

Vaishnavism as Fine Literature

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Speaking to God in Wondrous Ways: Contributions from Classical Telugu Poetry

This paper explores the contributions of two classical Telugu poets – Taḷḷapaḷka Annamayya and Nandi Timmana. Taḷḷapaḷka Annamayya (ca. 1424-1503 C.E.), a Smaṛta brahmin from the village of Taḷḷapaḷka, became a Śrīvaisṇava after the god Venkateśvara appeared to him in a dream and summoned him to Tirumala. Patronized by the famed Tirumala temple, Annamayya became well-known for his short lyrical poems (sankīrtanalu), and his extensive canon of songs was inscribed on thousands of copperplates under the direction of his son and disseminated in the decades following his lifetime. Just as Annamayya's songs were being inscribed on copperplates, Nandi Timmana, a court poet patronized by the powerful Vijayanagara monarch Kṛṣṇadevaraḷya, composed an epic poem (mahaḷprabandha) titled Paṛijaṭaḷpaharanamu (Theft of a Tree). Timmana's prabandha employs a range of Sanskrit and vernacular meters and literary conventions, including citrakaḷvya, to tell the story of Kṛṣṇa's theft of the paṛijaṭa tree from the garden of Indra. By comparing the short lyrical verses of temple poet Annamayya to the wondrous words of court poet Timmana, this paper showcases and interrogates Vaisṇava fine literature in a Telugu mode.