eyes and said, "Annamiah, you are destined to become a great singer and saint poet. From now onwards every word that you utter will be a song to glorify the God. You will be the leader to start a new poetic genre sankeerthana and thousands of devotees will follow you and your songs will have a magical influence on the mankind." Annamaiah was dumbstruck and immersed totally and almost in tears. Alamelu Manga continued,

"You are going to play an important role in the holy hills, you will sing the wake up song for the God in the dawn and sing lullaby for him to sleep. You are the highly blessed devotee of the God and you will incorporate new rituals on the hills. The magical influence of your songs will dispel the ignorance of the masses and enlighten them and turn towards righteousness and to attain the moksha."

Annamiah was in great spirits and bowed to her with reverence. Then the Goddess took out something from her saree folding and offered to him, "Annamiah, this is the holy prasadam of the lord, I brought it for you and so saying, she herself fed him the prasadam. He ate the holy prasadam fed by the Mother and was highly inspired and felt he was highly blessed by the Mother. He felt his hunger was totally disappeared and was in a mood inspired with new energy. Words began to flow from his mouth as a well-metered poem.

"Ammaku Thallapaka ghanu dannaya padya satakambu cheppe ko"
May you prosper with the hundred stanzas of flower like words, recited by Thallapaka Annamaiah, in praise of Amma, the Goddess. (Satakam means one hundred poems)

He recited poem after poem in praise of her with eloquence. He was excited and wondered at his own power of spontaneous poetry and recitation. Alamelu Mangamma was highly pleased with the boy, and then disappeared. It seemed like a dream but there was a sudden change in Annamaiah, and this was true, as he, now possessed excellent literary talents.

Very soon Annamaiah was in his senses. For him it was like a dream. Was it a dream? No, it can't be, he did not feel hungry nor tired. A beautiful smell of sweetness was coming from his mouth as if he had eaten the holy prasadam. "How highly blessed I am" he wondered, and also to taste the prasadam of the Lord. Now he was not an ordinary mortal but a blessed person by the Goddess. She was also the incarnation of Saraswathi, the Goddess of learning and literature. By the grace, power and blessings of Mother Alamelu Manga, he thought, he suddenly acquired the power of rhyme, rhythm and smooth flow of lyrical knowledge. He was sure it was not a dream. The mother personally came down all the way, only to soothe him and to bless him. He was delighted and highly elated. He started the journey. Now it appeared easy and comfortable.

Annamaiah, in a very short time crossed all the hills and almost at the threshold of Tirumala Giri. There was much fanfare and noise at the last turning. Hundreds of devotees were seen coming down after completing the holy darshan of the Lord. "They were highly blessed" Annamaiah thought and he still was at the last lap of his journey. There were no more tall and thick trees but small flower plants, with many kinds of colourful flowers; it was really a feast for the eye. He felt that the air here was cool and serene. Suddenly he experienced the transformation. He saw hundreds of devotees walking in all directions, sitting under the trees, sleeping in the stone satrams, buying colourful items for their children and also cooking food in the open space. It was evening time and the Sun was slowly sinking in the western hills. The shadows were slowly becoming lengthy.

Somewhere Annamaiah heard the temple bells ringing. The sound was captivating and magical. Also he heard nadaswaram and...
beating of drums. Soon Annamaiah realised that he was in Tirumala, a place he was dreaming to see, and the abode of Srihari and the Kaliyuga Vaikuntam. How can, the happiness and the state of mind of Annamaiah, be explained?
BOOK – TWO

The Singing Saint
IN THE ABODE

Annamaiah did not waste his time looking at the roads nor people. In fact many of them were eagerly waiting for the evening darshan of the God. He mixed with some of the pilgrims and went straight to the temple from the eastern side. In front of the temple there was a big stone arch and people were offering coconuts and camphor. It was twilight and as the camphor was burning, it was really a pleasing sight to watch. He was delighted by the smell of the camphor. The main entrance of the temple was grand and shining, as it was covered with gold and the big torches that were lit before the dawn. Some people, it seemed, were returning from the temple looking back again and again while the people entering the temple were eager and pushing and jostling each other to enter at the earliest.

Thought it was late evening, the Sun was still illuminating and the temple was seen with all its splendour. As the last rays were falling on the ‘Ananda nilayam’, it was the most memorable sight to watch. The golden temple was shining by the evening rays of the Sun. On hearing the nadaswaram and beating of drums, Annamaiah turned his attention on to the southwards. He saw a big procession coming from the southern side, beside the high temple walls. Two big elephants, wonderfully decorated, were leading the procession. Behind them the temple priests and devotees were following.

Annamaiah slowly approached the pushkarini, the holy pond on the north side of the temple. It was rectangular in shape with a small mantapam in the middle and steps on all sides. Pilgrims take a holy dip in this pushkarini before they enter the temple. People believe that the waters of several holy rivers merge in this pond and a holy dip would cleanse all the sins. Annamaiah saw many people taking dip with shaven heads. Annamaiah, while on the bank of the pond, knew about all the formalities of the temple. Accordingly, he first wanted to take a dip in this pond. The Sun disappeared totally and it was dark all around.

Annamaiah heard a voice from behind. It was the voice of an old priest of the nearby Varahaswami temple. He said, “Boy, do not enter the pond now. Now we have closed the doors of the temple. Do not forget in the morning to worship Varahaswami first before you enter Ananda nilayam.” So saying he briskly walked away. “Yes” Annamaiah thought, it was dark
and the gates already were closed. He cursed himself for being late in the
journey. He thought that it was the will of the God that he had to wait for
one more day to enter the temple.

Annamaiah turned back and walked towards the mahadwaram.
Lights were burning and there was a big gathering of people in front of the
big mandapam. A drama troupe was performing bhajan. He sat on the steps
and watched the bhajan. After some time, the programme came to an end
and all the people stood up and the place. Annamaiah did not know what to
do in the night. He walked towards the garden on the western side of the
temple. He saw some people, and to his great surprise, Hari was with them.
Mani, the flutist, came running to him and Annamaiah affectionately hugged
him. It was really surprising that the friends met again. Both were delighted
and Hari was the first to speak,

"Anna, I was only thinking of you, come let us have dinner first" and so saying, he brought a plate and served food to Annamaiah. After
Annamaiah finished his food, they started talking.

"Anna, we missed in the journey, we thought that you might have
climbed the steps fast and reached the temple before us. Peddaiah many
times asked about you. Where were you and how did you reach here? Hari
enquired.

"Actually, I was slow and could not reach the temple yesterday.
This evening only I reached here. Have you had the darshan?"

"Yes, we had the darshan in the morning it self and Peddaiah and
others left the hills in the afternoon?"

"Then, why are you still here? Annamaiah enquired.
"Actually I was supposed to leave the place with them, but I decided
against. What can I do in my hamlet alone and I want to stay here for some
more time. I liked this place and like you I want to serve the God. You were
saying that serving the God would bring us happiness".

Annamaiah was very happy to meet his friend. He thought that he
was not alone on the hills as he found the company of a friend who has the
same taste and same aspirations. More over Hari was a good player of flute
and both of them can sing songs. Annamaiah told about his experience on
the hills and how he was blessed by the Goddess. He said,
“Hari, Tomorrow I will enter the temple, I could not get the chance to see the God today”. Then he told Mani how he reached the place and accomplished his holy dips in the pushkarini. Annamaiah’s mind was happy and the two friends talked for some time and both of them slept on the floor in the garden. During the conversation Hari told him that he had met a person who was good player of drum as it was called Maddela. Hari also told him that he would introduce him the next morning. Annamaiah felt sleepy and within minutes he was asleep. He wanted to get up very early to visit the temples.

The next morning Annamaiah woke up with the sounds in the temple. He heard sounds of different instruments and also the sound of the temple bells. Other people were sleeping and he did not want to disturb them. He saw Mani, already got up and waiting for him. So at the dawn both friends started for the darshan. They approached the mahadwaram in a few minutes and saw many people already there. Both friends took a dip in the pushkarini. Annamaiah felt great tranquillity and peace of mind in the waters and so he again took the holy dips. They walked straight to the Varahaswamy temple first and worshipped him as per the tradition.

There was a legendary story that the entire land on the hills was under the possession of Adivaraha and he gave permission to Venkateswara to stay in the hills. So as a mark of gratitude it was decided that whoever goes to worship Venkateswara should first visit Varaha. Accordingly, the first offerings are made to Lord Varahaswami. It was believed that with the visit to this temple after the holy dip in the swami pushkarini, and with the darshan of Adivaraha, one could get divine knowledge and wisdom. Tirumala was referred as Adivaraha kshetram while performing sankalpam. Traditionally, the first portion of the prasadam prepared at the vantasala, was sent to the temple and later to the temple of Srivenkateswara.

With fresh mind and serene thoughts Annamaiah proceeded to the temple of Srivenkateswara. He then entered the temple and saw the tower from inside the temple and it was awe-inspiring. First he bowed to Dwajastambham and prostrated before it. It was in front of the main temple. It looked tall and majestic. Then he entered the sanctum and it was a thrilling experience. It was illuminating and the smell of burning camphor was emitting a scintillating fragrance. The idol of Lord Venkateswara was like a lightening
and decorated with beautiful flowers and golden ornaments. Pilgrims were shouting, Govinda, Srinivasa and Srivenkateswara in their ecstasy. It was a lifetime wish for the pilgrims. Before the God, they forgot the pain and fatigue of their journey from hundreds of miles. Annamaiah’s heart was filled with supreme satisfaction. He was totally out of bounds and felt that his life ambition was fulfilled.

Annamaiah stood before the idol for some time. He experienced a rare joy. He saw the Chakra in one hand, the conch in the other, a ruby in the naval, a dagger hanging to his waist, anklets on his feet. There were gems in the earrings pearls on the forehead and the crown, studded with valuable diamonds, was brilliantly shining. His joy knew no bounds. In his high spirits he started singing, in sankaraabharanam ragam.

“Podagantimayya mimmu, purushottama, mammu
Nedayakavayya, konetirayadaa,

Korimaminulinitti kuladaivama, chala
Neerichi peddalicchina nidhanama
Gaaravinci dappideerchu kaalameeghamama maak;
Cheerruva chittamuloni Sreenivaasuda,

Bhavinpa kaivasamaina paarijathama mammu
Chevadeera kaachinatti chin tamani
Kaavinchi korikaliche kaamadhenuva mammu
Taavai rakshincheti dharanidhara,

Chedaneeka bratikinche siddhanamtrama, rogaa
Ladachirakshinchae divvyaooshadama
Badibaayaka tirige pranabandhuda mammu
Gadayinchinatti Sree Venkatanaadhudaa.

(Lord, we beseech you, you are our ancestral property, you are the dark cloud to quench our thirst, you are present in our heart of hearts, do not leave us any more. Your name is enough to dispel all diseases like a magical medicine. You are our protector and dear to our lives)

He was eloquent, spontaneous and the words were musical. His voice was soft and captivating. The pilgrims listened to this sankeerthana
with rapt attention and Hari could not resist his joy and after the song was finished, he took Annamaiah’s hands and put them on his head in great appreciation. The temple priests were highly pleased with the song and praised the talent of Annamaiah and presented him the holy water and blessed him. They also gave him the sweet pongal and prasadam of the Lord.

Ammamaiah gracefully accepted the prasadam and tasted it. He felt that it was the same that had been given to him by Mother Alamelu Manga, in the forest while he was climbing the hills. He gave the prasadam to his friend Hari. While eating the prasadam, Hari, applauded Annamaiah for the sweet song he sang before the idol.

“Anna, the song was wonderful and all the priests and pilgrims were speechless and wondering at your captivating voice”. Annamaiah took this compliment and smiled silently at him. He said in humility,

“Hari, Is it so? I thought your playing of the flute was more enchanting”

“Oh, no Anna, you are really great, and I am proud to be associated with you”.

After a while Annamaiah came out of the sanctum and went around the temple. There were tall trees of sampangi with golden yellow flowers. He folded his palms in respect to Vimana venkateswara, the golden image of the Lord on the dome of the Ananda Nilayam. There were so many small structures in the temple complex and he visited all of them. He offered prayers to Yaga Narasimha and Lord Janardana. He visited every part of the temple. Then he saw the different vehicles of the God used for different rituals. He also saw the room where the valuable garments and golden ornaments were preserved. There were parrots in the gold cages and always they chirped, Venkatesa and Govinda and the pilgrims were wondered at these beautiful sounds. The pilgrims were offering many kinds of gifts to the Lord, which included silver coins. The temple authorities were collecting these offerings and preserving them in a big silver vessel.

It was a memorable day for Annamaiah as he had experienced the eternal bliss with the divine appearance of God. Words also began to flow from him as songs. The song contained the mudra of Sri Venkateswara in the last stanza. He was pleased with these wonderful developments. He
got the admiration of the temple priests and also he found his friend, Hari. What more can he ask from God? Every thing seemed perfect from the morning, he felt neither hunger nor thirst, for he tasted the holy water given by the priests and tasted the prasadam. He spent almost two hours in the temple and came out to see the Sun shining brightly out side the temple.

Outside the temple, many people were moving here and there. A lot of activity was going on. Annamaiah did not know what to do after the darshan in the temple. He had no plans about his stay in Tirumala. There was a change in him, and he did not know earlier that he was such a good composer and singer. He believed that it was God's grace and he was a mere puppet, acting under the directions of the almighty.

Ammamaiah and Hari were walking alongside the mighty walls. Annamaiah tried to memorise the song he spontaneously rendered before the God. His memory power was so precise that he could repeat it word by word. Hari also heard these words, he said,

I never heard such a lyric in my life. The words were so perfect and precisely set as pearls in an ornament. It was only possible for such a great poets like you."

"Hari, to be frank, it was all the grace of the God. I feel that when I was before the God, my mind and soul were under his influence. I merely sounded his words". Annamaiah was humble and attributed his talent to the will of God. By birth, from his parents and also from close observation of the world Annamaiah, learnt many things. Though young, he was wise and acquired musical knowledge from by watching and participating in many of the cultural programmes organised in the village. Tallapaka also played a significant role in nurturing his immense potential. And also with the help of the Goddess, his literary talents have blossomed fully and now he was a master in the art.

Well, all human beings in this world are, no doubt, endowed with a particular talent. But except a few, all of them do not actually know their own capabilities and simply live and die, as common people. Those, enlightened individuals, who thrive to do something for the people, will achieve success and fulfil their wishes. The Gods and angels also shower blessings on them.
A lazy man cannot achieve anything though he is capable. He always thinks that he is capable but never works hard and finds satisfaction in thousands of excuses. A man who is really committed to success neither waits for the time nor leaves it for the fate. Fate never helps a person who believes in it. Luck never takes side on one who waits for it. Luck and fate, always help a man, who believes in sincere work.

Annamaiah was, in a way, worked for his success in a determined devotion. He wanted to serve the God as a matter of gratitude. He believed in total submission and really wanted to propagate the greatness of Him as a mere duty of an individual. When an individual aspires some thing and if he serves the God only to fulfil his ambitions, his bhakti is not genuine. Annamaiah wanted to serve Sri Venkateswara, as he believed that He was the creator of his life and his life was really owed to the God. He also believed that every individual had a duty to be loyal to the God. His bhakti was pure, sincere and selfless. When the life itself is the reward of the God for the human beings, what more can they expect from him?

There are many ways to serve the God. Glorifying the ways and deeds of Him is also one among them. When hundreds and thousands of devotees listen to a song, in which the actions of God are glorified, their minds and bodies will surely feel. Annamaiah understood this fully, as the pilgrims and priests experienced this feeling when he sang in the temple. His mind was clear; he must serve the God by propagating His ways and deeds with his songs, of simple words.

As Annamaiah's mind was with these thoughts, Hari was eagerly looking for a man, who, he thought, would be of great help to his friend.

THE MEETING OF HEARTS

Annamaiah and Hari reached the garden. It was on the south west side of the temple. There were also some houses nearer to the garden, in which the temple priests and other officials of the temple lived. Hari, in just two days, was well familiar with the streets and people. He was talkative and can make friendship with any body, if he desires within a short time, always chirpy and understood the situations well. Annamaiah, by nature, was an introvert and shy and never mingled with new people so easily.
The Singing Saint

Both the friends sat under a big tree. It was a very big tree and full of golden yellow flowers. Annamaiah was looking at the temple. Suddenly Hari called a person by his name and as the person was approaching them, he said,

"Anna, this was the man I am looking for. He is a nice man and a good player of Maddela. Yesterday, we became friends and last evening he had gone to see a relative on the hills. He is also an orphan like me."

"Well I will be happy to meet a talented person like him" In the meantime the person was before them and instantly took the hand of Hari into his, and said,

"I was eagerly waiting for you from this morning. I thought that you might have been in the temple, so I too waited for some time near the Mahadwaram. But I could not find you there. I could not find my relative also last evening and I had slept in one of the rest houses at the entrance of the way from down. I am happy to see you again." There was an element of happiness on his face to see Hari.

"Well, I thought that I was alone yesterday but luckily I met Anna, and we spent the night here under the tree. In the morning we went to the temple and have just returned."

While they were immersed in conversation, Annamaiah had the opportunity to observe the man. He was nearly twenty years of age and dark complexioned burly man. Locks of long, thick and black hair were falling on his face and he was laughing loudly most of the times. He was carrying maddela. Even while talking also he was carrying it on his shoulders. By appearance he looked rugged and unpolished but had a definite attraction in him. Annamaiah wondered as how Hari could make friends in a very short time and was talking with the man as if he knew him for years. It was really an art and Hari can get on anywhere in the world happily. After their salutations were finished, Hari turned towards Annamaiah and said,

"Anna, this is Mani, our good friend from now onwards. As I had already told you he is a wonderful player of Maddela. I was very much impressed by his talent. We both practiced for nearly two hours yesterday." He thus introduced Mani to Annamaiah and again turning towards Mani, he, in a low voice said,
"Mani, (though Mani was older than him he kept on calling him by name and called Annamaiah as Anna, means elder brother) we are really proud to be in the company of our Anna, (also Hari never called Annamaiah by name) a scholar and composer of songs and a mellifluous singer. The song that he sang today in the temple was superb and all the pilgrims and temple priests highly appreciated his unique talent."

Mani bowed his head in respect and showed high regard for Annamaiah as he looked scholarly and believed that he was from a highly religious and orthodox family. He was hesitant and was not as free as he was with Hari. Annamaiah perceived this and took the hand of Mani into his and said,

"Mani, don’t be hesitant, I am your younger brother along with Hari, and we all belong to the family of music". Mani, it seemed was visibly shaken by the words of Annamaiah and his respect for Annamaiah doubled.

It was a good union of three people. Hari proposed to have a session of music in the garden. It was a good idea, and the remaining two also immediately agreed. Hari took his flute and Mani, his maddela and they sat under the tree with Annamaiah in the centre, Mani on his right side and Hari on the left. Annamaiah began spontaneously with a song. He could see before him the golden dome of the temple. He was singing at the high pitch of his voice.

"Eduta evvaru leru, Antha Vishnu mayame,
Vadalaka hari dasavargamaiva variki,"

"See, Nobody is in front of you
Every thing and everywhere it is Vishnu,
For those, who submit before Him,
And those join as His worshippers.

The idols of the Lord are everywhere,
All the letters of this world are His names,
All the tastes are His prasadam,
For those, who knew this truth;
Sri Venkateswara is filled in every heart,
The entire nature is his magic,
No more on this earth, than him,
For those, who worship and immerse in Him."

The words were simple, the meaning was clear and musical flow was reaching the hearts straightaway. Mani was providing the rhythm with his instrument and Hari, playing the flute along with the song. Music was flowing like a waterfall from the mountain ranges. When they had started the song, no body was with them but after Annamaiah completed it, there was a big crowd and all of them were awe struck by the feast of music they had never heard before. The language was simple and can be easily understood. It was the first song, that Annamaiah sang out side the temple. Only the difference was, that in the temple, the audience were learned and privileged, but here in the garden, there were only common people who are illiterates and mostly of working class.

They were used to listen to poetry and Sanskrit slokas. The Telugu poetry was mostly confined to metered poems and most of the words also from Sanskrit. The more these poets use high-sounding words, the higher they got the appreciation and rewards. The ‘padakavita’ means using simple words and can be sung easily by the common people was considered low and not suitable for courts. Annamaiah chose this medium not to please the kings and nobles but to reach the hearts of thousands of people. He took the message of the God to everybody.

The people were expecting some more songs from Annamaiah and his two friends. But it was already late and Hari asked Mani to pack up his musical instrument. It was only a signal from Hari and Annamaiah did not know this. Hari was very clever and did not want too much strain for Annamaiah at this stage. More over it was afternoon and they were hungry. Till now everything was going on smoothly and they did not face any kind of problem. It was the will of the God and for those who believe in Him, He shows the way and looks after them. Some times, or, He sends His own angels to help His worshippers. Annamaiah thought that he was alone but there were many people around him. Annamaiah some times, simply wondered at all these developments and people who were with him, he concluded that Chenchaiah, Matamma and others were the angels sent by the God to show him the way, but not ordinary mortals. They had played their part perfectly and disappeared when they were not needed any more.
To their surprise, an elderly man still stayed there in front of them. He was nearly sixty years old. He was looking strong and healthy. He approached Annamaiah, slowly patted on his back, looked highly appreciative and with an emotion filled voice, he said,

"Dear young men, I had never heard such a good song. I firmly believe that this is a new beginning on the Sevenhills. You must continue this, for the thousands of people who come here for the Lord of Seven hills. Who are you? Are you the angels of the God? I am not able to believe my ears, it was really enchanting and captivating." Annamaiah was really moved by these words and said,

"Ayya, it is all your blessing. We are new to this place and looking for shelter here. We want to serve the God by singing songs on Him. I am from a far away village; Tallapaka and my friends are also will be with me. You seem be an elder, kindly help us in our task. We need a small help from you. Can you provide a place for us to live in? We want to serve the God and sing songs on him"

Oh, why not, you really deserve a place on the hills. My elder son is an official in the temple. Let me tell you that you will be provided with a plot near the garden”.

"Thank you, very much sir" Annamaiah said in a tone of relief.

The old man then asked the three members to have lunch at his house. They were touched by the words of the old man and followed him. They were in the house in a few minutes. The house was an old one, big and spacious. It was lunchtime and they were hungry. They finished lunch and were seated on a raised platform under a tree in the house. Soon they were introduced to the elder son who had come for the lunch. The old man called his son by name and said,

"Krishnaiah, these three boys want to stay in Tirumala. Each one of them is endowed with musical talent. He is Annamaiah, a singer and also composer of songs; the other two boys are good musicians. I never heard such a wonderful song in my life. It is good that they want to serve the God and stay on the hills. What do you say?"

"Ayya, God will be happy to see his devotees serve Him in their own different ways. Let them stay in our house for some more days. I will
talk to the temple officials to grant a piece of land in the garden to build a
house for them."

Annamaiah and his friends really felt happy. For some days they
stayed in the outhouse of Krishnaiah, the temple official, for a few days. In
the garden a small hut was erected for them and they shifted to it. Though
the house was small, they had so much of space out side the house, and a
few days they erected fencing around the house, making the premises
spacious. They planted many flower plants and trees in the compound.
Though, they were busy with all these works, every day they practised
singing and music and twice in a day they entered the temple to worship
God.

In a short time they were familiar with all the temple priests and
managers of the temple. They got free access to all the temple rituals and
Annamiah had almost become a leader in conducting the rituals of the
temple. They ate the prasadam twice a day and it was enough for them and
they never thought of any other food.

One morning when they were in the house, Annamaiah having
completed his bath, sat to perform Gayatri mantra, when Hari came to him
and told that a man was waiting for him. After finishing the ritual Annamaiah
came out to see the man. He was nearly of the same age of him. He was
sharp and seemed active and well educated. Annamaiah asked him to sit on
the cot and enquired about the purpose of his visit. The man seemed pleased
with the courtesy shown to him and said,

"My name is Guravachari and every body calls me Guru. I came
with my parents to the hills almost ten years ago when I was only seven
years old. On the day, when there were thousands of people congregated
before the temple, we were in the crowd, I was separated from my parents.
Alone and weeping I was taken to Papanasam by an old man. He looked
after me well as he lived in a hut near the lake with his wife. I call them Avva
and Tata (Children call their maternal grand father and grand mother as Tata
and Avva) Tata made me to learn all the Vedas and I learnt to read and write
Sanskrit and Telugu well. He used to recite Slokas and poems and used to
write them on leaves and walls. All the people appreciated me for my beautiful
handwriting. The temple priests were very much pleased with my by
education and assigned me to look after the facilities for the pilgrims. I
brought my Avva and Tata from the faraway hut and now we are living in a house near the Varahaswamy temple”.

He was almost unstoppable till Hari interrupted him,

“Yes, I have seen you several times in the temple. Once I saw you counting the coins and another time distributing prasadam to the pilgrims”.

“You are right, they ask me to do many kinds of duties and they know that I am eager to shoulder any responsibility they assign to me”.

So saying he took out a long leaf and read something. When Annamaiah, Hari and Mani heard this they were amazed and first could not believe their own ears. It was the song that Annamaiah had sung in the temple before the idol. When did he write that? They were simply wondered and again looked at the leaf. Word by word, letter by letter, the entire song was written clearly and legibly.

“You are really good. When did you write it?” Annamaiah asked him.

“Well sir, I was in the temple with many devotees on that day. The people were highly appreciating the song when they were leaving the temple. I went home, recollected it and wrote it on this leaf. In fact I wanted to meet you on that day but Tata was not well for the last one week and I was confined to the house looking after him. Today I saw you in the temple and when I enquired, I was told that you live here and I came to see you. I was also told by the temple authorities that you are singing songs in the garden also.” Guru completed and he was talking as if somebody was chasing him.

Annamaiah looked at him with high admiration. No doubt he was blessed with a high degree of memory power. It would be highly useful if a talented man like him to be in their company. Annamaiah is endowed with the power of singing spontaneously with a perfect blend of ragam and talam. Meanwhile Guru himself revealed his intentions.

“Sir, Your songs and music are highly captivating. Never before, people had the chance to listen to these songs. You may not know that people on the hills are humming your beautiful words. Sir, I have a desire to be along with you and note down the songs and write them so that you may also read your songs and sometimes repeat them”.

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What more can Annamaiah ask for? His songs are written down neatly. Annamaiah asked Hari and Mani to sit with their instruments, began to sing a Sanskrit sankeerthana.

"Tattadhi timi Tom Tom.. Taka dhimi Thom Titti titti"... it went on,

Annamaiah was well versed in Sanskrit also and also in a way wanted to test the memory power and writing talents of Guru. The song was finished and in a few minutes Guru repeated every thing word by word. He said that he would write it exactly and bring it on the next day. Annamaiah felt that the man would be useful in writing his songs for preservation. Thus, just in few days, highly talented youngsters formed a group to enlighten and preach the people effectively through a new way, songs in praise of the Lord.

GURU’S BLESSING

Ghana Vishnu preached Vaishnava philosophy and led a simple life on the hills. He presided over the Vaishnava rituals and commanded a great respect in the temple. Vaishnavism totally believes and worships Lord Sree Mahavishnu as the chief deity and was founded by Sri Ramanujacharya. He was a great scholar and toured entire country on foot and did a great service to propagate the philosophy. His followers from generation to generation also took his message into the people. Ghana Vishnu, an authority on the visishta advaitham, was mainly associated with the development of Vaishnavism, particularly on the holy abode of Seven hills.

Though the temple on the seven hills was considered a centre for Vaishnavism, all people visited the shrine. Ghana Vishnu’s discourses influenced many people to opt for vaishnavism and they were given pancha samskara deeksha at a simple ceremony in the temple. The pancha samskaras are,

"Tapamu” (Pressing the conch shell and wheel on the shoulders)  
"Pundramu” (Having stripes on the shoulders and chest) 
"Namamu” (to be called as sreenivasadasa after the deeksha)  
"Mantramu” (Chanting Om namo Narayanaya) and, 
"Yagamu” ( performing aradhana for Sreevishnu)
A person should, follow all these samskaras and help in propagating Vaishnavism.

That was a dwadasi day. Ghana Vishnu completed his normal evening rituals, took his usual food consisting of few fruits and milk, and went to bed. It was an auspicious day and it was raining outside his ashramam. He heard a big sound of thunder and also a lightning. It was a heavy downpour and the wind was strong. It was the beginning of a new season. It was sultry and he could not get sleep. He was thinking about his duties. He was ageing and becoming frail and his vision was also slowly blurring. He did so much of service to propagate the philosophy of vaishnavism in his own way. But, he thought, it was not enough. They could not take the philosophy into the hearts of common people. His mind was fully occupied with these thoughts. He wished to see Vaishnavism to flourish leaps and bounds and reach all corners of the society. He taught Vishishtadwaita tatwam to many people but he was not satisfied, as his disciples could not take it, as he had expected. As a person of integrity and of high moral values, he believed in practising rather than preaching. As true vaishnavite, he was a truthful and never deviated from the basic principles of the philosophy he taught. He was waiting for a right kind of disciple to take the philosophy of Ramanuja after his death. Ghana Vishnu believed firmly that great people would be born only at the right and ripe time. The society had to wait to see such great souls.

Ghana Vishnu felt he was sleepy and in a few minutes he was slipped into in a deep sleep. In his deep sleep, he had a dream. It was grand spectacle in which he saw the God, like a lightning uttering in a celestial voice,

“Tomorrow you will see a boy, short and handsome, singing songs on me in the temple, born to glorify my deeds. Take him under your care and give him pancha samskara deeksha on behalf of me. All your wishes will be fulfilled”. So saying he disappeared.

It was a great moment in the life of Ghana Vishnu. He woke up and realised that it was a dream. Will it be true? He wondered. To his great surprise he found the replicas of conch shell and the wheel on his bedside. He respectfully took into his hands and pressed them to his eyes and kept
them in the prayer room. The sky was clear outside and the moon was shining brightly. It was almost the end of the night. Gentle cool breeze was blowing. He did not sleep afterwards. He waited for the dawn.

It was the brightest morning of the season with the Sun shining very brightly. It rained heavily in the night and the drops are still seen on the leaves. After completing his morning rituals Ghana Vishnu took the signets of God and proceeded towards the temple. When he approached the temple, the priests and other managers of the temple greeted him with respect. He entered the sanctum, offered prayers and ate the small portion of prasadam offered to him. He made his way towards the sampangi pradakshinam and sat on the stone platform.

Ghana Vishnu then heard a voice from the other side. He guessed some thing and slowly turned to his right and approached the place from where the song was heard. Many people were listening to a boy who was singing a song in praise of the Lord. When he approached the spot, the priests wanted to make a way for him to come to the front side of the singer. But the old sage silently signaled them not to move suddenly as it might disturb the singer. He listened to the entire song. Never before he heard such a song in praise of God. It was a feast of music and rhythm. Mani and Hari were also sitting on either side playing their instruments.

Ghana Vishnu saw Annamaiah and immediately remembered the celestial voice he had heard in his dream. The singer was the boy he was looking for. He was short, dark complexioned and looking handsome. When the song was over Ghana Vishnu approached Annamaiah and affectionately looked at him. It was a strange experience for both of them. Ghana Vishnu was the first to appreciate the boy,

"My boy, what is your name?"

Annamaiah bowed to the feet of the old sage. He was totally spellbound by the words of the sage. With all humility he said his name.

"Annamaiah"

The sage was pleased by the obedience of the boy and said,

"You are destined to serve the God and the society by your songs and take the Sri Vaishnavism to every heart. Shall I make the impressions of Vishnu on your shoulders?"
Annamaiah saw Vishnu himself in the old sage. He thought he was blessed by the divine grace. He was really out of words and was in tears.

Annamaiah was taken to the Sri Ramanuja Mandapam. Arrangements were made to conduct the ceremony. All the Sri Vaishnavites assembled at the hall and they were happy to be a part of the ceremony. With the chanting of ‘Namo Narayanaya’ in the midst of nadaswaram and beating of drums, Annamaiah was given the Pancha Samskara and took the oath to live as a true Vaishnavite and serve God.

After the ceremony Annamaiah fell at the feet of Ghana Vishnu and took his blessings. Ghana Vishnu gently lifted him up and said, “Annamaiah, from now onwards you will be called as Annamacharya. It is rare honour bestowed on highly learned and enlightened scholars. You are the youngest to achieve this honour. We are pleased to call you and God is on your tongue. You will be singing songs in praise of the Lord. These songs will be known as sankeerthanas and conduct the sakteerthana Yagnam with at least a sankeerthana every day”.

There was an atmosphere of happiness among the Sri Vaishnavites on the hills. Annamaiah sat with all the Sri Vaishnavites and ate the food offered to mark the occasion. It was a great turning point in his life. Followed by many Sri Vaishnavites Annamaiah went to his cottage. Hari, Mani and Guru were very happy to see Annamaiah becoming such a respectable figure in Tirumala in such a short time. They were also felt happy to be associated with him.

In the evening Annamaiah went to the temple. He was greeted there with all respect and accorded with special privilege. He was escorted to the sanctum and he was offered the prasadam. At twilight he left the temple to his cottage along with Hari and Mani. Normally after eating the prasadam, they practise for some time under the big tree near the cottage. On that day also they practiced for nearly two hours and retired to bed.

All the four were in a small room in their cottage. They were lying on the floor and in a few minutes Hari and Mani were sleeping. Annamaiah could not get sleep. He was, in a way, happy at the turn of events. Who was he just a fortnight back? A village boy under the care of his mother, dreaming
to reach the Lord's abode, now, the privileged devotee of the Lord of the hills in such a short time. What a transformation it has been! Unbelievable. Blessed by the Goddess, he was the word master and word flow from his mouth as water from the falls. He never thought of searching for words, they came naturally from him. The blessings of the Vaishnavite sage infused in him a new confidence. He was happy and what more he can ask for from God? Slowly he slipped into a deep and happy sleep.

The next morning they were ready before the dawn. They heard the beating of drums. It was the wake up call for the Lord. It was still dark, the lamps, lit in the temple emit a glow and that was seen from the distance. Annamaiah took his tampura and followed by his two mates approached the temple main door. Two big torches were lit on the either side of the main door. They were very bright and only the people associated with the temple rituals were entering. At the mahadwaram, the wooden door was shining with the glow of the torches. Annamaiah entered through the door and the beating of the drums continued. The priests and others were in the sanctum. He sat before the glass mirrors and began to sing,

"Vinnapalu vinavale vinthavinthalu,
Pannagapu domatera paikettavelayyaah"
(Oh, God this my request, please raise the net and wake up)
"Tellavare jamekke, Devathalu munulu
Allanantha adigo vare,
Challani tammirekula, sarasapu kannulu,
Mella mellane vicchi melukonavelayya
(It is the dawn, all the sages and angels are waiting for you, Open your eyes)

Garuda kinnara yaksha kaminulu gamulai,
Avirahapu geethamula vinthalapala,
Pari pari vidhamula paderu ninnadivo,
Siri mogamu terachi chittaginchcha velayya.
(Many garuda, kinnera, yaksha and others are singing hymns in many ways, Please get up and listen to them)
"Ponkapu seshadulu tumburu naradadulu,
Pankajabhavadulu nee paadalu cheri,
Ankelanunnu lechi, Alamulumanganu,
Venkatesuda reppalu vicchi chuchi levayya.”

(Sages like Tumbura and Narada and all other saints are eagerly waiting for you, Kindly open your eyelids and get up from the sleep)

Annamacharya always liked to sing in the dawn. It gave him scintillating experience. He composed many songs especially to waken up the God in the morning.

Lord Srinivasa heard the song in his sleep. He could not sleep further. The priests suddenly noticed a glow on the idol after the song was over. They firmly believed that the God woke up by the song of Annamaiah. By then Annamaiah finished the song and saw the first ray of the Sun falling on the Golden temple. It was a great experience for him. Guru, who was seated beside Annamaiah, along with Hari and Mani, noted down the song and memorized it to write it on a leaf to be preserved.

It had become a daily ritual for Annamaiah to sing a song in praise of the God. One day he would sing in the temple and while on the other day he would sing in the garden. At any place it was, hundreds of people gathered with in seconds to hear these songs. In a very short time his name was spread to faraway places. It became an added privilege to listen to the songs of Annamaiah for every pilgrim visiting the hills. Soon word spread in far and away that the songs of Annamaiah were a new sensation.

Guru neatly wrote all these songs on the leaves and preserved them as a bundle. In a few months there were so many bundles. Annamaiah visited all the places around the hills. Wherever he went, the three people accompanied him. He sang songs at secluded places, amidst hundreds of people, in the temple and on at almost all the places on the hills. Sometimes he sang in the morning at dawn, and on a few occasions he sang in the middle of the day and on certain festive occasions he sang in the nights also. He never turned down the requests of pilgrims from faraway places to sing a song for them. On such requests he took a leaf from the bundle and sang the song, in a way, the second time in a day. This occurred rarely as he never wanted to disappoint the devotees. After the song, sometimes people fell at his feet, and sometimes they offered him gifts spontaneously but he
never accepted these gifts and politely used to say that the right place for these gifts is the feet of the God.

On certain occasions Ghana Vishnu used to see him while singing a song. In the presence of the bold sage, Annamaiah felt highly privileged and on such rare occasions his voice appeared divine and celestial. One day Ghana Vishnu was ill and Annamaiah came to know this. He went to the sage’s ashram and found the sage weak. Yet there was a glow in his face. He invited Annamaiah to his fold, put his hand on his head and said.

“Annamacharya, how blessed I am to be the guru of such a Vaishnavite like you, I feel myself ennobled with a disciple like you”. While saying, his voice trembled.

Annamiajah took the hands of the old sage into his and kept them on his head. He then adjusted the stings of his tampura and began to sing,

Vinarohagyam Vishnu katha,
Venubalamidivo Vishnu katha.”

He sang the holiness of the name of Vishnu and all the audience were spellbound to hear the song. People were moved to see tears in the eyes of Ghana Vishnu. He, though not in good condition, slowly went to Annamaiah and embraced him and said,

“You are younger than me and you treat me as your guru, so I cannot fold my hands before you, but you deserve it. Lord Vishnu is on your lips. Your life is blessed. Live for hundred years to sing the Vishnu katha in the nuke and corner of this entire world. He heartily blessed Annamaiah. After listening to the ‘Vishnu katha’ by Annamaiah, he felt highly relieved and comfortable. Such was the power of the song of Annamaiah.

ON THE HILLS

Annamiaiah became an important functionary in the temple rituals and the priests consulted him on all the matters in conducting the festivals and the various processions. He had a direct access and his word was final in these matters. The songs became so popular that people used to request Annamaiah to sing again for them. He never disappointed them and used to sing the songs whenever pilgrims requested him. He believed that it was a service that he could render to the Lord.
He treated every pilgrim with respect, never showed any discrimination. For him all are equal before God and in the temple. He disliked the special treatment shown to the dignitaries and wealthy in the temple. What mattered to him was pure devotion and total submission before God. He sang songs on the God and in each song he left the impression of Venkata in the last stanza of all his songs.

After a few months his residence was shifted to one of the big houses to the back of the temple. The temple authorities requested him to shift his residence, as the small hut in which they were living was faraway and lonely. Some times pilgrims used to visit him in his house and requested him to sing songs. Mani, Hari and Guru remained with him.

One day it was raining heavily on the hills. It continuously rained for three days. Many pilgrims were held up on the hills. There were free rest houses on the hills for the poor pilgrims but all of them were full. The rich were put up in the cottages and they had enough provisions for their food. They enjoyed the weather very much. The dark clouds appeared so close that the people felt they were amidst them. All the streams and lakes were overflowing and it seemed water everywhere. The suffering of the poor was really pathetic. They had neither food nor shelter.

Some poor pilgrims were under the big trees taking shelter. In summer, if such a shelter was provided it would be happy but it was utterly unbearable under the trees against the fury of the active monsoon. Still some people were under the trees.

Annamaiyah was in his house. He saw it raining continuously. The strong gales were ferocious and the big trees were swinging with strange and dreadful sounds. It was fearful and the sound of the occasional thunders also added to this plight.

Suddenly he saw people running on the street. He did know the reason for their panic. He asked Hari, who was sitting close to him,

"Hari, did you see people running in this heavy rain?"

"Yes, I am also thinking about it. Shall I go and find it out, Anna,"

"See if there is any trouble to any body in this fury of nature"

Hari immediately rushed out and in a few minutes he came back. He was completely drenched in the rain and was shivering. The wind was
heavy and chilly. Annamaiah saw him coming and when he entered Annamaiah gave him his towel and said,

"The rain, it seems, is heavier than I expected. Take this towel and dry yourself first",

Hari took the towel and while drying himself, he said,

"Oh, I had never seen such a rain in my life before. It is pouring outside. The wind is heavy and the trees are being uprooted. Those people were running before us were actually running to see the people who were under the trees. It was a miraculous escape for them. They were under the trees when those two trees collapsed on them. Poor people, they were shivering with chill and fear. They were all the way from faraway place in the east. They were without food and shelter for these three days"

"Where did it happen, Hari?" Annamaiah enquired.

"Near the road junction at the way down wards, Anna,"

Ammamaiah felt very upset and immediately rushed out of the house. Hari was also following him. They reached the place in a few minutes and saw the trees uprooted by the strong gale winds. Many people were standing near the trees. The rain seemed unabated. Nearly twenty pilgrims with their children were standing under the nearby trees. Annamaiah straightaway went to them and enquired,

"Why are you standing here in this severe rain and winds?"

One man among them came forward. He told in a shivering voice,

"Ayya, two days back we came here. We are from a far away place. We came here for the darshan of God. So we far we had a good time but we are on the way to our village. Suddenly rain came, we then approached the people for shelter but we did not get. We took shelter under these huge trees. But the wind and rain lashed and we could not keep our provisions safe. Now we have nothing to eat and feed our hungry children. Where ever went, we met with the same reply that all the rest houses were full and no place for us. We don't know what to do now" he was very much annoyed with their pathetic situation.

Ammamaiah understood the situation completely. There was no way for them. He decided to help them. Then he loudly said,

"Don't fear, come with me to our house, you can stay there till the rain stops." So saying he hurried them. Hari watched this and he understood
the intensions of his master. Annamaiah led the way and others followed.

It was still raining heavily. It was late afternoon and Annamaiah
did not take his lunch. He led a Spartan life and ate very little and sometimes
used to skip his food. Mostly they took food in the temple with the temple
authorities and there was no need for them to have provisions and vessels
for cooking. Most of the time they were inside the temple or wandering in
the nearby hills. They spent their time in the house practising music.
Whenever they felt hungry, Hari used to bring them prasadams from the
temple.

They reached the house in a very short time as they were almost
running. When all the people approached the house Annamaiah signalled
them to come inside,

"Don't hesitate, come inside and treat the house as yours." He
then asked his friends to help the pilgrims.

"Mani, bring the towels from the wooden box and distribute to
them. First let them dry themselves and feel comfortable." Then turning
towards Guru he said,

"Guru, you and Hari immediately go to the temple and bring
whatever food available there. Tell them that it is for the pilgrims. Go, go
hurry up,"

In the meantime the poor pilgrims felt comfortable after a while.
But they were hungry, as they did not eat food from the previous night.
They were eagerly waiting for the arrival of food from the temple.

When people feel hungry, they want to eat anything available at
that moment. They can wait for sometime or can temporarily forget about it
when immersed in any activity. But if they wait for it, the waiting becomes
too longer and think only about it. They heard Annamaiah asking his friends
to bring food and they were eagerly expecting the food to be brought. So
they were eager and the hunger seemed increased by every minute. This is
natural for any human being. Annamaiah too was, in fact, waiting for his
friends to come with food. But he was sceptical about the prospect of
getting food or prasadam at that odd hour. He was only thinking of other
options. Time, naturally appears longer when in waiting and mind is centred
on one thought only.
Meanwhile Hari and Guru returned empty handed as feared by Annamaiah. “It is a testing time for me” Annamaiah thought.

When asked Hari told,

“Anna, they said that all the prasadam had been finished in the morning itself. It would be available only in the evening”.

“Well, come with me” so saying he hurriedly went out in the rain, even without covering his head, followed by Guru and Hari.

Annamaih straightaway went inside the temple. The head priest and others were seated near the dwajasthabham. They found that Annamaiah was in a hurry. He came to them and folded his hands with respect for the head priest. The head priest was affectionate towards Annamaiah and asked him,

“What my boy, why are you in such a hurry in this weather? Though he called him ‘boy’ affectionately, he had great admiration and respect for Annamaiah.

“Swami, I need a bag of rice and some provisions now.”

They were surprised beyond their imagination.

“Bag of rice, in this rain, and for what?” They expected rightly that certainly it they were not for Annamaiah. He never asked anything for himself and they knew that.

Annamaih told them everything about the plight of the poor pilgrims and how he called them to his house. He also said that they were waiting for the food eagerly.

When Annamaiah was saying these words they were looking at each other in dismay. How can they say ‘no’ to Annamaiah, who had already acquired the status of an Acharya and a chosen disciple of Ghana Vishnu, a highly respected Vaishnavite in the Tirumala hills? But they seemed somewhat reluctant, as it would set a precedent. They were highly orthodox and never deviated from the traditional customs and practices.

They were of the firm opinion that every thing in the temple belonged to God and ordinary mortals have nothing to do or interfere in such matters. They were in dilemma whether to oblige him or not.

“But Annamaiah”, the head priest calmly said, “The provisions are meant for the Prasadam of the God. How can we use them for ordinary
mortals? Will it not be a sin? Never before we used the rice and other provisions for any other purpose than preparing prasadam. Think over, you know everything." They could not say directly that they are reluctant to part with the provisions meant for the God. They firmly expected that Annamaiah would understand their position.

"Swami" Annamaiah said calmly, "God is everywhere and in every creature. Can he tolerate if any one of his creatures suffering from hunger? Service to the needy is, surely, the service to the God. Have you not heard the saying, 'Manavaseve madhavaseva'? God will surely be happy if his devotees are fed."

The priests were satisfied with these words.

Annamaiah, with the help of some temple workers and his friends carried the provisions to his house. The rain seemed heavier now. On the way Hari collected some big mud vessels and in a few minutes they collected all the material needed for food. Annamaiah and Hari knew how to prepare food in a simple way as they had seen and helped in preparing food on the roadside while they were on the way to Tirumala with Chenchaiah and his family.

In their hurry they had forgotten to collect firewood. Hari came out to see all the wood in the courtyard wet and lay in the water. "What to do now?" Annamaiah looked at the roof and found the beams. The wooden beams were neatly carved and had many designs on them. They were of sandalwood and looked beautiful. Nothing was more precious for him at that time than to serve food for the needy. He ordered the men to pull out four of them from the roof. With much difficulty they pulled out the wooden beams. The fire was lit and preparations were started for the late lunch.

All this did not take much time. While the rice and other items were on the fire, outside a severe lashing of rain was going on. Annamaiah saw the children crying in the laps of their mothers. Also the elders were waiting eagerly for the food to be served. All the people were in the hall. Annamaiah called Hari and Mani into the hall. These two people had a fine knack of understanding Annamaiah’s mind. They sat on either side of him with their instruments. Annamaiah began to sing a beautiful song for them.

The people immersed in the song deeply. Strange! The children stopped crying and they also listened to the song.

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It was a folk song that pleased everybody. The songs of Annamaiah depended on his mood and the taste of the audience. Whenever he noticed that the audience were illiterates and children he would go for folk and rhythmic songs. That pleased their taste. The children particularly liked the mannerisms of Mani on his Maddela. While playing, his hair also swung in a particular way. Annamaiah’s songs mostly consisted of three stanzas but sometimes they were beyond that number, it all depended on the situation.

The song was completed and the people felt that the musical feast was over. Then Guru came and announced that the lunch was ready. Annamaiah first prayed God silently in his heart and asked all the people to sit. Hari put plates of banyan leaves before them and Annamaiah himself served the food for all the pilgrims. The rice was hot and the cereal paste was nice. People ate heartily. While serving to children Annamaiah felt that he was serving to God. It was a nice feeling for him.

Out side, the rain was still pouring. Annamaiah told them,

“ It seems the rain is heavier now. Stay here as long as you wish. When you go home, your lands will be full of water and you will have bumper harvest this year.”

The pilgrims were pleased by these words. They were eager to reach their homes to begin the agricultural works, but the heavy rain and gales made them helpless and forced them to stay on the hills. But they were now happy to be the guests of Annamaiah and they tasted the hospitality of a great devotee of the Lord.

The next day the clouds cleared and the rain almost stopped. In the morning they could see the Sun peeping through the clouds. The dark and threatening clouds disappeared and within hours the hills seemed full of activity and bustling with pilgrims. After the lunch, the pilgrims took leave from Annamaiah and proceeded for their destinations. Annamaiah blessed their children and wished them to have a good monsoon. While leaving, everybody folded their hands in respect. In a few minutes the house was normal and silent and Annamaiah and his friends remained. But in those two days, they served the needy and felt that was a good opportunity provided by Annamaiah for them. In the company of Annamaiah they felt that real service to God is helping fellow human beings who are in distress. They remembered the song of Annamaiah fondly.
“Teliya cheekatiki deepamettagavale kani,
Pedda velugu lopaliki velugela?”
(When it is total dark, better light the small lamp, where is the need when there is big light?)

“Arayanaapunnuniki abhayameevalorgani
Ervaina sukhini kavanela
Varatha poyedivani vadideeyavalegaka
Dari vani teviyang thanela?”

“Miti leni papakarmuni kavavalegani,
Hitaverugu punyuni kavanela?
Tatiheenu krupachupa Tiruvenkateswarudu
Tati kavakundina thanela?”
(The poor and the wretched and the weak have to be protected.
Where is the need to help the blessed and strong?)

It is better to serve the needy and sinner as it would benefit him.)
Annamaiah sang what he believed and practiced what he believed.
The word had already spread on the hills that Annamaiah looked after the poor pilgrims in his house, who were struck up in the rain and strong winds under the trees.

In the evening, when they entered the temple, the priests looked at them with admiration.

THE NEW HUNDI

Ten years rolled by and there were many changes in Tirumala.
Annamacharya, as every body called him, became the most popular singer and composer. His name and fame spread everywhere and thousands of pilgrims listened to his songs. Guru followed him in all his singing programmes. He neatly wrote the songs on leaves and bundled them. He preserved these bundles in Annamacharya’s house in big wooden boxes.

People from faraway places visited Tirumala and offered whatever they could offer to the God. Lord Venkateswara is also called as Vaddi kasula Swamy, means a God full of money. There was a story about this.
Once Venkateswara approached Kubera, considered to the richest angel. Even Gods and Goddesses borrowed money from him. Venkateswara
needed money for his marriage. Kubera gave him money for interest. That was a huge amount and Venkateswara agreed to pay in instalments. But as the amount was so big that even for years it could not be repaid. So the devotees of Lord Venkateswara offered him money so that the amount of Kubera could be paid. Devotees offered gold, silver, copper and all kinds of coins to God. Some pilgrims offer everything on their body and this offering was called as Niluvudopidi. The pilgrims also offered their hair and they tonsure their heads neatly. Newly married couples come to Tirumala to offer prayers. When they are blessed with son or daughter they again visit the temple to fulfil their vow.

In the sanctum a big iron box was installed for these offerings. After a week the priests opened the box and counted all the valuable articles. Annamacharya used to sing songs sitting near this iron box on certain occasions. He felt that there should be a proper place for these offerings. Many a time he thought of it but that idea did not materialise. He firmly believed that proper time had not come.

When one evening Annamacharya was walking alone after the usual prayer in the temple, suddenly it started to rain. He was amidst tall trees and the place was towards the west of the temple. Also there was a big lake full of water and he usually come to that spot for evening walk. As the rain was heavy, Annamacharya stood under a tall tree. He expected the rain to be light but in a short time it turned out to be a heavy downpour. It became totally dark and the way was muddy and slippery. Annamacharya started to walk back to his house in spite of the rain.

Annamacharya was walking on the mud and slippery way. He walked slowly and carefully looking down the way. There was a lightning and he saw some shining object on the way. Again it was darkness and he could not see the object. He waited there and expected the lightning again. As expected, again there was a lightning and this time he clearly found the shining small object. He bent down and took this small shining object into his hands. He put this in his right palm and again waited for the lightning. He was surprised to find that it was a small and round gold coin. Suddenly an idea flashed in his mind. He touched this coin to his eyes respectfully and tied it in his towel. Slowly he walked to his house in that darkness.
He put that gold coin in his puja room before the small idol of God Vishnu. After the supper he practised singing for some time along with Hari and Mani. The rain stopped and again white clouds were clearly visible. Before going to bed, they discussed the morning duties they had to perform. Usually they discuss their plans and schedules in the night. The plans include where to meet and where the singing programmes to be conducted the next day. They plan their programmes in such a way that they cover all the places on the hills to conduct music programmes.

Most of the times they sang in the temple, sometimes they choose places where they think more pilgrims are assembled. The places include, the garden, pushkarini, on southeast side of mahadwaram, and some times the places around Tirumala. They did not bother about the number of people and time. Annamacharya sang with the same intensity and devotion. The scholars as well as commoners were highly influenced by these songs. In some of the Sanskrit songs, the meaning and literary talents were enjoyed by the scholars and the rhythm was applauded by the commoners who could not understand even a single word in the entire song. That was the magic of Annamacharya’s song. The folk songs contained the situations and words exactly suited to the commoners and the scholars appreciated the musical knowledge in such songs.

Annamacharya woke up the next morning before the dawn as usual. He turned towards the east and looked at the temple. It was his habit to see the temple till the first rays of the Sun falls on the golden gopuram. He also heard the beating of the drums from the temple. It was Friday and on that day certain special pujas are performed. It was Dasami, considered an auspicious day to begin any work. It was believed that any work started on that day would be highly successful.

After completing his prayers in his puja room, Annamacharya started towards the temple along with Hari and Mani. It was a beautiful sunrise after the rain the previous day. The Sun seemed brighter than usual. Hundreds of pilgrims were already in the temple. Annamacharya entered the sanctum and had the darshan of the Lord. He then stopped at the mirrors and started to sing a beautiful song.

“Kanti sukravaramu”
All the pilgrims passing into the sanctum were listening to the song. The head priest was also present on that day and was listening. The head priest himself was an ardent admirer of Annamacharya. After the song finished, Annamacharya stood up and straightaway went to the head priest, folded his hands in respect. Annamacharya developed this habit of folding hands in respect for the elders from his childhood. He told the head priest about his plan to change the place of the offerings.

"But, Acharya, traditionally this has been the place. If we change,"

"Nothing will happen. Change is natural and there is change everywhere. To change is the basic principle of the nature. If the change is for the better, better change it now. The development and progress of this world depends on the change only." Annamacharya gently explained about the necessity of change.

The head priest and other priests immediately consulted the temple officials and all of them decided to follow Annamacharya.

Annamacharya then asked them to bring a new piece of white cloth. When the cloth was brought, he put it before the idol for a few moments, applied pasupu and kumkuma on the cloth. He then took a round copper rod and tied the cloth on it. All were watching this with anxiety. Then he chose the place to the north of the sanctum and tied it to the roof with the help of temple workers. It was hanging like a swing above the heads. Anybody wanted to put the offering has to raise his hand to put inside it.

As all the priests, temple authorities, workers and pilgrims watched, Annamacharya made three rounds to this and threw the gold coin in it. Then he prostrated before it and heartily offered prayers. He named it ‘Hundi’.

He then asked the officials to open the iron box, took the offerings of the day and put them in the hundi. Then it was announced to the pilgrims to put their offerings in the hundi. It was a new experience for the pilgrims. They made three rounds to the hundi and put their offerings in the hundi. Annamacharya watched this for some time and satisfied with the change.

Annamacharya came back to the temple for the evening aradhana. After the aradhana he saw the hundi. It appeared full and he was very happy. He told the priests about this and a new cloth was brought and prepared as a new hundi and gently replaced the old one with the new one.
This was a new and unique method appreciated by all. In the night after the temple doors were closed, when they counted the coins, gold and other valuables, they found that, it was the highest collection of offerings for a day. Everybody felt that it was a great beginning and they were highly appreciative of Annamacharya. That day remained as a remarkable day in the history of the temple.

For so many days Annamacharya himself supervised the counting and the preparations of the hundi. The change proved to be a great turning point in the history of the temple. Annamacharya always participated in the kalyanam of the Lord celebrated in the temple. It was known as the Kalyanothsavam and hundreds of pilgrims participated in this ritual. Annamacharya acted as the kanyadatha, the bride’s father. In the marriage ceremonies there is a custom that the bride’s father cleans the feet of the groom with water and gives away his daughter to him as his wife. This was called kanyadanam or giving away the bride. Annamacharya was accorded this privilege by the temple authorities. It was a rare honour for his selfless work.

Annamacharya sang songs for all the occasions. He sang describing the various rituals and customs, places and surroundings, peoples and their professions, different Gods and Goddesses and on the stories from Bhagavad Geetha, Ramayana and Mahabharatham. He described the bhakti of great Vishnu devotees like Prahlada, Muchikunda, Sabari and others. He composed, set the tune and sang instantaneously at one stroke. He had an excellent memory power and also watched people and their ways closely. He was simple in living with high thinking. As one of the main functionaries he was entitled to, and received many gifts and honours from the temple authorities but never used or kept these for his personal use. He believed,

"Putta bhogulamu, Bhuvi haridasulamu,
Nattanadimi doralu maakeyavalena?"

(We are the servants of the Lord, Born with nothing,
We can’t accept anything from the other human beings posing as lords)

Annamacharya believed firmly that, for a true Hari bhaktha, these are nothing. He wished for salvation and to dedicate the life for his life giver.
After the rituals were completed, the temple authorities used to send Angavastrams, prasadams and gold coins as mark of honour for Annamacharya. It was also a tradition to send these as a gift to the privileged personalities on the hills. Annamacharya accepted these items and later distributed them to the needy pilgrims. He used to present the gold and other valuable coins in the Hundis as his offerings for the God. He never kept anything neither for himself nor in the house. He wanted nothing except a few angavastrams to cover his body and simple food as lunch. The prasadam of the temple was sufficient for morning and evening. Hari used to bring one or two fruits for him daily and Annamacharya took them in the night with his friends.

As the installation of the hundi proved to be a success, it brought more revenue for the temple. The temple managers consulted Annamacharya more frequently for any work related to the affairs of the temple rituals. He advised them to use the revenue for providing more facilities for the pilgrims coming from far away places. More free rest houses were constructed and food used to be served for them freely in these rest houses.

One day Annamacharya practised music for some time before going to bed. Hari and Mani accompanied him on their instruments. Annamacharya found that Mani was not in good mood and frequently he was panting for breath and still playing the maddela. Annamacharya observed this and perceived that Mani was not in good health. After completion of the song, he asked Mani,

"Are you not well? Why are you panting so much?"

Mani tried to look comfortable and said,

"Nothing sir, only a slight fever"

Annamacharya realised that Mani was not well and did not want to reveal it.

Meanwhile Hari came forward and told Annamacharya that for two days Mani was not well. He had also not eaten anything from the previous night.

Annamacharya bent low, took the hand and examined the pulse. He was running with high temperature and even could not sit. Annamacharya asked Hari to help him and they both lifted Mani to the inner room and put him on Annamacharya's bed.
It was already dark and windy. Annamacharya asked Hari to light the fire and prepared some hot water on it. He advised Hari to give hot water to Mani to drink and sit with him by the bedside. It was total darkness outside and the temple doors were also closed. Annamacharya wanted to bring the physician. While going out he said to Hari,

"Hari, I am going to bring Avadhani, I will come in a few minutes. Look after Mani, don't allow him to sleep, keep a close watch on him." He was about to leave, and Hari in a loud voice said,

"Anna, The Avadhani's house is far away and it is dark outside, I will go and bring him." But no one was there to hear his words. Annamacharya had already left the house in the darkness.

In fact, Avadhani's house was far away. It was almost on the east end and Annamacharya had to walk nearly a two miles to bring Avadhani. He virtually ran in the almost deserted streets. Annamacharya was apprehensive about Avadhani's coming if Hari called him in that late night. So he himself went to bring him.

When Annamacharya knocked the door of Avadhani's house, the physician was in deep sleep. He was surprised to see Annamacharya at his door at that odd hour. He opened the door and said,

"Please come, please come, Acharya, what made you to visit me at this hour? I am at your service at any time. Instead of coming yourself, you should have sent a word. Tell me sir, what help this poor Avadhani can render to you? He was polite and respectful.

"Ayya, my associate is running with high temperature and is shivering. Forgive me for disturbing your sleep. But I request you to see him now."

"Acharya, it is the duty of a physician to attend to a patient. 'Vaidyo narayano hari' I will be with you in a minute."

Both of them reached the house in a short time. Immediately Mani was examined and was given a potion into the stomach and few pills to take after two hours. Avadhani also asked Hari to give the potion again after three hours. While leaving the house he gave some instructions to Hari.

"It is normal fever, he will be normal in a day, but don't forget to give the medicines."
Hari accompanied Avadhani this time to his house. Annamacharya looked after Mani with care. Throughout the night Annamacharya and Hari were awake and looked after Mani. Twice in his sleep Mani asked for water and Annamacharya gave him hot water.

Some time after the mid night, they slept.

Mani became normal after two days and he was able to attend the programmes. When Annamacharya was in the temple Hari looked after Mani in these two days. Mani was quite moved by the service of Annamacharya and Hari. He felt highly emotional and concealed his feelings. He thought for a while in his heart,

"Who am I? What caste I belonged to? How lucky was I to be served by such a great soul like Annamacharya." He wondered. Faraway in the temple Annamacharya put a coin in the hundi as an offering to the Lord. He vowed to God that after Mani becomes normal he would offer a coin to Him in the hundi. Thus he fulfilled his vow.

Within a short time the hundi had become popular. Devotees, when in distress or sorrow vowed to offer some articles according to their position, and when their wishes are fulfilled, they visited the shrine and put their offerings with all respect in the hundi.

HIS MASTER’S VOICE

Guru was a note taker, who can write fast and legibly. He followed Annamacharya like a shadow in all his singing programmes. He also sat along with Hari and Mani but listened to the songs attentively. He had such a wonderful memory power that after going home he would sit and write the entire song on the palm leaves neatly. He would put these palm leaves in a wooden box safely. Annamacharya too had a great regard for him. Some times Annamacharya used to refer to these leaves.

One day Annamacharya asked Mani to bring the leaves to see a sankeerthana. Guru opened the wooden box and saw some damage to the leaves. But luckily the letters were in good condition. He told Annamacharya,

"Anna, the leaves need good protection. What can we do?"

"Time will come and we have to wait for the right time"

Guru was satisfied with the reply.
While Hari and Mani were musicians, Guru knew everything about music, without being a musician. He knew Sanskrit and Telugu well. During the entire association with Annamacharya, the programmes Mani missed can be counted on fingers. Mani and Hari missed so many times. But whenever Annamacharya rendered a song Guru was there and noted down the song. Sometimes he was the only listener. Be it a rainy day, a hot day in the mid summer, some time before the dawn or after the dusk, he was with his master to listen to and keep the song in his memory and write it down later.

During all these years he learnt much in the company of Annamacharya. He called him ‘master’ with all respect. He was also a great devotee of Sri Venkateswara and it was the same devotion that united all these people. They were all working with a mission and the mission was to glorify the deeds and the ways of Sri Venkateswara.

Some people on the hills were even wondered at them. They thought that youngsters were cranks and even mad. If not, why should they always indulge in singing, and that too songs on God only, will that fetch them anything. For those people, these youngsters were wasting their talents and youth. Yes, they were mad in a sense. They were, mad after neither money nor power, as many would thrive for them. They tasted the eternal bliss and for them the other pleasures are mundane and temporary. Only the pilgrims and the temple priests and the officials knew their devotion and highly respected them. While Annamacharya sang the pilgrims were able to know the greatness of God and the shrine in detail. The details and the history of each of the Gods and Goddesses were known to the learned people only. But after they listened to Annamacharya’s songs they were enlightened.

All the people who visited Tirumala shrine took a holy bath in the Pushkarini before they entered the temple. For many of them it was a mere formality and they only knew that they should enter the temple after the holy dip. They were never told about the importance of the Pushkarini. Even if they were told, they did not understand properly.

One evening the pushkarini was full of pilgrims. Tepposthavam, a sort of boat festival was conducted for God. With the illumination of lamps and with blazing torches the place was highly colourful. The Sun had not
set completely and still there was light. They lit the lights before the dusk. Annamacharya participated in this ritual and conducted the entire proceedings himself. After the ritual Annamacharya sat on the steps and began to sing.

“Devumiki devikini teppala konetamma,
Vevelu mokkulu loka pavani neekamma.
(O Goddess of pushkarini, on this occasion,
Accept our thousands of mokkulu
Offerings, prayers and gifts)

“Dharmartha kama moksha tatulu nee sobanalu
Armili nalugu vedalade nee darulu
Nirmalapu nee jalamu nindusaptha sagaralu
Kuurmamu nee lothu o koneramma”
(All the human qualities and Four Vedas are imbibed in thy waters.
All the seven seas are found in your calm and deep waters)

“Tagina Gangadi theerthamule nee kadallu
Jagati devathalu nee jalaampulu
Gaganapu punyalokalu nee dari mekalu
Mogali chuttu makulu munuloyamma”
(The holy waters of the Ganges and all the Gods and goddesses,
All the worlds and saints are in thy waters)

Viyakuntha nagaramu vakile nee akaramu
Chekonu punyamule nee jeevabharamu
Ekadanu Sree Venkatesude nee vuniki
Dekoni nee teerthamadithimi kaavavamma”
(Thy shape reminds of the holy Heaven and Sri Venkateswara
lives in you, Holy mother, we take a dip in you)

All the pilgrims, most of them illiterates were highly enlightened by this song of Annamacharya and they knew about the greatness of the Pushkarini. Following this tradition, Annamacharya also composed songs on many places and about the history of the people. Guru accompanied him
to all these places and noted down the songs. It was really a novel experience for him. Actually he did not know about all these places but he also was highly enlightened by writing these songs afterwards.

On a few occasions Annamacharya even composed more than one song in a day. It all depended on his mood. On a particular day he would go to the temple lonely before the Sun rise for the prayers and compose a song. Some times he sang for himself without any body before him. Such were the rare occasions. Mostly he sang for the pilgrims. The presence of hundreds of people gave him a new zeal and enthusiasm, as he believed that all the people should know the Vishnu tatwam and glory of Lord Venkateswara.

If Guru missed any song, he would come to Annamacharya in the night and asked him to dictate it for him. Annamacharya was also had a great memory and would dictate it fully. Guru would be highly satisfied to be dictated by his master. One day Annamacharya asked Guru,

"You are always with me and writing these songs, but why and how it would benefit you, and moreover you work hard in writing them on the leaves. You have to collect many leaves from far and away."

"Master, treat me as your servant. What service am I rendering to the God when compared to you? I am merely taking down what you had rendered from your heart. Your words are like a flow from the Heaven. They are like pearls falling from the heaven and I am simply gathering them and making a chain like a goldsmith. Without gold and pearls how can a smith make a beautiful ornament?"

"But what for this ornament, Guru?" Annamacharya asked him.

"For posterity master. These songs should be sung forever and as long as Sun, Moon and stars shine on this earth, your songs should be there. Let thousands of generations sing these enchanting songs. This is my aim and my ambition."

Annamacharya could not say anything more, as his heart filled with happiness. He felt highly ennobled with the company of such a group of selfless individuals. It seems these people are living for him. "I am blessed by God, to be in your company," he said to guru, in a tone of satisfaction.
Annamacharya never had any doubt in Guru's ability. On a particular occasion he wanted to test him. Annamacharya most of the times composed songs in simple Telugu and seldom used high sounding words also only when occasion demanded and inevitable. Sanskrit was considered the language of scholars and the poets wrote in Sanskrit to please them. Annamacharya too, knew this and composed many songs in Sanskrit at a time whenever he was surrounded by many scholars.

On a severe hot day in mid summer Annamacharya went to the temple of Narasimha, the lion God. Pilgrims believed that he was gigantic and ferocious to look at. Annamacharya wanted to compose a sankeerthana on Narasimha. There were many people inside the Narasimha temple. Annamacharya noticed that most of them were scholars and people of high positions in the temple. Guru was also seated before him. Annamacharya signalled to Mani and with the signal, Mani understood that he should be alert in playing his Maddela at certain high-sounding words, and rhythm, played an important role.

Lord Narasimha was the incarnation of Lord Maha Vishnu to kill the demon king Hiranya Kashyapa and rescue Prahlada the son of the demon king. Hiranya Kashyapa was a demon king who secured a boon from Lord Siva that no human being can kill him and not in a day or in the night. He also got a boon that no weapon had the power to harm him. He hated Vishnu and wanted to kill him. His son Prahlada, ironically, was a great devotee of Vishnu. The conflict went on for some time and the mighty father tried all methods to change his son's mind towards him and hate Vishnu like him. But that was not possible as Prahlada's Bhakti increased with all these corporeal punishments. Prahlada was very young and beautifully recited sankeerthanas on Vishnu. Hiranya Kashyapa was totally fed up with his boy and wanted to kill him. He asked his son in a fit of rage,

"Can you show me that coward Vishnu? Where is he and let him come before me," He challenged his son.

Prahlada was not so easy to be cowed down. He retorted,

"Father, Vishnu is here and Vishnu is their and every where. He is in our minds, in all the places, in all the animals, in the nonliving objects also."

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Immediately the angry father challenged his son to show him in
the pillar of the building and started to break it with his mace.

Immediately there was a great noise and the pillar was broken into
pieces. There was a ferocious roaring and appeared a monstrous creature
with the body of human being and head of a lion.

It was not a day nor night. The gigantic creature was neither a
human being nor an animal. He was Nara (human) and Simha (lion), the
incarnation of Lord Vishnu. He lifted the king, took him to the door and
killed him with his nails. Thus the ferocious Narasimha God killed the demon
king.

To describe the incarnation of the Lion God, Annamacharya felt it
would be better to show the ferocity and great anger of Narasimha in his
song. He began thus,

"Phala netranala prabhala vidyullatha
Kelivihara Lakshmi Narasimha"
"Darunojwala dhagiddhagitha dhamshtrama VI
Kara shpulinga sanga kreedayaa
Vairi danava ghoora vamsa bhasmeekarana
Karana prakata Venkata Naarasimha"

The song was completed. There was great appreciation from the
audience. It was feast of the magic of words. The ferocity of Narasimha was
vivid and shown before the eyes. For some time they forgot their
surroundings and were taken before the God. The playing of Maddela by
Mani was highly rhythmic and touched the hearts. After the song
Annamacharya thought how Guru was going to record the song. For him it
was easy to compose and sing the song but it would be highly difficult to
listen clearly and remember it fully. Annamacharya looked at Guru and Guru
smiled at Annamacharya before they left the temple of Narasimha.

In the night when Guru showed him the entire script of the Sanskrit
sankeerthana on Lakshmi Narasimha, Annamacharya did not believe his
own eyes. Word by word, the entire song was written neatly. What a superb
memory power and what a writing power Guru possessed, really
unbelievable. Annamacharya simply hugged him said with all admiration,

"Mani, you are really great. Lord Sreenivasa is in your mind and
Lord Ganesa is dancing on your pen. Go on, my good wishes are always

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with you, you will be with me always, death only separates us” Guru took Annamacharya’s hands into his and pressed them to his heart.

“That is the boon I wished from you master. Now I am blessed and this is a great moment in the life of an orphan, whom you took into your fold and made useful to the society in this way” Guru became emotional. He was happy to be the voice of his master.
LAKKAMAMBA'S DREAM

Nearly twelve summers have gone by. Narayanasuri and Lakkamamba have not yet recovered from the sudden disappearance of their son. They were hopeful and firmly believed that their son would come at any time. All the boys of the age of Annamaiah were married and blessed with children. They too wished for a grandson to play with. Narayanasuri totally immersed himself in the prayers in the Chennakesava temple and waited for the better days to come. The house was lonely and silent.

On one evening Narayanasuri was sitting in a wooden chair in the front room. He heard the noise of a child and towards the road. He saw Ranganatha was coming to their house with his grandson. The boy was only ten months old and was looking healthy and strong. He was crying all the time and Ranganatha was trying his best to control the boy. Narayanasuri welcomed his friend,

"Come, come, Ranga. How are you? Not to be seen for a long time;"

Ranganatha put the boy on a mat on the floor and sat in the chair opposite to his friend. Meanwhile Lakkamamba heard the noise of the boy and came out of the kitchen. She knew the boy and lifted him on her shoulders and went inside the house. Afterwards the crying stopped. Ranganatha started to tell about his chirpy grandson.

"Narayana, this boy is very naughty, never be silent even for a minute. Always wants to be in the lap of his mother and wants this or that."

Narayanasuri simply nodded his head and smiled. He knew well that people always tell about the pranks of their children and grandchildren. Then they talked about the monsoon and the affairs of the village. They also discussed how to celebrate the coming festivals. Ranganatha did not talk about Annamaiah as he thought, it would bring back the unhappiness of his friend.

Lakkamamba was playing with the boy inside the house. He was crawling in the kitchen and uttering one or two words he knew. Narayanasuri called her and asked her to bring water for Ranganatha. She took a glass of water and came out of the kitchen. Taking the glass Ranganatha asked her,

"Amma, where is the boy?"
"Anna, he is inside, playing with me. He is nice and helping me in the kitchen"

Ranganatha laughed at this remarks about his grandson and said,
"Keep him with you amma, his mother is so much annoyed with him. He never allowed her to be peaceful even for a minute." They all laughed heartily.

When Ranganatha wanted to take the boy from Lakkamamba’s lap, he refused to come to him. Lakkamamba gave him a little bit of payasam to eat. Ranganatha forcibly took the boy into his lap and while leaving said,
"Amma, for me it appears that your bad days are over. Every human being has to bear joys and difficulties equally. It is like day and night, sometime dark and sometime light. You have faced the troubles and went through the bad phase of your life. Be bold and keep faith in our Chennakesava. Tomorrow is an auspicious day; arrange a special puja in the name of our Annamaiah in the temples. You will be surely blessed." So saying he took leave from them.

The couple had good faith in the words of Ranganatha. They still remember the words of Ranganatha who advised them to go on a pilgrimage to Tirumala when they were childless. They decided to conduct special pujas in the temple in the morning the next day. Narayanasuri asked his wife to make out a list of items to be procured to prepare sweet pongali and payasam for distribution to the villagers in the temples. That night they did not take food and went to bed early so that they could get up early the next morning for the preparations.

In the night, Lakkamamba had a dream like vision. In it she saw a boy with Vaishnavanama on his forehead and shoulders, sitting amidst hundreds of people in a temple decked with gold and singing a song. She felt that the temple was familiar to her and she felt that had seen the temple. All the people were totally immersed in the song. The boy was bright and handsome. "Is he Annamaiah?" she thought. The smile and the gestures of the hands of the boy seemed to match exactly with her son. She woke up and could not remember anything. She heard the voice of her husband,

"Lakkamamba, Are you not getting sleep?"

"No, yes," she did not know what she was saying.
“Give me a glass of water” Narayanasuri asked her. She gave him a glass of water and took a glass for herself and within minutes immersed in deep sleep. Narayanasuri was also thinking about Annamaiah but he always concealed his feelings before his wife. He was stoic and had the courage to face the happenings in a philosophical manner.

Lakkamamba woke early in the morning and prepared payasam and pongali in two big vessels. By the sunrise, people gathered at the temples. First the couple entered the Chennakesava temple and offered prayers, then to the Vishnu chakram and finally to the Siddeswara temple. It was a sort of festive atmosphere in the village. A bhajan programme was arranged and all the villagers participated in the singing of bhajans in the Chennakesava temple. All the people participated in the rituals in the temple and prayed for Annamaiah. After the bhajan, the entire portion of the payasam and pongali was distributed to the gathered people in the three temples. Small children enjoyed the occasion.

In the afternoon, all the people went to their houses. The couple did not feel hungry during the afternoon, as they had taken the payasam and pongali in the temples along with the villagers. Lakkamamba was tired and took a nap in the backyard on a cot. Narayanasuri too, had a nap in the hall for just a few minutes. Narayanasuri never liked to sleep in the afternoons. He came and sat in the chair in front of his house and from there he had a view of the people moving on the road.

Narayanasuri saw a man coming to him hurriedly. He was almost running and with long leaps he reached Narayanasuri, and was panting. Narayanasuri was surprised at his speed and tried to make him calm by patting on his back. Then he asked him,

“Venkataiah, what is the matter and why are you so excited?”

“Ayya, I have seen our Annamaiah in the temple on the hills. I saw him singing a song as we were moving in the temple for the darshan.”

First Narayanasuri did not believe his own ears and dumbstruck for a few seconds. Then he cried loudly, “Lakkamamba, come here”

The voice of Narayanasuri was so high that Lakkamamba suddenly got up from her nap and rushed to the front yard. There, she saw her husband with Venkataiah, and she knew that Venkataiah and his wife had gone on a pilgrimage to Tirumala a few days back. When she saw Venkataiah, she
thought that he might have come to give the prasadam to them. Venkataiah was of the same age of Annamaiah and they were good friends, played together and after Annamaiah’s absence from the house, he had been helping the couple in some of their works. He was a poor boy and Lakkamamba used to give food whenever she saw the boy in their house. He was married a few weeks back and Lakkamamba presented a saree to his wife when they visited Narayanasuri’s house. She could not understand the reason for her husband’s loud call.

Narayanasuri turned to his wife and said,

“Lakkamamba, Venkataiah says that he has seen our boy on the hills.” On hearing this she eagerly asked Venkataiah,

“What a nice piece of information you have brought for us Venkataiah! Did you talk to him? How is my son?”

“Amma, when we entered the temple, we heard a beautiful song. We saw our Annamaiah singing the song near the Dwajasthambham. We entered the sanctum and many people were pushing us from behind. Annamaiah was totally immersed in the singing and did not see me though I waved at him with my hands. I had the darshan and I came out from the other side. I wanted to enter the temple again but I was not allowed by the temple guards. I waited near the mahadwaram for some time with a hope that I would see him but I was told that the Acharya had already left the temple. As it was raining heavily we went to our rest house and the next day we got down from the hills.”

Lakkamamba was highly pleased to know this. Within a short time, this information spread in the entire village. Many people came to Narayanasuri’s house to see him. After a long time there was again light and activity in Narayanasuri’s household. All the villagers were very happy. Narayanasuri and Lakkamamba immediately went to the Chennakesava temple and prostrated before the idol. This was the time they were waiting for. All these years they were hopeful and their hope became a reality now. Their belief was strong, conviction was sincere and hearts, filled with unflinching optimism.

In the evening, a few close relatives remained in the house. An elderly man proposed that two close relatives to be sent to Tirumala to bring Annamaiah, as it would be difficult for Narayanasuri and Lakkamamba
to undertake journey in that rainy season. But Lakkamamba insisted that she should go along with her husband the next day. They could understand her and it was decided that the couple and two of Annamaiah’s close friends to accompany them.

That night Lakkamamba did not get sleep. She prayed in her puja room for a while and was only thinking about her son. As a boy of sixteen he left the house and now he might have become young man. How did he spend all these years? Has he forgotten this poor mother? Narayanasuri was as usual leaning on his wooden chair and it was not clear weather he was sleeping or pondering over the future.

In the morning they started for the journey. Lakkamamba and her husband had visited the Chennakesava temple before the dawn and offered prayers in the temple. Lakkamamba lit deepams in the small niches around the temple and also in the Anjaneya gudi, a stone idol opposite to the sanctum to the north east of the temple. She vowed to Chennakesava that after their return with their son, they would make thousand rounds around the temple. Before the villagers woke up they were on their way. She stopped for a while before the Nagulamanu on the banks of the pond and sought the blessings of Nagaraju, the snake God for their safe and successful journey.

The journey was not as difficult as they had expected, but for occasional drizzle. They took shelter under the trees when severe rain lashed at them. They brought very small luggage with them and it was carried by Annamaiah’s friends. As their minds were full of expectation, the journey seemed easier and shorter.

The next day when they were in the forest, a bullock cart overtook them. The cart-man waited for them and when they approached him, he asked them to board the cart as he too was going in the same direction. On the way, he told them that he was going to bring his sister for the delivery. They indulged in a long conversation throughout the journey.

As the conversation went on, they crossed and entered a village before the evening. They had covered nearly twenty miles and the cart man requested them to stay in his sister’s house for that night. It was a big house and they were looked after well. Lakkamamba met the cart-man’s sister and wished her to be blessed with a boy soon. In the morning they resumed the journey.
In four days they were on the hills. As Lakamamba was nearing the Tirumala hills, her thoughts turned into apprehensions. "Where was the boy and how to find him on the hills? Is he still there or had gone somewhere? But she did not reveal anything to her husband who was walking along with them.

It was already dark and they were put up in a rest house at the entrance of the way. They could not go anywhere as it was also raining heavily. They were totally confined to

Their room and wanted to rest themselves for the night. After sometime the rain stopped and soon after they heard the sounds of nadaswaram and beating of trumpets. It was some procession going, they thought. As it was not raining, they came out of their room and watched the procession. Lakamamba's eyes searched for Annamaiah but he was not seen any where near the procession.

Narayanasuri noticed so many changes on the abode of the Lord of Sevenhills. Many more rest houses were built and the pilgrims were happy. When they came before the birth of Annamaiah, they slept under the trees. Many new buildings were seen and the number of pilgrims was also increased substantially. He went round the gardens and rest houses after the rain had stopped and found hundreds of people on the hills even during the rainy season. "Where is my son? Narayanasuri thought for a moment.

When he returned to the rest house, his wife was sleeping. After looking at her for some time, he closed his eyes and prayed to Sri Venkateswara,

"Oh lord, look at the mother, longing to see her child, shower your blessings on the poor mother. Let our sincere prayers be answered. For full twelve years we experienced the suffering and separation silently. Shower the light on us to dispel the darkness in our lives. Let tomorrow bring happiness in our lives." While praying, tears rolled down from his cheeks.

After he finished his prayers, he heard the sound of the temple bells. It marked the closing of the doors of the temple. He also felt that, it was also the end of their woes. He felt it was a good omen and went to sleep with a heart, full of satisfaction.
BOOK – THREE

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The Singing Saint
MOTHER AND SON

What a morning it was! Bustling with full of activity. It seemed that the entire hills were on the move. Narayanasuri woke up and found his wife already waiting for him. In a few minutes he was ready and all of them started towards the temple. It was a bright morning. They walked for a few yards and were told that a special ritual was going on in the temple. They felt very happy that they would find Annamaiah there for the special occasion. With all these thoughts they reached the Mahadwaram. Already there was a long line and people were pushing and jostling to enter the temple. The temple guards were pushing them to put them in line. Narayanasuri and his wife along with Annamaiah's friends stood in the line. After some time the noise seemed lessened. The pilgrims were moving slowly into the temple.

Lakkamamba asked the young men to be alert and vigilant all the time. In a few minutes they entered the temple through the Mahadwaram. As they were slowly moving, they heard pilgrims shouting at the high pitch of their voice, Govinda, Govinda. In the midst of this chanting Lakkamamba heard a beautiful song. She turned her head and found that a group of musicians were sitting near the Dwajasthambham. They were facing their heads towards the God and Lakkamamba could not see their faces. As they went nearer, she heard the song and all the pilgrims were also listening to the song. In a few moments they were before the musicians. Not only Lakkamamba but also, the other three were also moving slowly with excitement. When they were before them, their joy knew no bounds. It was Annamaiah in the middle and singing with pure devotion.

"Ade chudare mohanarupamu,
Padikotlugala Bhavaja rupamu."
(See the beautiful face of the Lord,
Shining like crores of lighting lamps)
He was describing the fascinating beauty of the Lord Venkateswara and the pilgrims were
Visualising his description of the Lord.
The expectation turned out to be true, and they were before their son. On that day luck favoured them. Annamaiah finished the song and
entered the sanctum for the darshan. At the same time Narayanasuri and his family members also entered the garbha gudi. It was a strange and memorable coincidence that parents and missing son were to meet after nearly twelve years. Annamaiah was taken inside the temple by the priests and he offered prayers and was returning outside. At the same time, his parents were also entering inside. For a moment Annamaiah looked straight into his mother's eyes. It was his own mother, and he was overwhelmed and became highly emotional. He concealed his feelings and slowly came out.

Lakkamamba saw her son. She too was overwhelmed with joy and was about to cry but Narayanasuri held her in his arms for a few seconds. In the meantime they were before God. It was the greatest moment in their lives and they prostrated before God and thanked him for his benevolence.

The next moment they were sad. Where was he? Did he leave the temple and gone out? Was he unhappy with the meeting? Could he be so unkind to his parents? Their happiness disappeared like bubble in the rain.

“Did he see us really?”

Lakkamamba asked her husband in utter disbelief. She was sure that the boy had seen them. They expected that he too was happy to see them.

Lakkamamba cursed her fate. “How long this unhappiness would continue?”

They came out of the sanctum and turned to the left, there they saw their son. He was waiting for them. It was a great reunion of son and mother. Annamaiah came and touched the feet of his parents. Narayanasuri slowly lifted his son and hugged him to his bosom. Lakkamamba was highly emotional, both the mother and son did not utter any word, as they were choked with emotion. Meanwhile the head priest and other officials of the temple reached there. They understood the situation. The head priest was the first to break the silence, turning to Narayanasuri he said,

“Ayya, you are really blessed to be the father of Annamacharya, it is our privilege to have you with us in the temple. He is not an ordinary mortal like us, we follow his advice and he, with his songs, ennobled the importance of the Sri Venkateswara and the sanctity of the temple.” All the other priests and other officials looked admiringly at Narayanasuri. It was a
great moment in the life of any father. That was the moment Narayanasuri felt the importance of a father.

What was the real proud moment of a father? Not at the birth of a son but when people praise the greatness of his son, a father feels really proud of his son. Narayanasuri fully cherished these golden moments and looked at his wife with tears in his eyes.

Meanwhile prasadams were brought and were offered to them. Annamaiah turned towards his old friends of his village and affectionately hugged them. As his new friends were looking at him Annamaiah called them and introduced them to his parents each by his name.

"This is Hari, with him I travelled from our village all the way to the hills and this is Mani, my rhythm and this is Guru, following me to all my programmes. These people are responsible for whatever I am today and also for my comfortable stay here. They are also your sons here after." Narayanasuri hugged all of them.

Then they slowly came out of the temple through the Mahadwaram to their house. Lakkamamba wanted to tell so many things to Annamacharya, but she could not. Never was he alone and seemed not so overwhelmed by joy nor showed happiness. He seemed casual and seemed relaxed compared to his mother's condition. After some time, Lakkamamba came near her son and,

"Annamaiah, do you know how your father and I spent these days in Tallapaka? We were only living with a hope to see you again. Have you ever thought of us? Even Gods and Goddesses too have parents and they live with them. When you were born, we were happy and that happiness lasted for some years. You left us and we lived a life of darkness. It was only after seeing you we came back to our senses. Is it good for you to leave your parents in such a condition?"

Annamacharya expected all these questions and was silent throughout the time. When his mother pressed him to speak, he could not keep quite. He said,

"Mother, It is the destiny that rules the entire world and we the ordinary people are not above the fate. Every thing is written by Brahma and things happen accordingly. I was led by the influence of the stars to the
Lord Srinivasa on the hills. The bond between the God and the devotee is the real and the eternal and is above all the human bonds.”

Lakkamamba could not say anything. Her knowledge and wisdom were confined to the extent of human bonds. Her son was, above all these earthly matters and she thought that her husband could at least turn the mind of Annamaiah.

Lakkamamba, after observing the situation began to think that her son was totally involved in the affairs of the temple and might be reluctant to return to Tallapaka, as they wanted to take him. Narayanasuri also felt the same but as a father he felt proud to see the respect his son commanded on the hills. Mothers want their sons to be with them and always consider them kids in the arms. They expect them to be in their control as small kids. Fathers generally want their sons to achieve name and fame for the house. Narayanasuri also, like many fathers enjoyed the status acquired by his son.

Annamacharya treated his parents as a devoted son and his parents were highly pleased with his bond towards them. At the same time they found his attachment with the temple, which was more and binding on him. But just as any other ordinary parents they wanted their son to be with them for the rest of their lives.

After the lunch they expressed their wish. Narayanasuri and Lakkamamba found Annamacharya alone in the hall as his friends were away resting. Lakkamamba took her son’s hands into her and said,

“Annamaiah, for nearly twelve years you were away from us. We lived only to see you and die in your lap. By the grace of our Chennakesava we again met you and that made us so happy. As a son you too have the responsibility to look after your parents. We want to celebrate your marriage and look after your children. So let us go to our village tomorrow. Your father also will be happy if you accompany us. In fact the whole village waits for your arrival. At least in the old age make us live happily in your company.”

Annamacharya was expecting this from them and immediately he said,

“Mother, I was also longed to see you all. But how can I come? I dedicated my services to Sri Venkateswara and conducting the sankeerthana
Yagam. How can I enter into the earthly bonds? Try to understand me and leave me to do service to the God. Whenever you wish to see me, you can come. As a son I will serve you." Annamacharya seemed firm and uncompromising. The parents felt unhappy and the persuasion did not move his heart. Annamacharya was polite but firm. After some time Narayanasuri gave up and reconciled to the fact that his Hari bhakti was more binding on Annamacharya than living with parents in the house. He was pleased with the determination of his son and silently asked his wife not to hurt the sentiment of their son. He thought, unless a miracle takes place it was difficult to change Annamaiah's mind.

After some time, the house was again came back to life with the arrival of Hari and others. They were highly moved by the affection of Lakkamamba towards them. Also the plight of the mother had made a deep impression on them. They wanted Annamacharya to make his mother happy but could not say so because of the awe and respect for him. Who can change his mind? Who had such a binding influence on Annamacharya? They themselves discussed for a while and silently left the place.

In the evening there was a surprise guest in the house. It was the old Ghana Vishnu who came with the help of his disciples. Annamacharya was very much surprised to see his Guru coming to his house. He went to him and bowed before him with all respect. Ghana Vishnu blessed him and said,

"Annamacharya I heard that your parents have come. I want to see the blessed couple. Are they in the house?" His disciples helped him to sit in a chair comfortably.

Annamacharya went inside and brought his parents. While in the house he had told about the Ghana Vishnu and how he was given the Deeksha and how the old man was respected on the hills and how he served for the development of Vaishnavism. Narayanasuri was also eager to meet such a great man.

Narayanasuri fell at the feet of Ghana Vishnu. The old sage lifted him and said,

"Ayya, you are highly blessed to give birth to such a great devotee like Annamacharya. His service to the God and Vaishnavism are worthy and
difficult to be emulated. It was my privilege and honour to give him the Pancha samskara deeksha myself."

Narayanasuri then told about the entire story of the birth of Annamaiah and how he came to Tirumala. He also told the old sage that his wife was lonely and wanted his son to be with him at least for some time. He also told him that they had waited for twelve long years patiently for the return of Annamaiah. Ghana Vishnu understood the situation and the plight of the poor parents. He then turned towards Annamacharya and said,

"Annamacharya, don't make your parents sorrowful. The sankeerthana Yagnam can be conducted in your house also. Listen to your parents and proceed with them. It is not good for any son to make his parents unhappy." Then he walked away slowly. Annamacharya was satisfied with the words of the old sage. But still he was not inclined to indulge in the mundane activities. He did not say any thing but left every thing to the fate and he thought that time can only settle all the matters.

That night Annamacharya had a dream, in which he heard a celestial voice,

"Annamacharya, leave every thing to me and you will be bestowed with good. My dear son, listen to your mother and do as she wishes. Go to your place and come back at the right time."

The message was brief and straight. Annamacharya made up his mind.

The next morning Annamacharya conveyed his willingness to his parents and they were on the moon. They wanted to start immediately lest their son should change his mind. Annamacharya went inside the temple and came back with all his friends. On knowing that Annamacharya was leaving for Tallapaka, they felt happy and simply followed their master. Narayanasuri and Lakkamamba were also very happy to know that other friends of their son were also coming to Tallapaka. So it turned out to be a big group. Hari, Mani and Guru were eager to see Tallapaka.

In the afternoon they all got down from the hills. By the evening they were in Tirupathi. There was bright sunshine all the way and they were walking happily, Narayanasuri and Lakkamamba were eager to reach their village with their son and in that happiness they did not feel the tiresomeness. The remaining people were young and were walking briskly as it was down
and the way seemed easy. Annamacharya did not carry much except his Tampura and a few clothes. Hari and Mani carried their instruments while Guru, his writing material with them. It was the best season to walk, with mild sunshine and occasional drizzle but that did not trouble them. The entire forest area was completely green and the lakes and ponds were full of water.

In a few days they were nearer to Tallapaka. When Annamacharya saw the Siddulaiah Gutta he fondly remembered every thing. Within a few hours they reached the Nagalamantu and Lakkamamba folded her hands to the tree on the out skirts of the village for their successful journey. The ponds were full of water and they reached their house in the night. As it was dark, nobody had seen them entering the village. Annamacharya was in his house after nearly twelve years. His thoughts were centred on how to conduct his daily sankeerthana Yagnam in his village amidst his own people.

IN THE VILLAGE AGAIN

The village was agog with the news that Annamacharya had come to Thallapaka. Everybody in Tallapaka felt happy to know from the two friends who had gone to Tirumala with Narayanasuri that Annamacharya had become great devotee and an important person on the hills. They also knew that Annamacharya was a great singer and composer of songs on Sri Venkateswara. It made many people to come to Narayanasuri’s house in the morning itself.

The house was like a place of wedding full of people and sounds. Some elderly people sat on the wooden cots in front of the house chatting with Narayanasuri. There were many young men and children in the house to have a glimpse of Annamacharya and they wanted to talk to him. Many of them were the friends of Annamacharya from his childhood. Annamacharya and his friends from Tirumala were in the hall. They had just finished their morning prayers. Annamacharya came out to see his old friends. He received them heartily and recalled all the incidents in their childhood. Lakkamamba served them with payasam made by her in the house and also a small portion of prasadam from Tirumala temple. It was custom in the villages to mix the prasadam with other cereals for distribution to large number of people.
The bells started ringing in the Chennakesava temple and it was the time for opening the doors. Annamacharya stood up and led all the people to the temple. All the people in the house along with Hari, Mani and Guru entered the temple. Many people including women, children and old people already had assembled there. It was a very pleasant morning and every one sat inside the temple and also on the walls. Just in front of the sanctum, there was a small raised platform, which can accommodate nearly eight to ten people comfortably. Annamacharya went inside the temple and offered prayers to Chennakesava along with his friends and sat on the raised platform. To his right Hari and to his left Mani were seated along with their musical instruments. Annamacharya began the programme with a poem on Tallapaka. The people were simply spell bound at his literary talent. The poem explained the importance and greatness of the village. It gave the meaning that the village was blessed by Chennakesava and full of Vishnu devotees. Also it revealed that he himself was proud, as he had taken his birth in the blessed village.

After the poem, Annamacharya began to sing a song.

"Kanti akhilanda kartha nadhikuni ganti
Kanti naghamulu veedu konti Nijamurahty ganti,

Mahaneeya ghanaphana manula sailamu ganti
Bahuvibhavamula mantapamulu ganti
Sahaja navaratna kinchana vedikalu ganti
Rahivahinchina gopuramulu ganti

Parama yogeendrulaku bhava gocharamaina
Sari leni padambujamulu kanti
Thira maina giri chupu divya hasthamu ganti
Tiru verikatachalaadhipu chuda ganti"

He described in the song about the grandeur of the Tirumala temple as was seen by him. While singing Annamacharya closed his eyes and recollected the celestial and magnificent gopurams reappeared in his mind.

‘Kanti’ literally means ‘I saw’
The people were rapturous to the rhythm and sweetness of the song. Whenever the word ‘kanti’ was repeated, it sounded like a musical feast for them.

“I saw the lord of the universe and was bewildered.
There were thousands of gold and jewel decked temples,
With natural golden tops of all gems, pearls, diamonds and all precious stones,
The sight was only for the sages and saints,
I saw the lotus feet of the Lord
And the hand that protects the world
I saw the Lord of Tirumala,
And I was the most blessed on this earth.”

Whenever the word ‘kanti’ was repeated, Mani twisted his head and played his maddela and the villagers liked this very much. They never heard this form of a musical feast before. They were only used to dramas, harikathas and other forms but not a sankeerthana, composed by the son of the village.

In the afternoon Annamacharya went round all the places he cherished and showed them to his friends. They liked Siddulaiah Gutta, Attirala madugu and the thick orchards around the village. After spending a few days they liked the life in Tallapaka.

They woke up early in the morning, took bath near the well in front of the Chennakesava temple and spent some time in the temple. They never bothered about food and they returned sometimes in the evenings. People liked their songs very much and thronged whenever they performed. Annamacharya conducted the sankeerthana Yagnam without any difficulty. Though he was away from Tirumala, his mind was on Sri Venkateswara.

Lakkamamba was eager to see her son married. They consulted one of their relatives and the job was assigned to him. After a few days he informed them that many were not willing to give their daughters to Annamacharya, who got the reputation of spending the time in temples all the time and singing songs. He did not bother about the house or parents. He would leave the house with his friends and come back after even a week. It was bhakti at its peak and cannot be understood by ordinary human beings. Is he mad? Some people thought. Yes in a way, mad after the God
and his deeds. The close relatives always said, "Marriage cures everything" and Narayanasuri put all efforts on selecting a suitable bride for his son.

The marriage was celebrated in a short time. It seemed every thing was predetermined and Annamacharya married two brides Timmakka and Akkalamma. They heard about him and wished to marry him. Narayanasuri was very happy and celebrated the marriage in his house. It was customary to celebrate the marriages in the bride’s houses. But Narayanasuri broke this tradition and nobody raised a finger at him.

There seemed to be truth in the words of elderly people and their beliefs. Annamacharya, after the marriage spent most of the time in his house. He continued the sankeerthana Yagnam and fulfilled his duty as a husband. Lakkamamba was really overwhelmed with the change in her son.

Annamacharya’s name as a composer spread across everywhere. No more was he treated as mad but as a musical and literary genius and people flocked to listen to his songs. His wives also helped him and they encouraged him, in every way. It was a happy family and what more can Lakkamamba ask for?

The house was active and happy. Lakkamamba treated Hari, Mani and Guru with affection. In a few days, at her initiation their marriages were also celebrated. It was a big family and all lived together. Timmakka, the first wife of Annamacharya was a good poet by birth. She closely followed her husband and learned much. It was really a confluence of all arts and hearts in a single family. Hari, Mani and Guru were adopted as the members of the family and were called with the family name of Tallapaka. Timmakka was interested in writing and Annamacharya appreciated her and encouraged her.

Time brings with it many changes and in this process, births and deaths also occur. It was natural and inevitable. Ramavadhani, Gangaiah and many more elderly people of the village had passed away. Narayanasuri also became frail but he was very happy as all his wishes were fulfilled. The couple, all the time, played with their grand children. It was happiness at its best. They enjoyed and cherished every moment of it.

An interesting and remarkable incident took place in the village before the death of Gangaiah. One day he came to Narayanasuri’s house
with his grand son. He was a boy of twelve years and interested in learning. Gangaiah belonged to one of the low castes and they were not encouraged to learn Vedas and other puranas. The Brahmin teachers did not allow them to sit with their kin for learning. Annamacharya observed that he was good at grasping and took him as his disciple. Also he went round the village and gathered some more boys and girls under his care and taught them. Timmakka helped him and she also taught the children. Some of the elders did not like this and asked Narayanasuri to intervene and stop his son from doing these activities. When they were in the house, Annamacharya saw them, understood the situation and came to them. One of the elders, in a tone of persuasion said,

"Annamacharya, we are happy that you a scholar and composer of songs. But don't go against the old traditions. You are teaching all the lowborn people from all the localities in your house and spoiling the sanctity of the Brahmin families. We feel it is not good and against the dharma of our culture. These things never happened before in our village. Moreover you did not get the approval of the elders while celebrating the marriages of your friends in your house. Who are they? Are they Brahmins?" He went on for some more time and asked the Narayanasuri family to be away from these people and atone for their previous deeds. It seemed that they were defiant and in no mood to listen to any body. Narayanasuri was silent and feared, where this would lead to.

Annamacharya listened to the elders silently and he too was defiant not to budge. He said,

"No dharma has ever preached to humiliate fellow human beings. Knowledge is for all. It also must be distributed among all the human beings on this earth equally. If all the human beings acquire knowledge the world will prosper. I teach what I had learnt from others. What is wrong in it? For me all are equal and I treat all the people in the same way. Will the deity object to any body when he enters the temple? As for my friends are concerned they were with me for a long time and we became one. They are great artistes and art is a gift of God. We are one family, the family of devotees to the God." He tried to convince them but they were not in a mood to listen to. They did not want to argue with Annamacharya and left the house in a huff.
Narayanasuri was unhappy. He was not defiant as his son had been and also did not want to invite the anger of the elders. At the same time he liked his son’s beliefs and eruditions. So he remained silent.

Annamacharya believed in equality. Why all these discriminations? He wondered. The next day he called all the people residing away from the village to his house. Every body knew that why these people were living away from the village. They were not allowed to enter the houses and sat out side the houses. He took them into his, much to the dismay of all the villagers. He performed puja in the house and distributed prasadam to all of them. Then he sang a song for them.

"E kulajudaina nemi evvadaina nemi
Akada nathaśe Hari neriginavadu,
Paragina satya sampannudainavadu
Paraninda seya tatparudu kani vadu
Arudaina bhuta dayanidhi aguvade
Parulutaneyani bhavinchuvadu,

Nirnāludai atma niyati kaluguvade
Dharma tatparabhiddhi tagilinavadu
Karma margamulu tadavanivade
Marmamai hari bhakti maravanivadu
Jagathipai hitamuga chariyinchuvade
Pagaleka mathilona bratikinavadu
Tegi sakalamu atma telisinavade Tagili Venkatesu dasudaina vaadu."
(Whatever be the caste and creed, all are equal, and all are the devotees of Sri Venkateswara.

There is no caste for the people of good character, those who think all are equal, always in the right path, ever helping others, kind and courteous to others and with pure heart.)

After the song, he invited them into the hall. With all of them he ate and his mother and wives served them. He termed it as “saha pankti bhojanam” which literally means sitting all together and eating the food. This incident changed the entire concept of the custom and paved way for
new and reforming society. He did not bother much for his detractors and left every thing to the will of God. He firmly believed that he was doing good and following the principles imbibed in the holy books. He practised his principle of "Be good, do good and help good" always and acted according to his inner conscience.

Soon orthodox people branded him as radical and doing injustice to the customs and the society. But his popularity as a composer and singer had reached a new heights and thousands of people visited Tallapaka to listen to his songs.

AS A FARMER

Years rolled by and as many changes occured in the life of Annamacharya in Tallapaka. The death of his parents was unexpected and peaceful. First it was the turn of Lakkamamba who wished to die before her husband. Soon Narayanasuri followed her. Annamacharya performed the last rites. After the death, the entire burden of the family, naturally, fell on the shoulders of Annamacharya. Narayanasuri was a hard worker and never wanted his son to share the burden. Now Annamacharya had to look after the large family.

Narayanasuri bequeathed him agricultural lands and the income was sufficient for them. But it needed personal supervision. Very soon Annamacharya took the role of a farmer and worked in the fields. Their fields were in the eastern side of the village and they were fertile and yielded good harvest. His friends also worked with him for so many hours. In spite of this hard work, they practised music in the evenings and nights. Annamacharya continued his work and also the singing.

Annamacharya felt his father's absence very much after his death. He wondered how quickly the life changes. Till a few days back they were happy and suddenly they felt lonely. Annamacharya thought that the people knowingly enter into these bonds, and they have to face all these experiences. But these bonds, joys and sorrows are temporary and ever changing. Nobody should take them for granted. The real truth lies in treating the joy and sorrow equally. Human beings should never feel that happiness and power are permanent. He was sitting in the Chennakesava temple in that
sorrowful mood and composed a song that depicted that joys and personal ambitions are the root cause of disappointments.

"Entha vibhavamu kalige adi anthayunu aapadani
Chintinchinadikada chedani jeevanamu.
(The more happiness that we get will be the cause of unhappiness
And those who realise this fact are the real happy individuals.)

"Chalamu kopambu thanu champeti pagathulani
Telisinadi adi kada telivi
Talakonna Paraninda tanaoali mruthyuvani
Tolaginadi adi kada tudaganna phalamu

Merayu vishayamule thana medanunna
Uruluga eriginadi adi kada eruka
Parivoni asa thanu pattu konu bhutamani
Verachinadi adi kada vignana mahima

Enaleni tiru Venkatesude daivamani
Vinagaliginadikada viniki
Anayambu athani sevananda parulai
Managaliginadi kada manujalaku maniki
(Anger, ambition, greed, are suicidal and all these should be totally avoided. All should know that serving Sri Venkateswara is the only good thing a human being can do.)

For several years Annamacharya shouldered the responsibilities as the head of a large family. He felt that all the individuals should also know this experience in their lives. This was even experienced by Gods and this is nothing but the result of the previous births. Nobody on this earth is above this. Annamacharya knew the difficulties of a head of the family, a husband of two wives, a father of children, a friend and mentor of three and above all a committed and selfless devotee of Lord Sri Venkateswara.

The responsibilities of a housekeeper seemed endless. But Annamacharya never shied away from them. He worked hard in the fields and took everything as the will of the God. In Tirumala he led a glorified and
famed life. Now as a hard working farmer he was leading a life of almost obscurity. Responsibilities and work never hampered his devotion towards God and he continued his Sankeerthana Yagnam.

Tallapaka had provided him the opportunity to fulfil all the responsibilities. Sometimes he sat alone in the temples, sometimes in the cool mango orchards in the summers, and sometimes on the banks of the ponds. People never disturbed him and they knew well that he was a great man and they and their village were ennobled by being in the company of Annamacharya.

During this time, the villagers experienced a severe drought condition. There were no sufficient rains for two successive years. The three tankss had dried up and there were no crops. All the wells were totally dried and people even suffered for drinking water. The elders remarked that they had never heard of such a situation before. The well near the Chennakesava temple was the only well to have water and people from all the places came there for water. There was severe famine and food grains were not seen in many houses. The poor, particularly, suffered severely and even some of them had fled to forests so that they could eat fruits, leaves and roots of certain trees. On certain days and after prayers in the temples, Annamacharya fed the poor with rice.

The severe summer was about to come to an end. "What about this year?" The villagers were only thinking about the coming monsoon. Annamacharya wanted to conduct a ritual for the rain God. So he asked all the people to assemble at the Chennakesava temple. In the evening he conducted prayers and sang a song about the difficulties of farmers. In the sankeerthana he maintained that God will never do harm to his own people and he knows well how to protect his subjects.

"Sommukalavadu thana sommu chadanicchuna
Kammi nee sommunu nenu kapadave Hari."

(I am your property and protect me God as a wealthy person protects his wealth. He also questions can any body harm one's own property.)

It rained heavily after the song and the prayers. For the villagers it was a miracle. After so many months they experienced the smell of rain again. The parched land in the ponds came to life with green grass. It was
really a great sight to see all the cattle of the village grazing on the green grass after a long time. That season had a heavy monsoon and brought immense joy in the minds of the farmers. There were jubilations all around and the life seemed to come back in the track. The tankss and the wells were again full. Farmers were seen carrying ploughs and indulged in the agricultural activities. Annamacharya liked rain very much. He enjoyed sitting on the raised platform in front of the Vishnu Chakram in the rain and relished the water flowing on to the streets. As child he used to wander after the rain in the streets with his friends and collected the white flowers under the trees and take home for his mother. Lakkamamba used to warn him about drenching in the rain. But who listens?

Thirty years passed by, since Annamacharya came to Tallapaka from Tirumala. He was a relaxed man as his sons took up the responsibility of the family. He wanted to concentrate fully on propagating Vaishnavism among the people by going around the country. He felt that his sons would look after the house and their mothers. Like him, they were also working hard and Annamacharya had full faith in them. He consulted his friends and immediately they heartily appreciated the proposal. Annamacharya then called his wives and said,

"Timmakka, I did my duty as a husband and a father for these thirty years. Our sons are matured enough to look after the house, I want to see all the temples in this region and also preach Vaishnavism to the people. As you know well, I believe in the destiny and wait for the time. It is good time to go on a tour, we will return to Tallapaka in a few months, you have to bear this for some time."

Timmakka knew her husband's mind and with out hesitation, said,

"Swami, I am very happy to know about your service to the mankind and the Vaishnavism. I want to write verses and bless me swami."

"Timmakka, I know your capability as a poet. You will certainly complete the book before I return to Tallapaka by the grace of Chennakesava. You will be the first Poetess in Telugu literature."

Timmakka then turned towards Akkalamma and said,

"Sister, tomorrow our swami is going on a tour to see all the temples. We should wake up early in the morning and light the deepams in
the God's niche. When our swami leaves for the journey, you should be the first to come across and wish him."

Akkalamma was happy to be given this responsibility by her elder sister.

Timmakka and Akkalamma had a very good relationship though they were different in mentalities. While Timmakka was interested in the literary aspects of her husband, Akkalamma was confined to domestic works. Timmakka was interested in the literary development and Akkalamma wanted her husband to get name and fame. Both helped Annamacharya and never said a word against his wishes. Annamacharya also respected their ideas and never forced them to accept his ideals. They were happy with the large family and treated all the children equally in the house. Whenever children quarrelled, they treated it as fun and they forgot in the next minute. All were happy as there were no misunderstandings among them.

It was really a remarkable union of many people, with the families of Hari, Mani and Guru, living under the same roof. Since their marriage, Timmakka and Akkalamma were treating them as the brothers of their husband. They developed a special bond for these people after they knew that each one of them was helping their husband in his musical and literary service. There were many advantages in the combined family system. Work and responsibilities can be shared and the house will never be dull.

Annamacharya used to bring many kinds of fruits from the fields and give them to Timmakka. She distributed them among all the children. She was kind and every child called her mother.

One noon when the Sun was shining on the head, the family sat for lunch. Suddenly they heard the sounds of hooves of horses. Hari came out to see and to his surprise, many horses were before their house. Hari went to a rider to find out what the matter was. The rider was an elderly looking man with a turban on his head and he asked Hari,

"Is this the house of Annamacharya, the singer and a renowned Vishnu Bhakta?"

Hari was really surprised by this enquiry. He said to the rider,

"Yes, this is. He is our guru. Have you come to meet him?"

"Yes sir, I am one of the ministers of the king Saluva Narasimharaya, the ruler of Penukonda. Recently the king visited Tirumala and came to

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know about the greatness of Annamacharya through the temple priests. He felt proud to have such a great man in his kingdom. We came here to convey the royal message to Annamacharya”

“Certainly, our guru is inside, please come inside, I will convey your words to him” Hari led them into the house.

The people were seated in the hall. Annamacharya came and at once they recognised that he was Annamacharya. The royal emissaries stood up in respect and folded their hands. One of the senior members among them handed over the royal invitation to Annamacharya. It was a pure silk cloth scroll and contained a request from the king. It read,

“Annamacharyulavaru, we are very proud to have such a great composer and singer in our dominion. We will be highly pleased if you accept our invitation and come to the palace. We would like to felicitate you on the occasion of our birthday. This may be kindly treated as personal invitation.” The signature and royal inscription were found on the invitation.

Annamacharya looked at the invitation and handed it over to Hari. He was silent for a minute and the royal emissaries were waiting eagerly for the reply. They thought that the reply was a mere formality, as no one would reject an invitation from the king. Annamacharya asked them to take rest for a while in the hall. Then he went inside and told about this invitation to his wives. While Timmakka looked at her husband for the answer, Akkalahamma seemed jubilant to hear this. Annamacharya understood the situation and came out of the room. He also understood that Hari and others were also happy for the invitation. Straightaway he came to the minister and told him,

“Ayya, convey our blessings to the king. We will be coming the next Sanivaram.”

The emissary then handed over to Annamacharya a small basket of rare fruits and said, “This is a small gift from our king, please accept, next Sukravaram, we will send you a carriage along with our men for you, sir” so saying they left the house. While every one in the house was happy at the sudden development, Annamacharya was alone and thinking about the destiny.

In fact he was not so happy, but did not reveal his reluctance to anybody. He knew the attitudes and temperaments of the kings. Also he was not interested in accepting gifts and felicitations from anybody. For
him the only felicitator was Sri Venkateswara and none other. He was composing and singing not for popularity but only to glorify the ways and deeds of the God.

Annamacharya experienced everything in life practically and he knew the ways of people, human bonds and all the intricacies of human life. But so far he did not see the courts and palaces, kings and their behaviour.

He did not want to attach too much importance for this invitation. He was only concerned with his proposed visit to the temple of the region and the propagation of Vaishnavism. "What will happen? He thought, Sreenivasa only knows.

IN THE PALACE

Two big horse-carriages appeared in front of the house the next Sukravaram. All the children and young men curiously saw the royal guards, some were on their horses. The entire village talked about the royal invitation and Annamacharya's proposed trip to the palace. They were very happy that their own Annamacharya is going to be honoured by the king. They had never seen a horse carriage in their lives.

The attire of the royal guards attracted the young men and the children. It was colourful and the horses were of the best breed. The guards were carrying with them swords and long weapons. Some of them even thought that they belonged to a drama troupe and began to ask them many silly questions. Whenever they answered these questions the young men laughed at them and this caused much annoyance to the guards.

Hari received the minister in the house, Annamacharya was in the hall and the minister asked Hari to get ready quickly as it might be late to reach the palace. He also told that they had been instructed to reach the palace by the evening. Akkalamma was so excited that she could not know what to do. Annamacharya came into the front portion of the house and saw the minister. The minister stood in respect and politely told him,

"Acharyulavaru, let us start as quickly as possible and we can reach the palace by the evening. Tomorrow is the birthday of the king. Many other kings and all the high ranking officials are coming to witness the ceremony."
Annamacharya slowly went inside and came back in a few minutes. He was ready and he too was waiting for his wives to arrive. The list of the people who will accompany Annamacharya was ready, his two wives, Hari, Mani and Guru. The children stayed in the house. Annamacharya and his two wives in one carriage and the remaining three in another along with the minister. As they boarded the carriages, guards on the horses followed the carriages. Annamacharya, while leaving the house folded his hands to all the elders and waved his hands at the young men and children. All the villagers assembled there. They were thrilled with this rare experience. The sound of hooves and the wheels of the chariots subsided within a short time. The villagers saw the carriages and the horses running at high pace till the ‘Mukkatla’ on the way. Then they disappeared within a few minutes. It was a great day for the villagers of Tallapaka as they watched the splendour of the royal carriages and the best breed of horses for the first time in their lives.

By the evening they were in Penugonda, the capital town. The carriages were stopped near a big bungalow. The minister also got down from the carriage and politely said to Hari,

“Sir, please get down here and take rest in the bungalow till the morning. In the night we will inform the king about your stay here and we will come back in the morning to take you to the palace.”

The minister then went to Annamacharya and gently helped him to get down from the carriage, instructed his men to carry the luggage into the bungalow and folded his hands in respect and told Annamacharya,

“ Acharyulavaru, kindly stay here for this night and we will take you all to the court tomorrow to witness the festivities. All arrangements had been made for your supper and comfortable stay.” So saying, he took leave of them.

The bungalow was very big and spacious with many rooms. They were told by the servants that the bungalow once belonged to the queen and after the construction of the new palace; it was being used for the royal guests. While all his companions enjoyed the stay in the bungalow, Annamacharya felt suffocated and lonely in the big bungalow. He finished the supper, which was served to him and slowly slipped into a room.

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The supper was brought from the royal kitchen and contained many delicious items. All of them ate heartily and had a good sleep on the beds. Annamacharya did not eat the delicacies but had a small amount of plain rice with buttermilk. He did not get sleep on the comfortable beds instead he slept on the floor. He woke up several times and all the time he thought of the God. He slept peacefully after he prayed for a while and silently sang a song for himself.

It was really a strange experience for Annamacharya. Among so many people he felt lonely and the big bungalow appeared too small and uncomfortable. He always liked simplicity and never bothered for either luxuries or sumptuous food varieties. In the night he asked to himself, "Why should I accept this invitation?" But there was no answer. He reconciled to himself that it was also a good lesson for him not to accept such royal invitations in the future. He felt that God was the only king for him and nobody on the earth can influence him. He wished himself to be firm. Several times the servants in the bungalow enquired him about his needs but he never asked for any thing from them.

Early in the morning, he woke up and completed bath and his morning rituals. Every body was ready and waiting for the royal messengers. Soon they arrived and escorted them to the palace in two horse carriages. Every thing seemed pompous and Mani was even not allowed to carry his Maddela and guards carried it to the court.

When Annamacharya entered the court hall it was filled with many dignitaries and officials. The king was seated on a big throne made up of gold and silver. He seemed tall and handsome young man well below forty. He wore a crown made of pearls and rubies and in his pure silk attire, he seemed the personification of royalty and opulence. Two women were waving at him with peacock fans and two strong and muscular guards were standing behind him. As the day was his birthday, the queen was seated besides him on the same throne.

The royal messenger announced the arrival of Annamacharya and the king, queen and all the dignitaries stood up and waited for the arrival of Annamacharya to his seat. A seat was allotted to him beside the prime minister and Annamacharya sat on the seat. Then every body sat in their seats and the proceedings began.
The king was presented with fabulous gifts by the dignitaries one by one and then the royal priests came forward and blessed the king. This was a glittering ceremony and took more than two hours to complete, as the celebrations are elaborate. Then the king stood up and in a commanding voice said to the audience, who were waiting silently for his words.

"My learned prime minister, all the ministers, learned men, royal guests and my dear courtiers, as I enter into another year in my life, I take this opportunity to compliment all the people who showered their blessings on me. The court has the honour of inviting a guest in to our midst. When I visited Tirumala with the queen, we were told that a great composer and singer lived in our kingdom. He is also a great devotee of Sri Venkateswara. We invited him to our court and wish to felicitate him. I am doubly happy because the day also happens to be my birthday. I am highly privileged to honour him on your behalf."

There was thunderous applause from the courtiers and Annamachayra was led by the ministers to the throne. The king came forward and garlanded him and covered him with a pure silk shawl. The royal priests sprinkled holy waters brought from all the rivers. Then the king presented him fabulous gifts consisting of silk clothes, gold coins and nine varieties of fruits. Throughout the time, trumpets were blowing and nadaswaram was played by the temple musicians.

Annamacharya looked at the king and then at the audience and said,

"Whatever I have been doing is for the sake of God. His ways and deeds are wonderful and all of us should know this truth and should lead a life of simplicity and achieve moksha. In this sankeerthana Yagnam, I had the luck of my brothers. They are my eyes, ears and hands and without their help it is not possible." So saying Annamacharya called Hari, Mani and Guru and introduced them to the king. The king, highly pleased with gesture also felicitated them also. The day was a great day for these people simply not for getting the felicitations but with the words of Annamacharya in the packed court hall.

The king continued his speech,

"We heard that Annamacharya has composed thousands of songs and all these songs have been highly appreciated by the people in all the
parts of the kingdom. On this occasion, we request him to sing a song.“
Again the courtiers applauded the king’s speech and were silent as Annamacharya took his seat.

In a few minutes a stage was prepared in a corner of the palace to the right of the king. Annamacharya seated himself in the centre while Hari and Mani were either side. Annamacharya looked at the audience and began,

“Emoko chigurutadharamuna edaneda kasturinindeno
Bhamini vibhunaku vrasisina patrika kadu kada,

Kaliki chakorakshiki kadakannulu kemppai thochina
Cheluvam bippudidemo chintinpare chelulu
Naluvuna praneswarupai naatina yakanachupulu
Nniluvuna perukaga antina netturu kadu kada
(The wide eyes of Alamelu Manga are red probably because of the drops of blood sticking to them when her sharp spear like looks has been plucked out of her lord.)

It was the description at its best ever heard and sung so sweetly by any body. The king and the courtiers were completely mesmerised by the wonderful description and a thunderous applause followed. In the sankeerthana Venkateswara was the hero and Alamelu Manga was the heroine. Annamacharya was at his best to visualise the picture and put before them. Hari’s playing of the flute in between the song was also received well by them. The king rose from his throne and took Annamacharya’s hands into his and praised him beyond the words. He said,

“Annamacharyulavaru, in my life I have never heard such a poetry and singing. You are great and we are blessed today to taste the musical and literary feast.”

Annamacharya simply smiled at the king and said,

“O king, the greatness you call does not belong to me. It was because of God. He sits on my tongue and I merely utter his words.”

The king then requested Annamacharya to stay for some more days in his court. Annamacharya accepted his request because he thought the stay might help in propagating the Vaishnavism among the people.
The audience seemed not satisfied with one song. They wanted at least one more from Annamacharya but no body revealed his inner thought. Sensing the mood of the people in the court hall, Annamacharya composed one more song for the audience. He wanted to preach them the greatness of Vishnu. He sang thus,

"Bhavamulona, Bahyamunandunu,
Govinda Govinda yani koluvavo manasa,

Hari avatharamule akhila devathalu
Harilonive bramhandamulu
Hari naamamule annimantramulu
Hari Hari, Hari Hari anavo mansa,

Vishnuni mahimale vihitha karmamulu
Vishnuni pogadedi vedambulu
Vishnudokkade vishvantaraathmudu
Vishnuvu vishnuvani vedakavo manasa

Achyuthudithade aadiyu nanthyamu
Achyuthude asuranthakudu
Achyuthudu Sree Venkatadri meeda
Achyutha achyutha sarananavo manasa

Annamacharya thus emphasized the need to worship Hari and the spell bound courtiers gave him again a thunderous applause. Then, after the festivities were completed Annamacharya was again led to his bungalow. His wives were so happy and particularly Akkalamma was on the moon. They examined the artistic beauty of the silk clothes and counted the gold coins again and again. Annamacharya did not pay any attention to these rich items. He sat on the balcony and watched the chirping of the birds.

That evening the king himself came to the bungalow to Annamacharya. He wanted to see the arrangements for the stay of the Sankeerthanacharya. He found Annamacharya not in high spirits and politely said,
“Acharya, are you not comfortable here? It is our wish to see you in our nagaru for at least a few more weeks. He took Annamacharya’s hands into his and continued,

“If you feel the bungalow is not comfortable to you to stay, we will take you to our own palace.” On hearing this, Annamacharya said,

“O king, I am not bothered about the big bungalows nor comforts. I want to stay in a small house surrounded by trees and garden away from the people so that we can practise. I will stay here for two more months to preach Vaishnavism to your subjects.”

The king was happy to know this and immediately ordered his ministers to shift the residence to a farmhouse away from the town.

In the new accommodation Annamacharya was very happier and more peaceful. It was in the midst of a coconut grove and on the bank of a small pond. He liked the wind and sound of the birds. In the mornings and evenings he walked around the entire garden. Annamacharya during this time composed many songs and the people in the nagaru were immensely happy to see Annamacharya in their midst. But for Annamacharya it was a temporary halt.

THE KING’S ANGER

During the stay in the capital town, Annamacharya was concerned only with the propagation of the Vaishnavism and he spent a life of simplicity. He was happy as his friends were also like him and they also completely followed him. The king was very cordial to them and on several occasions he also attended the singing sessions. He was highly pleased with Annamacharya and respectfully called him as Sankeerthanacharya. But the moods of the kings were not consistent. Sometimes they get anger quickly and expect the people to obey their orders without any word against them. When they feel that their orders were not obeyed they inflict severe punishments. Saluva Narasimharaya was also a king and he too possessed all the kingly qualities.

Saluva Narasimharaya ruled the kingdom of Tangutur in the Pottapinadu. The village Tallapaka was also a part of Pottapinadu so the king had heard about the popularity of Annamacharya. The rulers of the Saluva clan did great service to the temple of Tirumala in the fifteenth
century. Saluva was the title of the rulers and it ultimately remained as their family name. Saluva Narasimharaya was a great warrior and fought many battles and earned the name of a ruthless killer and punished the enemies mercilessly. He was pious and a great devotee of Sri Venkateswara.

One day Annamacharya was invited to the court and he himself accompanied him from his cottage. The court hall was packed with people. The king requested Annamacharya to sing a song and the composer obliged the king and composed a folk song to please the audience. The queen was highly pleased with the song. That day was her birthday. Earlier too she had heard the wonderful song of Annamacharya in the same court. On that day Annamacharya had composed a song on the beauty of Alamelu Manga and the bond between she and Sri Venkateswara. She still remembered the song fondly in her mind. Several times she appreciated the poetic talents of Annamacharya and had developed a particular desire and never revealed it to her husband. Women always liked when their beauty was appreciated and the queen was no exception. She had a notion that she was the most beautiful woman in the kingdom. Several poets wrote poems on her and the king but did not appeal to her. She thought that Annamacharya was the greatest poet of all and described the beauty of women exquisitely.

After the song Annamacharya was highly applauded by all the courtiers. The queen whispered something in her husband’s ears. The king, after listening to the consort became silent for a few moments and did not know how to fulfil the wish of her wife, the queen of the land, on her birthday. The queen looked at him persuasively and absolute silence ruled there for sometime. After some time he hesitatingly requested Annamacharya as all the courtiers watched,

“Sankeerthanacharya, we never asked anything from you, today is the birthday of my queen and she asked me to fulfil a desire which she had been nurturing for so many days. Will you kindly compose a song on the queen and the bond?”

This was a request Annamacharya never anticipated from any body. He was shocked to hear this. Immediately he closed his ears and loudly cried, “Hari, Hari.”

Annamacharya felt highly embarrassed and looked serious but not out of his control and said,
"O king, how can I praise anyone with this tongue other than the lord of the universe? It is impossible. You did not know what you are doing. I cannot stay here any long" while saying so he wanted to leave the court immediately. The king presumed that the poet was rather rude and impolite towards him. He thought that he was not unjust to ask a small obligation from the poet, that too to please the queen on her birthday.

The king was in a tricky situation as the queen and his courtiers were looking at him eagerly. He certainly would have not bothered had that incident taken place in a secluded place. Now an ordinary singer turned down his public request. He could not face this indignation any more. "Can’t he even fulfil the wish of his wife on her birthday? His eyes became red with anger but somehow kept his cool. He said in a tone mixed with anger and annoyance,

"Acharya, we invited you and felicitated you. We treated you with all respect and dignity. You are a learned man and don’t you know that the king should not be disrespected in the public? There are many court poets and they crave for our favour and write on us. We were so kind to you and,

Before he finished his words Annamacharya interrupted the king to say,

"Yes, my respected king, you were polite and respected me so much. I accepted your invitation not for myself but to propagate Vaishnavism and to glorify the deeds of God. I stayed here as long as my work continued. I sing only the deeds of the lord of the universe."

"Annamacharya" This time the king was harsh and showed anger.

"We honoured you and gave away everything"

"We did not ask for"

"But accepted"

"In the name of the God"

"Kings are the representatives of the God"

"But not Gods"

"We request you to sing a song"

"I turn it down"

"A request can be turned down, but we order you"

"I disobey your order"
“The order of the king?”
“I cannot disobey my commitment”
“The consequences”
“Whatsoever may be”

The king understood that Annamacharya was adamant and deserved punishment. But wanted to try again and deliberately softened his voice. He signalled one of his ministers to put the poet in the right track. The minister, on king’s behalf requested Annamacharya to oblige the wish of the king, other wise he might land up in troubles. Annamacharya seemed still unmoved and said to the minister.

“Whatsoever may be your might, you can not make me to sing. Can you make the clouds to rain by shouting at them? Will the cuckoo sing at your order? I can never sing on the human beings.

“Is this your final reply? The king thundered.
“Have only one reply and it can never be changed”

All the courtiers looked at this in stunned silence. They thought that Annamacharya was not wise enough to accept the wishes of the king. They thought they were helpless and sympathised with Annamacharya.

Annamacharya, without looking at anybody waked out of the court. The king became raged with anger and immediately ordered the guards to bring Annamacharya back into the court. The royal guards brought Annamacharya back to the court. The king looked at him but Annamacharya was firm and not repenting. This made the king more aggressive and cried at the guards.

“Put him in the prison at once.”

The guards took Annamacharya out of the court and within no time the Sankeerthanacharya was in the prison along with his friends.

On knowing this, Timmakka and Akkalamma rushed to the court hall but Anhamacharya was not found there. Then they went to the prison, but they were not allowed into the prison. Dejected and heart broken they went to the cottage.

Annamacharya took everything in a casual manner. He was neither afraid nor submissive at the prospect of heavy punishments. The tendency of the royal guards was also changed according to the orders of the king, they were now rude and started talking lightly of Annamacharya in the
prison. For them he was foolish for not accepting the riches and titles offered by the king.

It was dark and lonely in the prison. Annamacharya was put in a cell and he was not allowed to meet anybody. His friends were put in another cell. Hari, Mani and Guru followed their master as true followers and they too took these developments as the role of the fate and did not lose their hearts. Annamacharya sat on the floor and was thinking about the God. He was sure that the God would not tolerate his devotees being punished. He was amused at the sudden turn of events. Now he was chained and being treated as a hardcore prisoner. He started to sing a song on the importance of the name of the God,

"Akati velalanu alapaina velalanu
Tekuva Hari naamame dikku mariledu.

Koramaali vunnavela kulamu chedina vela
Cheravadi orulache chikkina vela
Orapaina Hari naama mokkate gathikaga
Marachi tappinanaina mariledu teragu

Sankela pettina vela champa pilichina vela
Ankiliga appula vaaragina vela
Venkatesu naamame vidipincha gati kaga
Manku buddhi boralina mariledu teragu"

(When we are in serious trouble, held captive of others, chained and in dire state and in a gloomy condition the name of Hari is the only consolation and can save us.)

Annamacharya prayed to God and to the surprise of all the guards his chains were removed. The guards scared and immediately informed the king about this miracle. The king did not believe and hurriedly came to the prison to verify. He saw Annamacharya in the prison sitting and praying to God. He was without any chains and seemed fresh and bright. The king ridiculed him and asked the guards to chain him more firmly.
The king looked at Annamacharya with contempt and challenged him,

"Annamacharya, I am not like my guards to come under your tricks. Let me see how you can free yourself this time. Let me also see the power of your song."

The guards chained Annamacharya with all their might. It was really painful and the king enjoyed this. The king expected that the pain and suffering would change Annamacharya's mind and would oblige him. But that did not happen and Annamacharya, in a tone of utter uneasiness prayed,

"Nee dasukla bhangamulu neevu chootuva?"
(Will you see the sufferings of your servants silently?
I am like the elephant in the hands of the crocodile (Bhagavatam)
And like Drupadi in the court of the Kouravasas (Bharatam)
Why don't you come and rescue me immediately?"

After the sankeerthana was completed the chains were again fallen on the floor. The king saw this and bewildered and with utter fear prostrated before Annamacharya.

Annamacharya lifted the king, who, in humiliation and shame, could not show his face. Annamacharya found the king in deep repentance and told him,

"O king never humiliate the servants of Hari again in your life. To inflict humiliation on them is like humiliating the God himself. The king is the father of his subjects. Treat them as your children. I see repentance in you and rule your kingdom living by as an example to your people. God bless you"

The king followed him silently. Annamacharya was joined by his friends and they reached the cottage in a short time. Timmakka and Akkalamma were happy to see him along with the king. As it was night they decided to rest for the night in the nagaru.

The king ordered his men to bring royal supper for Annamacharya and others from the palace immediately. But Annamacharya did not approve the idea, he said,

"Raja, we, the Hari bhaktas, like to eat simple food and the palace tastes are not suitable. We can subsist on the prasadams of temples and

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fruits brought by other Hari servers. So don’t put us in trouble by asking us to eat sumptuous food”

Saluva Narasimharaya then picked up some fruits from the basket and put them before Annamacharya and folded his hands and requested the poet,

“Acharyulavaru, kindly treat me as a Hari Bhakta and accept these fruits for my sake. My heart is burning with shame and repentance. I had committed great sin and there is no remedy for this mischief. At least let me serve you to atone my sin”

Annamacharya felt that the king was really a changed man. So he took the fruits into his hands and said,

“O king, how can I refuse fruits given by another server of Vishnu? Be happy and pray to God and he will forgive you.”

The king was happy and left with a mood of satisfaction to his palace.

That night Annamacharya did not sleep. He was only waiting eagerly for the night to culminate as early as possible for the arrival of dawn. He wanted to leave the place early in the morning. He did not reveal this to the king with the apprehension that the king might persuade him to stay for some more days. As a free bird he wanted to fly into the world of freedom. First he had to reach Tallapaka to decide the future course. His plan to visit all the temples in the kingdom did not materialise due to the invitation of the king. In a way, he thought, it taught them all a lesson.

As Annamacharya was pondering over these thoughts, he heard the sound of birds. It was an indication for the culmination of night. The birds are the living beings to welcome the day. Annamacharya felt happy that his stay in the nagaru is coming to an end in a very short time. But who knows what is in store for the next day?

SALUVA’S OFFER

It was early in the morning. Annamacharya and his group were ready to move out of the capital town of Saluva Narasimharaya. Annamacharya was surprised to see the king coming to his place at that time of the day. He found that the king was dull and seemed did not sleep well in the night. His eyes were red and showed signs of fatigue. He got
information from his guards that Annamacharya was about to leave in the morning. Straightaway he went to Annamacharya and requested him to stay for some more days.

"Acharya forgive me for my petulance yesterday and stay as my guest for some more days not for me but for my people. After yesterday’s incident I felt ashamed and guilty of humiliating a great sage like you. I want to serve you and I too will come with you. Please allow me."

Annamacharya looked at him with a smile and said,

"You are a king and you have a responsibility to look after your people. We are the servers of the God and each of us has our own duties to do. Don’t persuade me to stay."

"Acharya, I also want to participate in your sankeerthana Yagnam and get atoned of my wrong doings against you. Order me, what can I do for you?"

Annamacharya felt happy as the king wanted to do service to his Sankeerthana Yagnam, certain tasks can be assigned to some people capable of doing them. Annamacharya looked at Guru, who was standing nearby and said,

"O raja, this is Guru, He is with me since I began to sing on the hills. He is writing all the songs on the fresh palm leaves for the posterity. But I have a doubt, how many years these leaves will survive. I wish to preserve all these songs written on copper sheets. They will remain for thousands of years and generation after generation can sing these songs. As long as the Sun and the Moon shine in the sky and the Earth remains in this Universe these songs will remain. You take up this work and under the supervision of Guru. But I feel still the time has not come for this work. I will inform you about this at the appropriate time. You have to wait till the right time."

The king was very happy to hear this and told Annamacharya that he would send any amount of copper to any place as required by him. Taking Annamacharya’s hands into his, he said,

"Acharya, I am really blessed today to be a part of your great work. I will be waiting for your word and will come with the material to the place you ask me to deliver."
Annamacharya left the place and started the journey on foot though Saluva Narasimharaya begged him to go in the carriages. They took leave of the king and started towards their village. Hundreds of people followed them up to the outskirts of the town. Before leaving the town Annamacharya distributed the gold coins and the expensive clothes to the people who followed them. He was happy that they arrived in the town empty handed and were also leaving without any thing. It was a great lesson for his wives, as they felt proud of their husband and at the expensive gifts from the king. In the end they realised that nothing is valuable than the selfless service to the God.

On the way they had to pass through a thick forest. When they were resting in a temple they were attacked by a group of highway robbers. They were in large number they thought that the king’s gold coins and the gifts were with them. They were very cruel and killed the people who resisted them. They also uprooted the temples for gold and looted the villages. Annamacharya and his group did not resist and the robbers knew that there was nothing to rob from them. One of the robbers found the small silver idol of Lord Venkateswara in Annamacharya’s hands and snatched it. They fled on their horses after damaging the small temple of Anjaneya.

Annamacharya felt very sad but could not do anything. All happened in a fraction of time and the robbers disappeared. He saw the idol of Anjaneya before him and loudly sang a song on his plight.

"Indira ramanu tecchi iyyaro makinuval
Pondi etani pujincha poddaye nipudu.

Dharuni miravanu dandinchi Ramu tecchi
Nerupu minchina Anjaneethanaya
Ghora nagapasamula kottivesi ethani
Karunya mandinatti khagaraja Garuda.

Sree vallabunaku asesha kikaryamula
Sree Venkatadrivaina seshamurithi
Kaivasaminayatti karhaveeryajunuda yee
Devuni eevelanitte tecchimaku niyyare.
(O Anjaneya, you are strong and powerful. You saved many people. I lost my idol and get it back for me. This is my prayer.)

Annamacharya fell on the floor after the song. Tammakka and Akkalamma started weeping that her husband had swooned.

The robbers were rejoicing in a tent a few yards away. Suddenly a monkey entered their tent and in a flash of a second and snatched the idol from a robber. The monkey inflicted injuries to all the robbers and fled from the place. It uprooted the tent before fleeing. In a few minutes the monkey reached the place where Annamacharya and group of people were standing around Annamacharya.

Hari was the first person to see the idol in the hands of the monkey. The monkey slowly put the idol before Annamacharya and left the place. Hari slowly called his master,

"Anna, get up, Anjaneya has brought our idol back. Annamacharya got up and saw the idol before him. He took the idol into his hands and that it was the grace of Lord Hanuman, he believed.

The rest of the journey was easy and happy. They crossed a river and on the banks of the river they saw a temple of Sree Rama. Annamacharya took bath in the river and spent some time in the temple. By the evening they reached Tallapaka.

Hari told every thing to the villagers about their experiences in the court of Sa'luva Narasimharaya and how Annamacharya, by the grace of God came out of that trouble. He also told the villagers about the robbery and the miracle of the monkey. The villagers got angry with the king and hailed the deeds of Annamacharya.

In the night Annamacharya called Tammakka to his side and asked her,

"You had seen all the facts and experienced the deeds of the Heaven. Gold is not as permanent as the service to God. Now you had that real experience. I did a mistake by not going on a visit to the temples. Shortly I am going to visit all the temples and worship all Gods in this region. It will give me a great relief and it was a due for so many months. I hope this time our wishes will be fulfilled." His wives understood his words well and did not say anything. He finished his evening prayers and ate his supper and slept in his room after so many days.

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Annamacharya wished to spend his remaining life in Tirumala. He called all his family members and expressed his desire and they did not say anything. Timmakka had finished her ‘Subhadra Kalyanamu’ a dwipada kavyam and sought her husband’s blessings. Annamacharya felt happy and appreciated her poetic talents. He said,

"Timmakka, you are the first poetess in Telugu Literature and will influence the women to write. You have shown to the world that women are not lagging behind men and can do anything if encouraged."

Annamacharya never thought that Timmakka would write such a great kavyam. He thought that it was the blessing of Alamelu Manga, and his entire family is under that influence, he also found that his sons were also endowed with poetic talents. But he never interfered with the affairs of his sons and left them to choose their living as per their interest and never influenced them.

Annamacharya had to wait till the rainy season to come to an end. The ponds were full and the greenery spread everywhere and the lands wore a thick green look. In that season the marriages of his sons were celebrated. Annamacharya thought that he had nothing to offer to his family and he had completed all his responsibilities. The house was full of people and festivities. Annamacharya called his friends, asked them to be ready the next day for the visit to all the temples. Annamacharya knew well that before getting the old age, he had to see all the temples. It needed so much of strength and endurance to undertake such a tour. Annamacharya was physically and mentally active and his poetic talents were at their best. He thought that it was the best time to see so many places, meet many people and know the places and their importance. By exposure only men can learn, and this was his strong belief.

Annamacharya intended to take this journey to fulfil his wish to see all the temples and also to observe closely the people of different regions. The other idea was to propagate the Vaishnava philosophy to the people. He believed that all people cannot move out of their places and for such people he had to go and preach the Bhakti to them. He did not know how many days it would take and when to reach Tallapaka again. He left every thing on Sreemivasa and He would guide him. Annamacharya told the members of his family that they would go on for the tour the next day.
Timmakka too expressed her desire to accompany him but Annamacharya asked her to remain in the house and fulfil the motherly responsibilities till his return.

Annamacharya then called Hari and said,

"Hari, we are going to visit all the temples and many villages in this region. After this trip we will be entering our final destination, the abode of Lord Sree Venkateswara in a few months. Tell Mani and Guru also about our plans. You all should prepare for this long journey and our return depends on the wish of the God. Tomorrow is an auspicious day and let us start in the morning."

Accordingly Hari informed the other members and they too felt happy to accompany their guru. They informed the members of their family about their journey and were ready to undertake this hazardous journey, on foot at any time.

The next day as usual Annamacharya completed his prayers in the Chennakesava temple in the morning. The other members were ready and were eagerly waiting for Annamacharya to start. Already the villagers assembled at the Vishnu Chakram, they knew that Annamacharya was on a journey. Annamacharya as usual wanted to make it a low key affair but it had become public and all the villagers wanted to bid farewell and wished Annamacharya to come at the earliest.

All of them tied a small cloth bundle on their left shoulder, containing two or three panchas (a white cloth to tie around their waists) and nothing more. Annamacharya carried his tambura, Hari his flute, Mani his Maddela and Guru his writing material. Their luggage was light and simple. In a few moments they crossed the Nagulamanu and the Mukkata. Before the start, there was a continuous chanting of 'Narayana' and 'Govinda' by the villagers. Akkalamma did the Haarathi and applied kumkuma on their fore heads. This was a naval journey for them, as they did not know either their destination or period of journey, they were only moving.

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ON THE TOUR

After crossing the Siddulaiah Gutta, Annamacharya asked them to turn towards the south. After walking for four miles they crossed a river. They had difficulty in crossing the river, as it was full of water. They entered a village by the noon and took rest under a tree. The villagers mobbed them, as they knew about Annamacharya and his songs. The village head requested them to come to his house for lunch but Annamacharya politely turned down his request and instead asked him to bring simple lunch. They ate the lunch under the tree and liked the water. Annamacharya had heard there was a big temple in that village. He expressed his desire to see the temple and the villagers led him to the temple.

It was a magnificent temple to the east of the village. The temple deity, Soumyanatha is the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The temple was built with very big stones and the appearance was grand and aesthetic. Though it was a bright and sunny day, hundreds of people gathered in the temple to see Annamacharya. They were certain Annamacharya would sing a song for them. Whenever Annamacharya saw many people his heart would fill with satisfaction and words flowed from him as a song. There in the temple he sang three songs and each of them was a gem in its kind. Whenever Annamacharya sang two or more songs he would please all sections of people by singing songs of different categories. Annamacharya’s songs, based on the theme, were termed as romantic or sringara, folk or desi, philosophical or adhyatmika and divya Nama sankeerthanas.

His sringara sankeerthanas contained wonderful romantic situations with the lord as the hero and Alamelu Manga as the heroine, describing their beauty and their romantic situations. It was not the union of mere two individuals but the union of jeevaltha and paramatma. His adhyanthma sankeerthanas were highly philosophical and received well by the elders. To please the rural people, particularly the rustics, he composed many folk songs. He purely described the beauty of places and the deeds of the Gods in his divya Nama sankeerthanas. In many of his sankeerthanas Annamacharya described the people and their professions, which included farmers, businessmen, physicians, caste based works and different people and situations. Though he mainly composed songs in simple Telugu, to
please the learned men he composed sankeerthanas in Sanskrit. But Annamacharya's chief intention was to sing for the masses.

Though Annamacharya belonged to the category of great devotees he never wrote only for the sake of describing the deeds but glorified the deeds with justification. As a great poet he did not write only for name and fame but put his heart and soul in those songs. Being a great musician he did not bother only for the rhythm but caught the beatings of the hearts of the people.

The villagers were delighted to listen to the songs and fondly requested him to stay in their village for some more days. He politely turned down their request and started the journey. The entire village followed him up to the outskirts of the village. Annamacharya crossed the big pond and by the evening he reached another village. They rested in a small structure in the night. They never bothered about food or comfort for sleep. Such was their will power and strong determination. If the villagers provided them with something to eat they took it as the prasadam and subsisted on it for the rest of the day. They bathed in the ponds and running streams and were exposed to the Sun and rain alike. As it was the winter, they never bothered for water, as all the wells, ponds, tanks and streams were full of water.

They started early in the morning and by the time the Sunrays were severe, they were travelling by the side of a very big tank. They were told that in a few minutes they would reach another magnificent temple in Ontimitta, a small village. As they were walking by the side of the tank, they saw two tanks on their right side. One was bigger than the other. Some children were grazing their cattle near the tanks and they told Annamacharya that the two tanks were called as 'Rama Theertham and Lakshmana Theertham. Annamacharya and his friends took bath in these tanks and proceeded towards Ontimitta.

It was bigger village than they had expected. A very big ter: of Lord Rama with great outer walls and tall gopurams was seen. They wondered at the artistic beauty of the temple and after the prayers, they sat inside the temple for some time. It was a memorable experience for them, inside the temple with cool breeze touching their bodies. It was afternoon and the priest offered them some stale rice, as the prasadam was not available
at that odd hour. Annamacharya ate that food along with his friends. After they had eaten the food the priest enquired.

"Who are you and where are you coming from?

"You are talking to Annamacharya of Tallapaka, Have you not ever heard of him?" Hari told the priest.

The priest was aghast. He heard of Tallapaka Annamacharya a great devotee and a great singer. He was quite ashamed to serve the stale food to Annamacharya and in a fearful manner said to the great singer,

"Acharya, please forgive me as I had never seen you but heard of your songs. Our Ontimitta is lucky to have you in our village. We are blessed and let me bring fresh food to you from the village."

Annamacharya objected to him and said,

"We never bother about food and other facilities. We will be pleased if you can provide us butter milk"

The priest went almost running into village and in a few minutes came with many people. There were children, young men and aged alike. Most of them carried fruits, milk in copper vessels and some snacks. They put all these things on the floor respectfully before Annamacharya and silently sat before him.

One of the village elders came forward and said,

"Acharya, we heard a lot about you and your songs. If you compose a song on our temple deity, we always remember the song and sing it on festival days." Annamacharya observed the villagers closely, there were all kinds of people. He started to sing praising the great qualities of Lord Rama, He looked around and found the majestic and tall gopurams around fascinated.

"Deva devam bhaje, divya prabhavam
Ravanasuravairi rana pungavam

Rajavara sekharam ravikula sudhakaram
Aajanubahu neelabhra kayam
Rajari kodanda rajadeeksha gurum
Raajeeva lochanam Ramachandram
The Singing Saint

Pankajasamavinuta paramanarayanan
Sankararjitha janaka chapadalanan
Lanka vishoshanam lalitha Vibheeshanam
Venkatesam sadhu vibhuda vinutam.

It was in pure Sanskrit and many of the villagers could not understand the meaning but enjoyed the rendering of Annamacharya. Annamacharya found that the people gathered there wanted more songs and did not disappoint them and composed yet another sankeerthana on Lord Sree Rama, in a simple Telugu language. Annamacharya went on singing many songs and the villagers thoroughly enjoyed the sankeerthanams. He stayed in the village till the evening and resumed the journey.

Annamacharya travelled for nearly three months and went through numerous villages and worshipped all the deities in all these villages. He found that there were many Chennakesava temples in many villages. Annamacharya worshipped Ranganayaka in pulivendula, Lord Sree Venkateswara at Devunikadapa, and all most all the Vaishnava temples. The tour created a sensation among the villages. The people waited outside their village to receive him and saw him through their outskirts. He acquired immense popularity and in some villages people fell at his feet and sought his blessings. Whenever people fell at his feet he felt uncomfortable and did not like it.

While on the journey he came across a poor Brahmin, who could not marry his daughter, as he did not have enough gold with him. After a song in a village the poor man asked Annamacharya to help him to celebrate his daughter’s marriage. Annamacharya knew that the poor man was honest and pious. He wanted to help, but how?

When Annamacharya was composing songs in a temple a king happened to hear these songs. The king was in disguise to know the situation in his kingdom. He was highly pleased with the songs and thought of felicitating the composer. When the king in the disguise, removing his disguise, expressed his desire, Annamacharya told him,

“O king, I do not like these felicitations and honours bestowed on me. I will be very happy if you help this man to celebrate his daughter’s marriage.”
The king happily agreed and helped the poor Brahmin by providing gold to him. The man felt very happy and said,

"Acharya, how can I express my gratitude to you? You are the greatest humanitarian among all the humanitarians. You are the only man to understand my position. My daughter and her children will remember you always." Annamacharya felt happy that the girl was like his daughter and helped her in a way he could. The tour was going on smoothly without any break and everything was going on the expected lines. To his surprise his name was familiar in all the villages.

Annamacharya looked after his friends in an affectionate manner. Whenever people in the villages gave him anything to eat, Annamacharya first gave them to his friends and only after they ate he used to take a very little amount of them. Annamacharya was never interested in eating and so kept good health throughout his life.

He composed at least a new song a day to fulfil his sankeerthana Yagnam. If he wanted to sing more he took the help of Guru who was his ready reference. The days were going on smoothly and Annamacharya was happy as he could infuse a new life in the minds of people by his songs.

One day Annamacharya and his friends were about to enter a village. They saw a big crowd of people at the outskirts. It seemed a funeral. There were big sounds of drums and nothing was heard in that great noise. Annamacharya perceived that something was wrong there and went near the funeral pyre. To his great surprise he saw a young lady in the midst moaning. Normally women are not allowed to accompany the corpse to the graveyard. So he was curious and watched the proceedings from a distance. Then suddenly the men were seen forcibly throwing her into the pyre. She was weeping loudly and arguing with them. Annamacharya found from the argument that the lady had a small child and her husband died. But these people want to perform 'sati'.

"'Sati' was a cruel and barbarous tradition in some parts of the country. When the husband dies the wife also commits sati in the funeral. She voluntarily comes forward and is burnt along with her husband in the same pyre. In some cases when the wife was reluctant to die due to various reasons, her relatives forcibly throw her into the pyre. Annamacharya believed that it was a blot on the society and should be
abolished. But nobody dared to oppose it as majority of the people supported the sati.

Annamacharya saw this and signalled Hari to run and stop the movements of the people. Hari ran and told the people the intention of Annamacharya. In the meantime the Sankeerthanacharya approached them and asked,

"What is going on here?" his voice was firm and even commanding.

The people looked at him and whispered something among them. The person before them was Annamacharya and many of them knew about him already. Meanwhile the lady came forward and said,

"Ayya, I have a child of only five months. The boy is weeping for milk when we came here. I am not interested to live after the death of my husband, but what about my child? Who will look after him? But my relatives are forcing me to commit sati." Her voice choked with weeping.

Annamacharya understood the situation completely. He too had heard about this barbarous practice but had never seen it before. He told them,

"Nobody on this earth has the power to end one's own life or forcibly end others life. The giver and taker of life is the supreme God. Life and Death are natural for any living being. By asking her to die along with her husband you are doing the great harm to the child. Who will bring up the child like his mother? Everything goes according to the karma and we are not empowered to interfere in the affairs of the Almighty. So let her go and feed her child. Complete the other formalities"

The lady fell at the feet of Annamacharya and went away to their colony for her child. Then they completed the formalities and reached their houses.

The touring of the new places and people provided Annamacharya to observe the people and their customs. He found most of the people are illiterates and ignorant. So he wanted to enlighten them. He preached them about the importance of education and in every village he toured, he selected some learned men and got promise from them that they would make others to learn. Annamacharya also specifically asked the womenfolk to learn and become educated along with men. Wherever he taught, he mentioned his mother and wife as examples, they heard with attention when Annamacharya
told about Lakkamamba and how she told him stories from the puranas. He
told them that his wife Timmakka was a poet.

Annamacharya was happy about his trip. He had undertaken this
journey to propagate Vaishnavism and to glorify the ways of God, but in
the course of it he was able to do lot of good for the villagers by teaching
them about the importance of education, particularly for women, to drive
away the wrong and inhuman customs and practices in the society and
also to create Bhakti on Lord Vishnu. Just in a month, he mingled with
thousands of people, he taught, sang and sermonised according to the
situation. He had a tremendous impact on the people and the tour was still
going.
BOOK – FOUR

The Singing Saint
THE FINAL DESTINATION

Annamacharya, in this process got the chance to see many fairs and celebration of festivals according to local customs. He also learnt many things in this journey. In a fair he saw many people gathered and it was colourful. The shopkeepers attracted his attention. They kept many articles in their tents and were selling them. Annamacharya closely observed them and even composed songs on their attitudes.

Annamacharya heard about Ahobilam and the magnificent temple. Also there lived a great ascetic called Sathagopa Yathi in Ahobilam. Annamacharya wanted to visit this saint and learn vedantha from this saint. Sathagopa Yathi was a pious man and believed to be blessed by the Lord Narasimha of Ahobilam.

Ahobilam was an important Vaishnav centre. Annamacharya first visited the lower Ahobilam. They had to pass through very thick Nallamala forest area. It was believed to be full of tigers and lions. Annamacharya and his friends never felt any fear and walked in the forest without any weapon. Their bhakti was their strong weapon.

The temple at Ahobilam was artistic and the sculpture was magnificent. The deity here was Prahladavarada Narasimha. He sat for a while in the temple and was impressed by the beauty and sculpture. He worshipped the Lord and composed many sankeerthanas on the deity Narasimha. The fierce shape of the lord was described in his songs.

The pushkarini in front of the temple was very big. Annamacharya took a holy dip in the pushkarini. Then he went to Upper Ahobilam. After a wonderful journey through the forests he reached the upper Ahobilam. He worshipped the God in a cave. The surroundings were touching the heart.

Annamacharya saw Sathagopa Yathi. He was seated like the incarnation of Lord Narasimha. Annamacharya fell at his feet and instantaneously sang in praise of the Yati. Annamacharya spent many years in the Mutt and learnt Vaishnavite rites from him. His thought of Vaishnava philosophy as,

"Vishnu is everywhere and same for all. Vishnu can be pleased only through absolute surrender". Annamacharya was an enlightened man and everybody liked his preaching. Annamacharya admired this place very much.
Annamacharya learnt the philosophy of Vishishtadvitha from the Sathagopayathi. He mastered the Narasimha Mantra and composed thousands of sankeerthanas on Narasimha.

One day during his stay in Ahobilam Annamacharya called Guru aside and said,

"Guru, we are becoming old and we have responsibilities to fulfil. How long I may continue this sankeerthana Yagnam? May be for few more years. I have a wish to offer all these sankeerthanas to the feet of Lord Sri Venkateswara soon. So the time has come to reach our final destination. In Tirumala, under your supervision the work has to be taken up. We are going to Tallapaka tomorrow." Annamacharya left Ahobilam for Tallapaka and in a few days they were in their village.

Annamacharya had become old but was active and healthy. One day it was raining heavily. Annamacharya was sitting under the front roof of Chennakesava temple alone. His fondly recalled all the memories. "There is some power on this soil and in this temple," he thought. His mind was filled with satisfaction as he did service for the mankind preaching the Vishnu Mantra and spreading it across the whole region. "After me who will continue this? Who will take up this mantle?

He then entered his house, called Timmakka and said to her,

"Timmakka, I have many responsibilities to fulfil and we have to go to Tirumala, it is my final destination. What do you think?

Timmakka, without hesitation, said,

"Swami, your word is final and biding on us. It is our wish to serve you in the old age. We will also accompany you and spend the remaining life in your service. We find pleasure in serving you as you serve the God."

Annamacharya could not say anything but nodded his head in approval.

In the night, after the arrival of all the sons, Annamacharya said to them,

"My dear sons, God is calling us, and we have to go to the abode of Lord Venkateswara. Your mothers wish to spend their remaining life with me. We have fulfilled all our parental duties. You have grown up and running the family. Never do anything against the dharma. God bless you". His sons remained silent, they liked their father and when Annamacharya was talking.
about life, they feared the separation. To come out of the shadow of their father caused a fear in their minds.

A strange gloomy atmosphere prevailed in the house. Except Annamacharya all the members in the family were bothered about others. Timmakka and Akkalamma thought of their sons and grand children. Their sons feared about the separation of their father and mothers. There were many people in the house and the pull of human bonds caused silence in the house. Annamacharya observed this, and thought that they have not been enlightened and think that these bonds are permanent.

Annamacharya thought of his mother and father. Where are they now? Lakkamamba wished to be with her son always. Did that happen? No, The jeevatha takes many shapes and different relations. All these human relations are like bubbles in the rain. Life is very short. Annamacharya wanted to teach them about the human relationships. That evening he sat under a tree in his house and composed a sankeerthana, and all his family members listened to this song. It was evening and sombre, he sang,

"Evvarevvari vado ee jeevudu
Evvariki emono eejeevudu

Endariki koduku kadejeevudu
Endariki thobuttadeejeevudu
Endarini bramayimpa deejeevudu duhkaha
Mendariki kaavinda deejeevudu

Ekkadekkada thiruga deejeevudu
Ekkado tana janma meejeevudu
Ekkadee chuttamulee jeevudu
Eppudekkadiki eguno eejeevudu

Ennadunu chetule jeevudu
Ennitanuvulu moya deejeevudu
Ennagala Thiru Venkatesu mayala tagili
Enni padavula pondadeejeevudu

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(One person takes many roles like son, brother, relatives and many more and all these roles are governed by God, and all are temporary and repeated. These are deceptive and seemed to be real and bonding.)

According to Annamacharya the bonds remain till the death, the desires haunt as long as the mind is active, there is no link for all these troubles. The only way is to submit to the will of God. That is the only way to achieve mukti. His mind was highly philosophical and he saw around him all the sons and relatives. He brooded,

"Which is the end and which is the start for all these maya? How to get out of all these? All these are surely the creations of Lord Venkateswara. That day, in that serene and blessed mood Annamacharya composed songs of bonds.

Edi tuda denikedi modalu
Padukonu Hari maya paragu jeevuniki

Enni badhalu tanaku enni lampatamulu
Enni vedanalu mari enni duhkhamulu
Enni paritapabulenni talapothalu
Enni chuchina mariyu anniyunukalvu

Ennitiki chitinchu ennitiki harshinchu
Ennitiki haasinchu ennitiki Tirugu
Enniyunu Thiruvenkatesu leelalugaka
Ennichuchinanu thanevvadunu kadu
(Which is the end and which is the beginning? Nobody knows,
For all these human beings, many troubles, desires, sorrows and broodings.
All these are the creations of Sree Venkateswara and He remains unattached.)

That night Narasinganna and Pedathirumalaiah the two sons of Annamacharya approached their father. Annamacharya took them to his side and asked,

"Nayanalara, my days are coming to an end. I want to leave for Tirumala along with your mothers tomorrow. Make the preparations for the journey"
Then his younger son Pedathirumalaiah told his father that he too had a desire to accompany him to Tirumala. Pedathirumalaiah inherited the qualities of his father and his poetic talents are blossoming under the influence of his father. Annamacharya did not believe in grooming his son to take his mantle. He only believed in fate and one cannot groom nor insist on doing a thing. It was the interest of the individuals. He perceived that Pedathirumalaiah had the poetic fervour and allowed him to continue on his own. He found Narasinganna to be work minded and carried the responsibility on his shoulders completely.

When Pedathirumalaiah expressed his wish to come to Tirumala, Annamacharya looked at his elder son. Narasinganna understood his father's mind and said,

"Ayya, brother wants to accompany you to Tirumala. He is a learned man and a poet. He will definitely assist you and serve you. I will stay in the village, kindly take brother with you. This land is ours and as a farmer I will look after our works here. Whenever I wish to see you I will come."

Annamacharya felt immensely happy at the words of his elder son. Though he was leaving for Tirumala, he cannot totally be away from Tallapaka and the places round the village. So he wished that at least one of his sons should stay in the village. So it was decided to leave for Tirumala the following day and except Narasinganna, all other members would go to Tirumala. The next morning, all of them started early in the morning. It was a big group. It consisted of Annamacharya, his two wives, Hari, Mani and Guru and their families. All the grand children of Annamacharya followed. Only Narasinganna and his wife remained in Tallapaka.

As usual Annamacharya started the journey after completing the puja in Chennakesava temple. Narasinganna became emotional when he was embraced by his father. Tears rolled down his cheeks and Annamacharya did not know how to console his son. He blessed him and moved out of the house. Many times Annamacharya moved out of the house, but this time the experience was new and strange. All his childhood memories encircled him. His father, Narayanasuri appeared sitting in the wooden chair in front of the house and His mother was seen carrying a plate with rice for him. He heard the temple bells of Chennakesava. Will he
ever hear these bells again? The air of native village was different; he knew
this after he crossed the turn near the Siddulaiah Gutta.

On the way Annamacharya met some devotees of Lord Shiva in a
temple. As it was evening and Annamacharya had to offer his prayers. He
entered the temple but the priests objected him saying that how a Vaishnavite
can perform puja in a Shiva temple. Annamacharya laughed at their ignorance
and preached them that all Gods and Goddesses are one and the same. If
one calls by the name Vishnu, he is Vishnu. Others call him ‘Shiva’ he likes
it. Some call him Adibhairava, people call God with different names but he
is the same and looks after every one equally. He sang,

“Enthamatramuna evvaru thalachina antha matrame neevu
Antharantharamu lenchichuda pindanthe nippati annatlu
Koluthuru mimu Vaishnavulu kurimitho Vishnudani
Palukuduru mimu veedanthulu para brahmananuchu
Talaturu mimu Shaivulu Tagina bhaktulumu Shivudanuchu
Alari pogaduduru kaapalikulu Adi bhairuvudanuchu

After listening to the sankeerthana, they knew that he was
Annamacharya, and they felt ashamed of their ignorance. They accorded
him with temple honours and Annamacharya worshipped in the temple and
they rested in the village for the night. Though many people offered their
houses for Annamacharya and the members of his family for rest, he chose
the temple and rested there. They walked for miles and miles and in a few
days they were nearer to the temple town. Soon they reached Alipiri at the
foot of the hills and started to climb the steps towards the holy hills. The
weather was pleasant and sometimes cloudy.

After climbing a few steps Annamacharya recollected his previous
experience of Alimelu Manga and how the goddess offered him Prasadam.
He stopped them for a moment and said, “This hill is pious and celestial.
Remove your footwear and you will experience the change” Accordingly,
all others removed their footwear. They felt that their fatigue and pain
disappeared and were fresh. After a few hours, they heard the chanting of
Govinda and the sounds of the temple bells of Ananda Nilayam. They felt
they were near the Abode of the Lord.

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PRESERVING FOR POSTERITY

They were greeted warmly and with respect by the temple officials in Tirumala. Annamacharya noticed no greater improvement in any sphere except the number of people. The house in which they had lived was intact. The head priest, on knowing that Annamacharya had arrived, came all the way to receive him. Initially they were put up in a rest house and within three days the house was renovated. Annamacharya and members of his family soon entered the house. It was one family, the family of Annamacharya. Hari, Mani and Guru had long ago become the family members. The temple authorities provided them with all the necessary things for their comfortable stay.

Guru gathered all the palm leaves, on which he had written Annamacharya’s sankeerthanas with a sharp ghatam, a sharp bronze dry nib, from all the wooden boxes and wanted to preserve them. But he saw some of them in a bad condition. He wondered at the huge pile of the bundles. He showed these bundles to his master. Annamacharya thought that time had come to preserve these songs in a safe way for coming generations. He should undertake this monumental work at the earliest. He had become old and wanted to complete this work before his death.

Annamacharya discussed his plans with the temple officials and they readily accepted his proposal. Then Annamacharya prepared a message to Saluva Narasimharaya, which read,

“His Majesty, Sri Sri Sri, Saluva Narasimharaya,

Now we are in Tirumala, I have become old and want to take up a work, which would be useful for all the coming generations. I want to inscribe all the sankeerthanams on copper sheets and preserve them in the temple. It is a monumental work and service to God. As you had requested earlier, I would like you to take part in this work. As you had promised earlier, the copper sheets may be sent now. The bearer of this message is my close friend and a member of my family. The work has to be started soon. May your kingdom and people prosper? The blessings of Lord Sri Venkateswara will always be with you.

Sreenivasadasa,
Tallapaka Annamacharya.
Annamacharya wrote this on a leaf and handed over to Hari and told him to go to the capital town of Saluva Narasimharaya immediately and come with the king's message. The temple officials provided Hari a horse and a horse rider. Hari started the journey on that day itself.

Hari returned in a very short time. He straightaway came to Annamacharya and folded his hands. His face expressed the happiness of his journey. Annamacharya and other members of family wanted to enquire the happenings at the royal court. Hari began thus,

"I reached the palace and told the guards about my arrival. I told them that I came on behalf of Tallapaka Annamacharya. I was told that it was the rest time of the king and the guards hesitated to disturb his rest. Upon my insistence they informed the king of my arrival. I was expecting a call from the king. To my great surprise the king himself came out and received me warmly. I told him that my master had sent him a message and I handed over the message to him. He took the message with respect and touched his eyes with the leaf and then read the message. When he was reading the message, I saw the brightness in his eyes and he was immensely happy. He immediately called his prime minister and instructed him to procure whatever amount of copper he could. He asked me to take rest in the palace. In the morning he gave me this letter and said that he would reach Tirumala in a week."

Hari handed over a letter to Annamacharya, and Annamacharya handed it to his son Peda

Thirumalaiah read it for his father. It contained,

To

The most respectable Annamacharya Guru varyulavaru, Pranamamulu to your feet,

I have been waiting for all these days for a message from you. After waiting for a long time I had concluded that I might not get a message from you any more. I am very happy and blessed to receive a message at last. In a few days I will be coming to Tirumala with necessary arrangements to undertake the great work.

Your humble servant

Saluva Narasimharaya.

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Annamacharya felt happy and called Guru to be ready for the work. The leaves were piled up in all corners of the big hall. Annamacharya took the help of temple workers and all the members of his family, in putting them in order. Peda Thirumalaiah followed his father and he was also beginning to recite sankeerthanams in the temple, and helping his father. Annamacharya thought that the work needs the help of many skilled people and they also should treat the work as the service to the Lord. But he was sure that every thing would happen at the right time.

In three days Saluva Narasimharaya arrived in Tirumala with much fanfare and his retinue. After the darshan he found Annamacharya sitting near the Dwajasthambham and singing a sankeerthana for the pilgrims. The king ordered his men to leave him alone and waited for Annamacharya to complete his song. He went to Annamacharya and fell at his feet. Annamacharya lifted him and warmly hugged him to his heart. The king felt immensely happy and said in a humble voice,

"Guruvarya, You have made me to wait for a longer time for your order. I am your servant and rushed at your call. I brought one hundred skilful writers with me. I also brought hundreds of copper sheets to preserve your holy sankeerthanas for the sake of coming generations. Order me, when the work should begin?" He folded his hands and waited patiently for Annamacharya’s reply.

Annamacharya was pleased with the king. He told him,

"Raja, let me start this work tomorrow. I will not hold you for long time. The kingdom should not be without the king for many days. Tomorrow, after the prayers, the work will begin under your patronage. God will be pleased"

The next morning they performed special pujas in the temple. After the puja Annamacharya led the way to his house. Hundreds of people were waiting there. It was a festive atmosphere and all were waiting for the start of the work. Annamacharya then asked Guru to take a copper sheet and dictated him to write the introduction. He dictated it spontaneously. It contained the details regarding his start of the composition of his sankeerthanas. It the beginning he mentioned the year, month and the circumstances that led him to write these songs. Guru went on writing this introduction and all the remaining writers followed it.
It was really an extensive and patient work. One hundred skilled writers took part in the work. Guru provided them with the copper sheets and the writers went on writing for months together. Saluva Narasimharaya supervised the work for two more days and after taking permission from Annamacharya proceeded to his kingdom. When he was leaving he promised Annamacharya that if he needed any thing that message can be passed on to him and he would immediately respond to the situation. The temple authorities also were highly helpful in doing this work. Soon the hall filled with new copper sheets with the sankeerthanas inscribed on them neatly.

Annamacharya entrusted the entire supervision to Guru and his son Pedathirumalaiah. One day Pedathirumalaiah asked his father,

"Ayya, you never accepted any thing from any body except food and water, that too when inevitable. You did not even carry the king’s gifts and gold coins presented to you. But you asked the king to provide help to undertake this work. Is it not a gift from the king for you?" Pedathirumalaiah was bold enough to ask this question to his father.

"Nayana, you posed a good question. Listen to me. Yes, I never took any gift or anything from the rich for myself. These copper sheets are not for me or for our family. They will be preserved and offered to Lord Venkateswara to the temple. Once Saluva Narasimharaya offered me great golden ornaments and asked me to sing a song on his wife and their romantic tales. I resisted and he jailed me. But due to the grace of the Lord, he realised his mistake and freed me. At that time he promised me and volunteered to do any work for the sake of sankeerthanas. By doing this, the sankeerthanas will remain in the world as long as the Sun and the Moon throw light on this earth. So I merely fulfilled the wish of the king to serve God in this way."

Pedathirumalaiah was satisfied with the answer and now and then helped his father in doing the work. The work went on for many months. Whenever Guru got a doubt regarding any sankeerthana Annamacharya used to clear it.

Annamacharya did not bother about incorporating the personal details of the poet in the copper plates. The work was going on and Annamacharya saw hundreds of copper sheets neatly tucked and kept in the house. Annamacharya firmly believed that the work done with pure heart would be appreciated by God and people.
“Trikaranasuddhiga chesinapanulu
Devudunumecchu lokamu nu mechu.”

There was no dearth of copper sheets. Saluva Narasimharaya twice visited Tirumala and personally supervised the work. He brought copper and handed over the sheets to Annamacharya. The work took nearly two years to complete and all the sheets were ready. After finishing the work the writers from Saluva kingdom left Tirumala. After the work Annamacharya hugged Guru and blessed him. He said,

“Guru, your work is not completed yet. It may take a few more months till my sankeerthana Yagnam comes to an end.

Guru was horrified with these words of Annamacharya and said,

“Master, for God’s sake, don’t say like that. What will happen to us? We will become orphans if you leave us”

Annamacharya laughed at Guru and said,

“Guru, man is mortal, you know this. and I am already more than ninety years old and eagerly waiting for the call from the heaven.”

After a few more months all the copper plates were ready and Annamacharya was immensely happy to see all his sankeerthanas inscribed in the copper sheets. He felt highly satisfied. He was only thinking of how and where to preserve these thousands of sheets. He wanted to leave this to God and He only would show him the way at the right time. Time should come, and we had to wait for it.

In the evening he went to the temple for the evening prayers. After coming out from the sanctum, he went round and fondly looked at the Hund. He saw many pilgrims putting their offering with great reverence in to it. He silently waited there for some time. Then he went to the temple for the evening prayers. After he saw a small room opposite to this hundi on the north side adjacent to the temple of Bhashyakaras. Suddenly a thought flashed in his mind. He discussed with the head priest and they happily accepted to his proposal.

He came back to his house and revealed his plans to his friends and they also felt happy. For them the copper sheets are precious and must be preserved in a highly guarded and secured place. The place selected by Annamacharya was highly secured and always bustled with activity.
Annacharya felt that all his wishes had been fulfilled and he only waited for the call from Heaven.

That night he went home happily. He slept for a while and again thought over the place and woke up. This was natural for all the people to get things done at the right moment. Annacharya also was waiting for the right time to end his life. He was eager but when that shall happen? God only knows.

ANNAMACHARYA-PURANDARADASA

Many great scholars and poets visited Annamacharya and learnt many things from him. Among them was, Purandaradasa, a Kannada poet and composer of songs in the same mould of Annamacharya. Purandaradasa was a singer par excellence and was called ‘Kannada Sangeetha Pitamaha’ and also later composed thousands of songs on Ranga Vithala. Purandaradasa visited Annamacharya in Tirumala. Purandaradasa was young and Annamacharya was in his old age. He heard much about Annamacharya from the Kannada pilgrims who visited Tirumala. He met Annamacharya in his prime youth and was eager to learn more from the great man.

Basically Kannada and Telugu were considered sister languages and there were lot of similarities between these two languages. On that day Purandaradasa came to Tirumala, it was a beautiful sunny day. Purandaradasa straightaway entered the temple and finished the darshan of Sri Venkateswara and enquired about Annamacharya. He was told by the priests that the Sankeerthanacharya might be near the Varahaswami temple. Purandaradasa was eager to meet the poet singer and in a few minutes was near the spot. There he found Annamacharya singing melodiously and hundreds of devotees were listening to him with rapt attention and singing along with Annamacharya. Purandaradasa found the old singer as the incarnation of Lord Venkateswara, and silently sat in the crowd.

The sankeerthana of Annamacharya went on,

"Saranu saranu surendrasannuta saranu sreepati vallabha,
Saranu rakshasa garvasamhara saranu venkatanayakaa,
Kamaladhurudunu kamalamithrudu kamalasatrudu putru"
Kramamuto meekoluvukippudu kachinareccarikayaa

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The Singing Sai

Animisheendrulu munulu dikpathalamara kinnara siddhulu
Ghanatato rambhadi kanthalu kachinareccarikaya

Ennagala Prahlada mukhyulu ninu koluvaga vacchiree
Vinnapamu vinavayya Tirupathi venkatachalanayaka
(Venkatanyaka, you are being worshipped by the deities like
brahma, the Sun and the Moon. Saints, angel, sages and other heavenly
beings wait upon you. May I seek your protection)
After the completion of the sankeerthana, Annamacharya repeated.
Saranu saranu surendrasannuta saranu sreepati vallabha.
And all the devotees were loudly repeating after him.

Purandaradasa was completely immersed in the sankeerthana and
he too loudly sang along with the devotees. And in a while spontaneously
started to sing,

"Saranu saranu surendra vandita saranu sreepati seevita
Saranu Paarvathitanaya maaruthi saranu siddhi Vinayaka

Nitalanetrana devisutane naagabhushana priyane
Tatilla tankita komalangane karnakundala dharane

Batuvu muttina padaka haarane baahu hasta chatushkane
Ettitodagayu hemakankanapasa ankusa dharane

Kukshi yelu maha lambodarane ekshu chapa gelidane
Pakshivahananada purandara vittala nijadasane

All the devotees looked back and found a young man singing in
the same way as Annamacharya did. Though they could not understand
the meaning, they liked the melody and devotion in it. After the song was
completed, Annamacharya nodded his head in appreciation and asked the
young composer to come to him. Purandaradasa fell at the feet of
Annamacharya and sought his blessings. Annamacharya lifted and hugged
him to his heart in admiration. Purandaradasa completely overwhelmed with
gesture of the Sankeerthanacharya and said,

"Swami, I had heard a lot about you, now I see your greatness.
You are my guru and I am blessed today by your darshan. Your
sankeerthanams are not mere songs but heart moving mantras. My life's
ambition is fulfilled today."

Annamacharya was also moved by the humility of the young poet
of Kannada. He blessed him and said,

"Purandara, I too heard about you. You are blessed by Ranga
Vittal, and your songs will be the primary lessons of Carnatic music."
Annamacharya then asked his son Pedathirumalaiah to assist him to the
house. Purandaradasa too accompanied them and in a while they reached
the house, they had lunch and Purandaradasa then left the house after
touching the feet of Annamacharya.

Annamacharya never felt unhappy for his old age and imminent
death. After they came to Tirumala from Tallapaka Pedathirumalaiah was
blossoming and following his father. Annamacharya was happy at this
development. His daily routine remained the same for many years. In the
morning and evening he spent the time in the temple and continued the
sankeerthana Yagnam with a sankeerthana everyday. He sang mostly
philosophical songs about human relationships, death and unfulfilled
ambitions.

One day Hari was near the Varahaswami temple. He was told that
a group of musicians were singing near the temple. "Who are they? He
wondered and went near the temple. There he saw a man, nearly fifty years
old, sitting in the middle and addressing the people gathered before him.
He looked gaudy with his colourful attire and his language seemed
intentionally superfluous, drab and lifeless. He introduced himself, and
began thus,

"All call me as Kannamaiah, and I can sing wonderfully. The other
singer cannot sing as beautifully as I can. Is it a great art to sing songs? I
can also sing number of songs in a day" When he was saying like this a
man beat his drums continuously. The people laughed at them. Kannamaiah
looked contemptuously at his drummer and continued,
"When I sing Gods come down and listen, and I only sing for gods. Now you are lucky to listen a song from me." Then he sang a song and it was a copy to the song of Annamacharya. He changed the words but put the notations as that of Annamacharya. When he was singing people were continuously laughing at him. He seemed unmoved and continued the song. After the song was completed, Kannamaiah looked at the people and they were still laughing at him. He did not know the reason but they were thinking him as a jester. Hari went near him and asked him.

"Hey man, why are you singing like that? You seem to be foolish. Sing if you know about music, compose if you know the language, or keep quite."

The man seemed offended by these words and showing anger said,

"You seem to be the follower of that Annamaiah, I know. Is he so great? We can also sing but why that man has got such a great name and why not me? Let him come and sing with me if he can." He seemed adamant and proud. The people shouted at him when he talked lightly about Annamacharya and heckled at him. Hari went home and narrated to Annamacharya about this incident. Annamacharya did not bother much about this.

In a few days Kannamaiah spread rumours that he was the real singer and composer and demanded gold and money from the temple authorities. Annamacharya thought that some people were copying him. He despised them and wanted to teach these copy masters a lesson. The sankeerthanas of Annamacharya had become popular and these writers thought that they could also get great name by singing some songs copying Annamacharya. But can they get the melody, rhythm, devotion and decency of Annamacharya krithis? Impossible. They had their own flatterers still vulgar than themselves. Annamacharya felt these people should be condemned. One day he sang a song specifically for these copy masters.

"Verrulara meeku veeduka kaligithenu
Arruvanchi tadikallangarada

Mudichivesinapuvvu muduvayogyamukadu
Kudichivesina pulle kuduvaga kadu

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Badi nokaru cheppina brati cheppabothenu
Adari Sreeharikadi arhamukadu.

Pucchinatti pandu bujilonanenundu
Bachana kavithalu bathigavu endu
Mucchukannatalli moolakodiginatlu
Mucchimunifuela mokkaro hariki

Ennaga Sree Venkatesu Tallapaka
Annamacharyulu akhiladikkulu meccha
Nunnatitopadiri Okadevvarotanu
Sannanorasunata sammatha sreehariki.

The people understood about the copy masters. Whenever these singers started singing, the people laughed at them. After some days they left Tirumala and never sang copy songs anywhere. Can a crow sing as a cuckoo? By simply joining some words can any body become a poet? Such men disappear into the oblivion very soon.

Annamacharya earned the reputation and fame because of his service and devotion to the God. The family members of Tallapaka were accorded many honours and special privileges by the temple authorities during festivals and certain special rituals. Annamacharya took active part in all the temple rituals.

One such important ritual was annual Sreevari Brammasthanams. Annamacharya regularised the celebrations. He also composed many sankeerthanams on the celebration of Brammasthanams. He led from the front and supervised all the rituals and thousands of devotees participated in the annual Brammasthanams. For these annul celebrations people from far away places came in heavy rains and worshipped the Lord. In all these days the Lord was taken in procession on many vahanas on all these ten days and Annamacharya described as,

Thiruvedhula merasi devadevudu
Garimalaminchina singaramula todanu
Tirudandapelai negi devudide tholinadu (First day)
Sirula rendavanadu seshuni meeda (Second day)

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Muripena moodonaadu muthyala pandirikinda (Third day)  
Pori naalugonaadu puvvukovilalonu (Fourth day)  

Gakkuna aidavanaadu garuduni meeda (Fifth day)  
Ekkuenu aaravanadu eenugu meeda (Sixth day)  
Chokkamai edavanadu suryaprabhalonanu (Seventh day)  
Ekkuva therunu enimidonadu (Eighth day)  

Kanakaputadelamu kadipi tommidonadu (Nineth day)  
Penachi padonadu pendlipeeta (Tenth day)  
Yenasi Sree Venkatesudu Alimelmangatho  
Vanithala nadumanu vaahanaala meedanu  
(All the different processions on all these ten days including Kalyanam)  

One evening it was lightly drizzling. Annamacharya and Hari were sitting in the front room of their house. Suddenly a boyish looking young man and a girl swiftly came and fell at his feet. Annamacharya did not know why these people were at his feet. The boy was nearly twenty and the girl also of the same age. They were shivering with fear. Annamacharya asked them to relax and asked them what the matter was. The boy said,  

"Ayya, we are from the nearby village. Since our childhood we liked each other and now we have decided to marry. But when she told her parents about this, they kept her in a room and wanted to get her marriage with her maternal uncle. She did not like that and fled from the house along with me. We know, this is not good but we did as it became inevitable. We came to the hills and want to marry. They came to know this and chasing us. Ayya, kindly help us." Annamacharya did not know the reason for the anger of her parents. He asked,  

"If you like each other why did your parents object to this marriage?"  

Then the boy said,  

"Ayya, I belong to lower caste"  
Annamacharya understood the situation and asked the girl.  
"Do you like the boy and want to marry him?"  
The girl nodded her head in approval.

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Within a few minutes a big group of people also reached there. They came straightaway into the house and saw the boy and the girl there. They shouted and threatened the boy to leave the hills or they would kill him. Annamacharya tried to pacify them but they were not in a mood to listen to. As they were shouting very loudly many people gathered in front of the house. Annamacharya tried his best to convince them but they were adamant. They felt highly ashamed to treat a lower caste boy as their son in law.

Annamacharya then loudly said, "See if you bless them, it is well. They like each other and they know what is good and what is bad for them. The boy seems to be good. I will celebrate their marriage. No one can stop me. I will keep them in my house for some more days. Then I will send him to Saluva Narasimharaya and he will provide a job for this boy. It is up to you to decide weather to bless them or leave them here.

When they heard the name of the king and the intimacy of Annamacharya with him they agreed and the marriage was celebrated in the house of Annamacharya. Thus Annamacharya not only celebrated the marriage of the Lord in the Kalyanothsavam but also the marriages of human beings and showed the way for a new and reforming society.

THE REFORMER

One morning Annamacharya was slowly coming towards the temple along with his friends to offer the morning prayers to the Lord of the Seven Hills. He had just completed his bath in the holy pushkarini and his mind was fresh and merry. The gentle breeze blowing across was touching his body and created ripples of divine thoughts in his heart. The whole atmosphere was serene and calm and he was ready to compose another sankeerthana.

As he was approaching the shrine, he saw many people gathered in front of the Mahadwaram. He could clearly see the fury in their faces and they were shouting at the top of their voice. Many of them were waving bamboo sticks in their hands and they seemed to have bothered deeply as a great act of sin had been committed near the temple.

In the midst of the crowd a man was seen helplessly requesting the people to show mercy on him and allow him to enter the temple. But
nobody in the angry crowd seemed to be convinced by his words. They were very much bothered by the presence of that man near the temple. Annamacharya understood the whole situation.

In those days some people were considered untouchables and they were not allowed to enter any temple to worship the Gods. They were humiliated in many ways and were treated as social outcasts. They suffered the humiliation silently without raising their voice against the people who oppressed them. When any body resisted this discrimination, he had to face the brutal punishments.

Meanwhile an elderly man among the crowd shouted,

"How dare you to enter the temple? You low born fellow, do you want to spoil the sanctity of the temple? Then turning to the crowd he shouted again,

"Beat that fellow. He is trying to spoil the holiness of the temple. How can we tolerate such unholy deeds in the temple? We should teach him a lesson.

The man trembled with fear by these words and tried to plead with them. But nobody took his word seriously. He pleaded with folded hands,

"Ayya, I came from faraway, walking miles and miles facing many difficulties to see the God. I heard a lot about the temple and the God of the seven hills. I want to see and pray the God at least once in my life. My heart longs to the god from many years. Let me have the great joy of the darshan at least once in my life." When he was uttering these words his voice choked and tears rolled down his cheeks.

Annamacharya approached the crowd. All the people folded their hands in respect when they saw the composer of songs. He wanted to know the reason for the assembly of the people in such a large number. He asked one among them,

"Why are you all assembled here now, what is the matter? Your faces show your anxiety. Let me know the reason."

There was a wave of murmuring in the crowd. They simply turned their faces against each other. Out of the respect for Annamacharya they kept quite. Then the elderly man with a long beard came forward. Looking at Annamacharya he said,
"Acharya, this wretched man is trying to spoil the holiness of the temple. If we were a few minutes late, this fellow might have entered the temple. Luckily we came in time and prevented this rogue from entering the temple." Then again turning to the crowd he shouted at the top of his voice,

"Drive away this fellow from this place, beat him with sticks and teach him a lesson. Otherwise he may come again. But, be careful, don’t touch him"

Annamacharya was little bit surprised by these words by such an elderly man. He could not understand the situation fully but knew that they were preventing a devotee from entering the temple. With a slightly raised voice he spoke to the people.

"I could not understand how it can be a sin if a devotee enters the temple. Why are you all angry with him? Let him be permitted to enter the temple and have pleasure of the darshan of the Lord.

Then another man came forward and said,

"Acharyulavaru, You might not be knowing, this fellow is an untouchable.

"So what? Annamacharya retorted.

Hari, Mani and guru, all were looking at Annamacharya. They had never seen their master in such a serious mood.

Then one more person from the crowd came forward and said in a low voice,

"Acharyulavaru, this is practiced all over and we are following the same here also."

Annamacharya then understood the situation completely. These people were preventing a devotee from entering the temple as he belonged to a lower caste. He disliked their attitude towards a poor and helpless man. He thought that he could change their minds away from such misconceptions. All the people on the hills respected him and liked his songs. He too had that confidence that they would not argue with him.

All the people were looking at Annamacharya for his wise remarks about the situation. Annamacharya slowly lifted his head towards the sky and thought for a moment, heaved a sigh of relief and said,
"The almighty has created all the human beings with same blood. But later some people created these caste and other barriers for their selfish motives. Great saints and sages preached that there is no discrimination among the human beings. All are one and equal."

Then he recited a sloka from the Bhagvad Geetha, the holiest book for the Hindus.

"Vidya vinaya sampanne, brahmane gavi hastina,
Sunichaiva swapapakecha panditha samadarsinaha."

Annacharyya unfolded the meaning that wise men should see no discrimination among other men. These are the words of Lord Sree Krishna in the Bhagvad Geetha.

When he was saying these words, all the people were listening with rapt attention. Annacharyya observed their feelings and began once again,

"Look at this man, He travelled from many miles facing so many difficulties to reach here. He came here with heart and deep devotion to see and offer his prayers to the Lord of the seven hills. He will be immensely happy if enters the temple and worship the Lord.

Nobody has the right to prevent a devotee from entering the temple. Nobody should stand between a devotee and the God. God likes all the men who really devote their minds towards him. God will be unhappy if his devotees are not permitted to see him. Every one with devotion and dedication can see Him and pray Him with pure bhakti and can reach Him and attain salvation. We are all one and belong to one caste, we are human beings."

He then loudly uttered to all the people.

"Vijathulanniya vrudha vrudha
(All the castes are waste; the only caste is Hari bhakti)

Annacharyya went to the man embraced him much to the surprise of all the people. The man was overjoyed with this gesture of Annacharyya, and fell at his feet. Annacharyya gently lifted him, took his hand into his and turned to the crowd and said.

"Come and let us all have prayers in the temple"
But some people remained unmoved. Annamacharya noticed this and went near them and said,

"Some people still feel that I would be spoiling the sanctity of the temple. How can it be?"

Then he took the hand of Mani and showing him to the crowd and said,

"You all know this man, he is my close friend and an excellent musician. I shared my food and accommodation with him for the last fifty years. I never asked him what his caste was. This is Hari and here is my junior Guru. We live together and eat together as one family."

The people began to know the importance of equality and their minds were already turned and Annamacharya began to sing a song. The other two musicians helped him with their instruments. Annamacharya started to sing,

"Thandanana aahi Thandanana pure,
Thandanana bhala thandanana
Brahmamokkate para brahmamokkate para
Brahmamokkate para brahmamokkate.

Nindaara raju nidrinchu nidrayu nokate
Andane Bantu nidra adiyu nokate
Mendaina brahmanudu mettu bhoomi okate
Chandaludunti sari bhoomi okkate

Anugu devathalaku alakama sukhamokate
Ghanakeeta pasuvulaku kaama sukhamokate
Dinamaho ratramulu tegi dhanadyunakokate
Vonara nirupedakunu okkate aviyunu

Korali sistannamulu konu aakalokate
Tirugu dushtannamulu tinu aakalokate
Pargu durghandhamulapai vaayuvokate
Varusa parimalamulapai vaayuvokate

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Kadagi Enugu meeda kaayu endokate
Pudami sunakamu meeda polayu endokate
Kadu punyunalu papa karmulanu sari kaava
Jadiyu sree Venkatesu naamamokate

Annamacharya explained the people about the equality by taking examples in the nature and the basic human qualities. The basic human qualities like sleep, want and hunger are common for all the people irrespective of their caste and creed. The nature showers its treasures on the all human beings equally. Sun light, moon light and the air fall on all the people equally. Then why should there be all these discriminations?

The sankeerthana was highly rhythmic. The music was entertaining and the meaning clear. While Annamacharya was singing all others picked up the tune and started singing as the chorus. In his ecstasy Annamacharya started to dance and all others too started to dance with him.

After the song had been completed, Annamacharya took the hand of the man and invited all others to enter the temple. All men happily followed him, as their minds were clear. The temple bells started ringing. It seemed there appeared a smile on the lips of God Sri Venkateswara to welcome all his devotees.

In a few minutes they completed the darshan and Annamacharya served the prasadam to him. His life ambition was fulfilled. At the same time that was a great turning point in the history of the temple.

BEGINNING OF THE END

Days, months and years, it's a cycle going on forever, the time waits for none and moves in its own way. After some more months Annamacharya felt that age was fast catching up with him. He was not as active and agile as he used to be. It is common and nothing new for the mankind. He saw the life in all angles and knew every aspect. He wondered, how fast the time was, ninety years passed off, like a flash. The memories were still fresh in his mind. His childhood playing days, parent's affection, old peoples, he was gloomy but felt happy that he did not waste time as all others. Most of the people simply spend their time on so many things. At
the end of the life the realisation pricks the mind, but it is all over. Saints and
sages know the value of time.

Half of the time is lost in sleep, some more time in all sorts of
adventures and so much of it in the old age. Can any one get back his time
after realisation? No, ever.

After the riches for some time, after food, after his people and to
fulfil desires. Every minute that is lost can never be regained. Annamacharya
preached the people not to waste their time in all these mundane activities
but put mind on the Lord to attain mukti. He sat alone in the temple in one
evening and slowly sang a sankeerthana. Slowly many people gathered
and all of them realised the value of time. It was a sankeerthana to remind
them about the value of time and he succeeded. The setting was perfect
and it was twilight and darkness slowly creeping in, the song went on,

"Nimishamedathegaka Hari ninnu thalachi
Mamatha neemeedane emarachi bratukutakaka

Nidurache konallu neeramula konallu
Mudimiche konallu mosapoyi
Kadisi korinanu gatha kaalambu vachune
Madi madine vundi emaraka bratukutakaga

Dhanamu venta tagili dhanyambunaku tagili
Tanavaari tagiki kaatarudainanu
Kanugaligi Sree venkatanadhakathune
Konassaagi ninnu ne kolichi bratukutakaga

Annamacharya even did not rest at this ripe age. He slowly walked
and supervised the preparations for all the temple rituals. He called
Pedathirumalaiah and said,

"Pedathirumalaiah, yesterday you were in the temple and heard
the sankeerthana about the value of time. Act accordingly. You have to
gather many singers and train them to sing these sankeerthanams in the
Vaishnava temples. To day I saw some cracks in the steps of the pushkarini.
I already talked to the temple authorities and take interest to construct new

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steps by the coming bramhosthavams. You also should supervise the
ekalyanosthavam conducted daily in the temple.”

Pedathirumalaiah nodded his head in reverence and said to his
father,

“Ayya, I know you had started the ritual of celebrating the
kalyanosthavam in the temple for the Lord. How can we, as the descendents
of you shall neglect this ritual? All the pilgrims say this is a popular ritual
on the hills and hundreds of couples are participating in this ritual every
month. This will be known as the Tallapakavari ritual.”

Annamacharya felt happy.

The next day Annamacharya called all the temple priests and
officials to his house. Hari, Mani and Guru were also present. Timmakka,
Akkalamma and Pedathirumalaiah were looking eagerly at him. He asked
Guru and the temple officials to bring all the copper sheets from the house
into the hall. Within a few minutes they brought all the copper sheets and
neatly put them in order. The temple priests were amazed to see hundreds
of copper sheets in which thousands of sankeerthanams were neatly
inscribed.

Then Annamacharya told them to carry all these to the temple. He
tied a big cloth around his waist and carried one copper on his head. While
he was leading the way, many people and the temple priests followed him.
All of them were carrying these copper plates on their heads. When they
reached the temple premises hundreds of pilgrims also followed them. As
they were passing through the streets, many people looked curiously at
them. Annamacharya and his followers were also chanting ‘Narayana’ and
‘Vishnu’ while walking in the streets. In a few moments they came near the
Mahadwaram and entered the temple. All of them entered the sanctum and
put these copper sheets before the idol for some time and Annamacharya
silently prayed for some time. Then they again lifted these copper sheets
on their shoulders and walked along with Annamacharya. They approached
the hundi and opposite to it on the north, they saw a small room by the side
of Narasimha swami temple.

Then Annamacharya asked them to stop there and put the copper
sheets neatly in that small room. Then he sat on the floor of the temple and
began to sing.
"Dachuko neepadalaku tagane cheesina pujalivi
Puchi nee keerithi pushpamulu evi ayya
(Kindly accept these flowers of sankeerthanams. I put them on
your feet to glorify your deeds.)
"Okka sankeerthane chalu oddikai mamu rskshimpaka
Takkinavi bhandaraana daachivunchani
(Only one sankeerthana is enough to protect us and let the
remaining be kept in your safe custody forever.)

There was a spark in his face. He seemed bright and his eyes were
wet with satisfaction. First it was Hari and then all others touched his feet.
Annamacharya blessed them all. The temple priests brought prasadam and
distributed to all of them. It was a great occasion. Thousands of
sankeerthanams were preserved for the future generations. With satisfaction
Annamacharya went home. He did not take lunch as he felt uneasy and
asked Timmakka to bring a glass of water for him, and after taking the water
said,
"Timmakka, I feel quite uneasy, send a word to Narasinganna, our
second son, to come, I want to see him, I may need him, as the first son, he
has a duty to perform."

Timmakka understood the meaning of her husband's words. She
tried to infuse new strength and confidence in him, and said,
"Ayya, you will be happy and live for many years. The world
needs your songs and we need you. Lord Venkateswara will protect you."

Annamacharya closed his eyes and listened to his wife. He gently
laughed at her and said in a low voice, which was shivering.
"Never forget that we are human beings. I led a long life and
waiting for a call from the God. It may be any day. It may be tomorrow or the
day after. Kindly do as I say."

The next day word was sent to Narasinganna to come to Tirumala.
In a few days Narasinganna was in Tirumala along with his wife.
Annamacharya looked at him with affection. Elders say that a father pins all
his hopes on his first son and like him more than the others, while a mother
likes her youngest son more than the others. Narasinganna saw his father
and tears rolled down his cheeks. A few years back his father was vibrant
and mesmerising the people with his songs. It was a change beyond
expectations. Annamacharya asked him about the village and the people. He was highly satisfied when his son told him about the temples and places around Tallapaka.

Annamacharya was almost confined to his house, and with the help of his son, he went to the temple daily, and continued the Sankeerthana Yagnam. These days his songs were philosophical and about life and death and human bonds. Annamacharya had a great memory power and his all his senses functioned excellently, but physically he became weak. He composed a sankeerthana daily and uttered slowly word by word and the remaining people repeated along with him. This went on for some days.

Pedathirumalaiah also helped his father in the Sankeerthana Yagnam. Annamacharya was satisfied immensely with his service to the God and thought that his best days were over. One day, after completing the evening prayers, he came to the house. It was twilight and darkness was beginning to creep. He was on the bed and all his family members and friends were around him. Knowing that Annamacharya was ill all the temple priests and the temple officials also came to see the Sankeerthananacharya. He asked Pedathirumalaiah to bring the Bhagvad Geetha and asked him to recite a sloka. Pedathirumalaiah went on reciting the slokas for some time and Annamacharya listened. It was the Sankhya yoga; all the slokas pertained to the life and imminent changes. Pedathirumalaiah went on,

"Dehinismin yadha dehe koumaram yavvanam jara
Tadha dehantaraprapthi gherastatranmu muhyati
(Childhood, youth old age and death, these are the common changes in any body’s life)

" Jaatasya dhruvo mruthyuhu dhruvam janma mrutasyacha
Tasmada pahiharterhe natwam sochitu marhasi
(Every body is certain to die and bound to reborn. This is the law of nature. So death should not be mourned, as it was inevitable.)

Annamacharya, though, was an authority on the Bhagvad Geetha, listened to the slokas with rapt attention. He rose from the bed and sat and took his tampura into his hands and began to sing a sankeerthana,

" Nanati bahuksa naatakamu
Kaanaka kannadi kaivalyamu
Puttutayu nijamu povutayu nijamu
Nattanadimi pani naatakamu
Ettaeduta kaladee prapanchamu
Kattakadapatidi kaivalyamu

After the sankeerthana was completed, all of them were in tears. The language was simple and clear. Birth and death are certain and eternal truth. The entire happenings are like a play in which we are the characters. The master is Sree Venkateswara. The prasadam brought by the priests was served all the people and Annamacharya looked happy and folded his hands at every body. They all left the house and Annamacharya, then took a glass of water and rested.

That night Annamacharya had a dream. In that he saw many people singing his songs not only in temples but also in so many places. Thousands of people were listening to them. Annamacharya felt extremely happy at this sight. What more can he ask for? His vision and ambition was to take these Sankeerthanas into every household and to every heart. He saw that vision fulfilled. He remembered his son Pedathirumalaiah’s verses on his sankeerthanams.

"Vedambulu pouranikka vaadambulu
Varakavithva vaniveena naadambulu
Kruta srujanahlaadambulu
Tallapaka Annaya kavithal."

He was happy to see his son compose songs and poems like him. He was confident that his sankeerthana Yagnam would continue even after him. That idea infused a great confidence and he can leave this mundane world happily. He again thought,

"Nothing is there in human hands, we have to wait for the time."

Annamacharya was waiting for the time.

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NOTHING FOR ME

One day a temple official came to Annamacharya's house. He was very old and had been working in the temple for nearly fifty years and knew all the details regarding the administrative affairs of the temple. He commanded great respect and enjoyed considerable clout and his word was almost final the temple affairs. Despite his advanced age he took interest in the affairs of the temple. In the olden days looking after the temple affairs was considered a selfless service and they had to face many problems. But now as the number of pilgrims had increased substantially and with that the income from the Hundis increased, many people were much interest to serve the temple. This man managed to find employment to two of his sons in the temple. One son was inducted to look after the amenities for the pilgrims. His other son was employed as the head of the employees assigned to prepare and distribute the prasadam. Now the persons employed for temple duty are getting salaries apart from some special privileges as temple officials.

In those days, when the old man arrived there, it used to be very difficult to live in Tirumala. They had to come daily from Tirupathi and returned the same evening. They suffered a lot but served the temple wholeheartedly.

On hearing that Annamacharya was not keeping well, the elderly man came to Annamacharya's house. He found Annamacharya sitting on a wooden chair and fanning himself with a palm leaf fan. The temple official went near to him and folded his hands in respect and said, "Acharya, namaskaram, how are you feeling now? I was told that you were unwell."

Annamacharya reciprocated his namaskaram and gestured the visitor to sit before him in another chair and slightly adjusted his posture and said, "Oh, nothing likes that, yesterday I could not get good sleep and felt exhausted a bit, nothing more than that. You know, I am not young and getting on age. It is common for any old man."

"But you seem active and agile at this age also." The official quipped.

"With the blessing of Venkateswara." Annamacharya murmured with folded hands while looking at the side of the temple.
Meanwhile the official surveyed around the house and concluded that Annamacharya was living in a house with minimum facilities and needed many more things for the house.

"Acharya, You are doing a lot for the temple, and because of your service and of your sankeerthanams only the income of the temple has increased substantially. Pilgrims from far away places come only to listen to your songs. You are doing a lot for the temple and God, you never asked anything for yourself and always live a life of an ascetic."

Annamacharya never liked whenever people say that he was doing great service to God and always felt that God had blissfully provided the chance for him to serve and indeed it was a boon for him.

"Ayya, who am I and who are you? All are created by Him and are brought up by His grace. I owe a lot to him as he made me to compose songs on him. How blessed am I as he possess me and I am able to serve him. I am nothing before him. How can I ask anything from him? Said the great composer.

"Acharya, not for you, but for posterity. Why don't you wish to put at least one of your sons as an official in the temple? And I, as a well wisher of your family, advise you, of course I am not a person to advise a man of such an esteemed stature like you, to reap the benefits from the temple at the right time." Said the old man.

"Ayya, my father did not ask anything for me. He only wished me to stay in the house along with my mother, but God's ways are other wise, I am in Tirumala and in the service of the Lord. I don't know what my sons are aspiring for and I don't want them to come in my way. It is left for them to choose their own way" replied the sankeerthanacharya.

"Of course" the official interrupted, "but we also should take care of ourselves. You are highly blessed and no mundane affairs bother you as do to us. My three sons are well settled and two of them are already working in the temple and the third also earning well from a shop very near to the temple and I somehow managed to secure the place for his shop with my influence. But we are not at peace in the house, always want this or that and there are quarrels for silly and simple things. More over my wife and daughters- in- law always want to show their superiority in the house-affairs and I am vexed with them." The old man became emotional.
Annamacharya seemed amused by this and said, “Ayya, this is common in all house holds, not even Gods are above these quarrels” He remembered one of his sankeerthanas in which he described the quarrels of Atta (mother-in-law) and Kodalu (daughter-in-law) and their verbal quarrels.

The official also seemed to be in a lighter mood now and said,

“Acharya, tell me how to be peaceful and happy like you at this age?

“Well, leave every thing to your sons and try to be away from these bonds. As long as human beings indulge in these bonds, they are away from peace of mind. Eat to live and never aspire nor wish for any thing that always tempts you. Why man should thrive and thrive for these things and in the process forget God? What does actually a man need for his life?” Annamacharya went on, and the official was simply nodding his head and immersed fully.

“Kadupenta ta kuduchu kudupenta? Deenikai
Padani pattella padi veravanela?

(Why should we indulge in all troubles when we need a very small portion of rice for the survival? All that a stomach needs is less and very less. So eat whatever we have and less and less and lead a life of simplicity.),

“Acharya, kindly listen to my words. Tomorrow the rulers are visiting the temple. When they pay a visit your house convey to them that you want your son to be appointed as one of the officers to look after the temple affairs. Also ask them to sanction a portion of land to the west of the temple and also in Tirupathi so that you can build some cottage or a house for you and for your posterity.” The old man said.

“Ayya” Annamacharya interrupted. His countenance revealed such an expression that he was totally against such idea and his disapproval. “For me, for you and for all, there is no need to bother about the future and Sreenivasa looks after all of us”

The old man, now clearly understood that Annamacharya was not that kind of person who can be persuaded easily. But as a well wisher he advised so. He made a final attempt to persuade Annamacharya to put at least one from his family as an employee in the temple.
"Acharya, I firmly believe that Tirumala would certainly be the holiest shrine in this land. Thousands and thousands of pilgrims will visit this temple. If we can put our men in the temple affairs, our coming generations would certainly benefit."

Annamacharya looked at the old man with a smile, and the old man continued,

"Acharya, as you know well, we have a house behind the temple and now my two sons have constructed houses for them selves. Also we have a big garden on the northern side of the temple and in Tirupathi, we have a big house and I am thinking of presenting it to my daughter. I only revealed all these details to you because you possess nothing as I know well. It will not be difficult for you if you want to possess some assets for you and for your children. Your clan will also remember you forever if you provide them with such immovable assets, so that they can live happily for generations."

The old man heaved a great sigh of relief after finishing his words. He was now convinced that he could change the mind of Annamacharya.

But his assumption lived only for a few moments.

Annamacharya, who was leaning on the chair for so much of time, got up from his posture and in a low voice said,

"Ayya, I can understand your anxiety for the future and children. But in the process how can I ask anything from others? We only gave birth to our children not their prosperity. It is now for them to choose how to live and what to do. Moreover I never asked anyone for anything for me or for my children throughout my life." Then he started reciting a few lines from one of his sankeerthanams about his philosophy.

"Chi chi naruladeti jeevanamu
Kaachuka sreehari neeve karunintugaka,

Adavilo mrugajathi ina kaavachugaka
Vadi etarula koluvanga vacchuna?
Vudivoni pakshi ayi vundanaina vacchugaka
Viduvaka evvarinaina vedavacchuna?"
(It would be better to live like a beast in the forest and like a bird moving here and there,
But never ask anything from any body. There is no more wretched life than that. (means asking any favour from others) Sreehari is there to look after us.)

The old man could say nothing after this. But Annamacharya, sensing that the old man’s feelings were hurt, began,
“Ayya, The best asset that we can leave to our children is our good name and affection for them. I still remember my father’s affection and my mother’s love for me. My father wished me to become a man of letters but not certainly a rich man. What more can I leave for my children? I wish them serve Madhava as well as Manava.”

The old man listened with rapt attention as Annamacharya was telling about the Paramartha (the ultimate aim and truth) of life. Meanwhile Annamacharya, after taking a glass of water, said,
“The life is like a mirror, it shows us in reality. If we feel contented, our face reveals it, if we want more and more and thrive for it, we are sure to face the results of it; the end is sorrow and gloom. The greatest man on the earth would be the man who is contented with what he has and thinks of God and expresses his gratitude for Him. We came into this world with nothing and leave this world with nothing. One should always remember this truth.”

Meanwhile two or three elderly men also joined them and were also listening to Annamacharya’s enlightening words.
“Serve God wholeheartedly and feel the experience. Give him whatever you can, in any way you like, what more can God give us, He gave us life, air to breathe and water to drink and food to eat and live. We always should be grateful to him, how can we expect anything from Him? Some serve God to show that they are devotees and expect much from Him, and I despise such bhakti. The bhakti should be as pure as the smile of a baby.
We should worship God with pure and unselfish mind. As your outward show outward, so should your inner mind” Annamacharya slowly recited the first lines (pallavi) of one of his sankeerthanhas for them.
Annacharya then put his hands on the shoulders of old man and said,

"For me God is everything and I am a servant and feel great to serve Him. I owe a lot to Him as he provided the opportunity to serve Him in His abode. What more can I ask Him? I believed and my great belief in Him will never let me down. My sons and all my people, as long as they serve Him and as long as they leave everything to Him, they will be blessed and will be looked after by Him. He gave us all and nothing we ask from Him."

Having finished these words Annacharya again leaned back to his chair and closed his eyes. The onlookers left one by one.
MISSION COMPLETED

The day was Bahula dwadasi. As usual he rose from the sleep and prayed for some time in the puja room. Then he called his son Pedathirumalaiah, asked him to accompany to the temple. As he was walking, he felt a new experience. The road, the trees, the long lines of pilgrims and the processions, all seemed like an eternal experience. He wanted to keep these sights in his mind forever. He entered the temple and the priests welcomed him with usual respect. They folded their hands and led him through the Mahadwaram and straight into the sanctum.

Annamacharya entered the sanctum and stood before the God silently for some time. The priests noticed a change in Annamacharya that day. He was silent and staring at God and tears were rolling. The priests never saw such a change in Annamacharya. He stood like a statue and seemed not in his usual senses. Pedathirumalaiah noticed this change and slowly took his father outside. While coming out of the temple, Annamacharya looked at the hundi and stopped there for a while. Then he stood near the Sankeerthana Bhandagaram for some time.

This sankeerthana bhandagaram was the treasure house of Annamacharya’s sankeerthanams. Annamacharya was a visionary and wanted generation after generation to listen to these songs. What a novel idea it was; Annamacharya also wished many singers to sing these songs in all the important temple rituals.

Nobody noticed Annamacharya’s inner feelings. Annamacharya was in the lap of his son near the Sankeerthana Bhandagaram and started to sing a song, but felt for the first time in his life words were not coming out from his mouth.

"Anthryami, Alasiti solasiti
Anthata nee saranide chochitini
(Swami, I have become old and tired. I came to your fold and take me into you.)

Pedathirumalaiah took over from his father and completed the sankeerthana.

Annamacharya felt very happy for his son’s ability and both of them completed that song. Then Annamacharya was slowly led to his house.
In the evening Annacharya asked his son Pedathirumalaiah to his side and whispered to him,

"Timmappa, My sankeerthana Yagnam comes an end today. Now it is your responsibility to continue this Sacred Yagnam and offer a sankeerthana daily to the Lord." His voice started to shiver, he handed over the tambura and chiruthalu (Two small wooden musical instruments worn in the hand to give a rhythmic sound) to his son. Then he said, with a voice that was very low,

"Timmappa, call all the members of the family. I want to say my last words to you all. Go and bring all of them."

Pedathirumalaiah went inside, saw his mother, brother and others. He did not know what to do and how to tell them about his father's condition. Timmakka saw Pedathirumalaiah and asked him,

"Nayana, you had been to the temple and when did you come? Where is your father?"

Pedathirumalaiah could not look straight into his mother's eyes. He was afraid to disclose Annacharya and his last wish. He said slowly,

"Amma, father and I came from the temple some time back. Father is very weak and wants to see all of you now."

Timmakka, on hearing this, became alert and rushed inside the hall. She saw Annacharya on the bed sleeping peacefully. She waited near his feet for some time and did not want to disturb him. Meanwhile Akkalamma and all the family members were in the hall with anxious looks.

After some time Annacharya slowly opened his eyes and looked around. All his family members were near him. He signalled with his eyes to Narasinganna, his second son, to come near and told him in a low voice,

"Anna, go to the temple and bring prasadam and Theertham for me, I want to take the Theertham, can you fulfil my last wish?"

They understood the situation. Annacharya wanted to take Tulasi Theertham of the temple from his son. They were silent and nobody uttered any word. They knew well that Annacharya would not like to be disturbed by sentiments at this time. Already they were mentally prepared for this, the last and eternal journey to the unknown world.

Annacharya then turned to Pedathirumalaiah, all other family members were also eagerly waiting, and Annacharya said,
"Never deviate from the service of the Lord, treat all human beings equally, serve the needy and the God will be pleased."

Narasinganna came back with a silver vessel. It contained Theertham from the temple and many temple priests, the head priest and officials followed him. The hall was full of people and they were silent. Annamacharya looked at them, gently smiled at them and asked Pedathirumalaiah to bend nearer, and whispered,

"Timmappa, I want to hear a sankeerthana before I take leave from you. I am happy and contented. I served the Lord and wish to be united with him, go on, sing my son." His eyes were shining like stars.

Pedathirumalaiah began to sing a sankeerthana of his father, as a boy Pedathirumalaiah heard this sankeerthana many times and his father very much liked this sankeerthana.

This sankeerthana his father used to sing many times at the time of Pavvalinpdu seva, a ritual to sing lullaby to the God. Pedathirumalaiah felt his father needed rest as his father’s mind was agitated with strange thoughts about life and eternity. Pedathirumalaiah heard this lullaby song many times from his father. He too sang this wonderful descriptive sankeerthana many times at various temples particularly at the time of evening rituals.

"Alarachanchalamaina atmalandundani alavatu chesene uyyala
Palumarunuchvasa pavanamandundane bhaavambu telipene uyyala

Udayastha sailambulonarakambamulaina udumandalamu moche uyyala
Adana aakasapadam addadulambaina akhilambu nindenee uyyala

Padilamuga veedamulu bangaru cherulai vatti verapaitoche uyyala
Vadalakituf dharmadevatha peethamaimigula varnimpanarudaye uyyala

Kamalakunu bhoosatiki kadalu kadaluку mimmu kougalinchaga chese uyyala
Amaraanaganalakunu nee haava bhavavilasa mandande chupenee uyyala

Kamalaasannadulaku kannula panduvai ganunimpanarudaaya uyyala
Kamaneeeyamurthi venkatasailapati neeku kadovedukaivunde uyyala

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When Pedathirumalaiah was slowly singing ‘Uyyala’ several times, all of them were repeating after him. Annamacharya experienced the wonderful feeling of listening to his sankeerthana from his son. Annamacharya took the hands of Pedathirumalaiah and blessed him. Annamacharya wished to see the temple for the last time. He liked to see the golden temple particularly at the twilight hour as the last rays of the Sun falling on the Aananda nilayam made the tower illuminating.

Annamacharya then asked Narasinganna to help to him to his feet. He then clung to his arm and lifted himself. He had to be held by Narasinganna and Pedathirumalaiah on each side. He started walking towards the temple and the crowd followed him in a solemn and silent pace. The western sky was red. Annamacharya could not walk but insisted upon pulling himself up along all the same. He was panting and they reached the temple premises and were almost near the Mahadwaram. He heard the temple bells ringing. It became difficult for Annamacharya to move further. He was panting and could not move further. May be he did not want the pilgrims to be disturbed so he stopped at the entrance. The evening was coming to an end and the cool breeze was too strong for him to bear.

Annamacharya sat in front of the Mahadwaram in the lap of Narasinganna, face towards the temple. The Golden temple was visible to him. It was bright as the Sunrays were falling on it from behind. That evening seemed bright and serene. The twilight seemed the last in the life of a great saint and he was waiting for it. Annamacharya signalled to Narasinganna that he was thirsty and Narasinganna took the Theertham from the silver vessel with a leaf and put a few drops in his father’s mouth. Annamacharya seemed happy to see his son fulfilling his last wish. He took the Tulasi Theertham and his eyes closed down slowly. It was dark and all the people around saw an illuminating light passing into the sanctum from the great saint poet.

“Jathasyahi dhruvo mruthyuhu
Dhruvam janma mrutsyacha”
Sreemad Bhagvdageetha

-THE END-
GLOSSARY

Alamelu Manga: One of the two wives of Sri Venkateswara, her temple at Mangapuram is nearly five km from Tirupathi.

Alipiri: A place at the foot of the Tirumala hills.

Amma: Mother.

Anadarakshaka: The protector of the weak and orphans.

Anandanilayam: The most revered golden temple top of Lord Venkateswara in Tirumala. Literally means happy abode.

Angavastram: The cloth worn to over the upper part of the body.

Anjaneya: The Vanara (Monkey) warrior and a great devotee of Lord Rama. 

Apadamokkulavada: The liberator of all troubles.

Attirala Madugu: A pond in the eastern side of Tallapaka. A Shiva temple is on the banks of this pond.

Ayyya: Has different meanings. (Father, mother, master etc.) Sometimes wives too call their husbands thus.

Bali: The famous king in Bhagavatam who was famous for his charity.

Bhagavatam: A holy book for the Hindus in which the birth and deeds of Lord Krishna are wonderfully portrayed.

Bhagavad Geeta. A part of the Mahabharata and considered very holy book for the Hindus. Lord Krishna recites the Geeta to dispel the fear of war in the mind of Arjuna.

Bhajan: A song or hymn sung in praise of god rhythmically.


Bhakti: Worship or devotion

Bharatam: The greatest Indian epic poem in which the war between Pandavas and Kouravas is described. Also known as the Mahabharata.

Bhashyakaras: Linguists.

Brahmin: Sanskrit brahmana, higher ranking of the four varnas, a social order. Mostly priests.

Chakker Pongali: A rice item prepared with sugar.

Chitalamma: A village goddess for rural people.

Daddodhanam: A rice item prepared with spices.

Darbha: A kind of long and thick grass used for Hindu rituals.

(a)
Pulihora: A delicious rice item prepared with lemon juice or tamarind paste.

Puranas: The great books of Hindu Religion.

Pushkarini: A holy tank on temple premises for holy dip.

Rudrakshamalas: A chain made of certain beads and worn around wrists, around the neck and the arms.

Sankalpam: Inner Thoughts.

Sankeerthana: A song or hymn in praise of god can be set to tune.

Sankeerthana Yagnam: Annamacharya took a vow to compose at least one sankeerthana in a day. This is his sankeerthana Yagnam.

Sankhya yoga: A chapter in the Bhagvad Geetha.

Sankranti: A three day harvest festival celebrated in the month of January. It is also celebrated in all parts of India with different names.

Sanskrit: An ancient Indian Language from which most of the Indian languages are originated.

Shravana: A devoted son who faithfully served his old parents.

Slokas: The metered poems in Sanskrit.

Sreenivasadasa: The servant of Sreenivasa.

Sreevari Brahmosthavams: Extremely auspicious days. Festivities celebrated in some particular days of a year for ten days. Usually in the month of September.

Sri Ramanujacharya: A south Indian Brahmin theologian and philosopher, the single most influential thinker of devotional Hinduism.

Srihari: Lord Vishnu.

Subhadra kalyanam: A poetic work by Tallapaka Timmakka, wife of Tallapaka Annamacharya.

Tallapaka: Birth place of Annamacharya, nearly five km from Rajampet in Kadapa Dt and nearly ninety km from Tirupathi in Andhra Pradesh.

Tambura: A string instrument.

Tirupathi Gangamma gudi: A temple for village goddess in Tirupathi. In Tirupathi town Ganga jatara is celebrated usually in the month of May, with pomp and gaiety to drive away evil forces and get protection from diseases.

Tulasi theertha: Water mixed with Tulasi leaves considered holy.
Maddela: A percussion instrument like drum used for rhythm.
Madhava: Another name for Lord Vishnu.
Mahadwaram: The main entrance of Tirumala temple.
Mantapam: An open structure mostly in temples and sometimes resting place for pilgrims.
Muchikunda: A great devotee of Lord Vishnu in Bhagavatam.
Mukkatla: A way to reach Tallapaka where three roads are met.
Mukti: To unite in god.
Mutt: A building constructed by Hindu religious organizations or philanthropists for religious activities and these are being used to accommodate travelers and guests of the village.
Nadaswaram: A wind instrument used in temple processions and for celebration of marriages and other functions.
Nagalamanu: An entwined giant trees of neem and ficus (Ravi), at the entrance of Tallapaka.
Nagaram: Town, here capital city.
Nandi: The impressive white bull, the vehicle of Lord Shiva.
Narasimha: The incarnation of Lord Vishnu in the form of Lion.
Niluvudopidi: Offering to god whatever on the body to the hundi.
Nivedyam: Any sweet or rice item offered to God and later distributed to the devotees.
Niyogi: A sect in Brahmins.
Padakavita: Prose verse. Annamachrya considered to be the father of this genre.
Papanasam: Master or mentor.
Payasam: A sweet item prepared with sugar or jaggery.
Prahlada: Child devotee of Vishnu. His father, Hiranyakasyapa had a great hatred for Vishnu.
Prahladavarada: The saviour of Prahlada, Lord Vishnu.
Pranaamamulu: Respectful greetings.
Prasadam: Eatables like sweets and other items prepared and kept before the deity and after the puja distributed to the devotees.
Pujagriham: A place or room in the house where the portraits of Gods and Goddesses are kept and worshipped.
Dasami: The tenth day of a fortnight in Telugu calendar.
Dharma: Righteousness.
Dwajasthambham: A high mast usually stands in front of the main door of the temple.
Dwipada Kaavyam: An epic written in dwipada, a particular meter in Telugu.
Ganesa: The elephant god, considered to be auspicious to pray before the start of any work.
Ganga: The Ganges, the holiest river for the Hindus, reverentially termed as Mother Ganga.
Gangamma gudi: A temple in which the stone idol of Gangamma, a village goddess is kept.
Garbha gudi: The sanctum or the innermost temple where the main idol is kept.
Garuda gambham: An iron frame in which cotton wickers are lit and sometimes carried house to house.
Gayatrimantra: A sloka from the Vedas for chanting.
Govinda: Lord Vishnu.
Guru: Devotees fondly attribute Lord Venkateswara the qualities of a money lender.
Haarathi: Lighted camphor placed in a plate at the conclusion of a prayer.
Harikatha: A peculiar narration of stories particularly from the puranas by the narrator. They are usually arranged during festive occasions throughout the night, accompanied by music instruments.
Janamejaya: The descendent of Pandavas of the Mahabharata.
Jeevathma: Eternal soul.
Kaliyuga Vaikuntam: Vaikuntam means the abode of Lord Vishnu. Tirumala is referred as present day Vaikuntam.
Kalyanothavam: Celebration of marriage.
Kumkuma: A red powder to be applied on the foreheads.
Lord Janardhana: Lord Vishnu.
Vaddikasulaswamy: A waterfall about six km from Tirumala.
Vaidya narayano hari: The doctor is like god.
Vaishnavism: The essence of Vishnu doctrine.
Varahaswami Temple: A temple near the pushkarini for Varahaswami in Tirumala.
Vedanta: Philosophy.
Vedas: The four great scriptures of the Hindu religion. The authorship is unknown. They are Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Adharvanaveda.
Venkateswara: The Lord of Sevenhills.
Vibhutinamas: Stripes of white powder drawn on the body showing religious belief.
Vithala: An incarnation of Lord Vishnu.
Yaganarasimha: Lord Narasimha.
Yagnam: A fire ritual to satisfy the gods.
The Arch at the Mumbai-Chennai Highway at the Talavala Cross, Built by the Tirumala Tirupathi Devasthanams
Entrance of the Annamacharya Memorial Hall Complex
It includes a newly constructed Kalyana Mandapam.

Side view of Annamacharya Memorial Hall.
Stone idol of Annamacharya in the Annamacharya Memorial Hall.

The Ancient Vishnu Chakram
For centuries it had been used as dais for religious & cultural activities in the village.
The Bull in the Siddeshwara Temple.
Side view of ancient Siddeswara Temple.

Nagalamu, the giant entwined trees of Neem and Raavi at the entrance of Tallapaka.
The new Annamacharya mandapam by the side of Chennakesava Temple.
About the author

RLN Raju, born in Tallapaka, Kadapa Dt. Andhra Pradesh, did his post graduation in English Literature from S.V.University, Tirupathi. He is currently working as Assistant Professor of English and Head, Dept of Humanities and Sciences in the Annamacharya Institute of Tech& sciences, Rajampet Kadapa Dt. He is pursuing research for doctoral degree from Potti Sreeramulu Telugu University Hyderabad, under the guidance of the renowned scholar and literary critic Dr C. Mrunalini.

He shows keen interest in Telugu Literature, though by profession he is a teacher of English. His fascination for the saint poet has, obviously stemmed from his being born in Tallapaka, which also made him an ardent follower of the vaggeyakar’s life and works. By writing in English, his intention is to spread the message and greatness of Tallapaka Annamacharya to the world.