Harshita Mruthinti Kamath – Emory University

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

This paper explores the contributions of two classical Telugu poets – Tāllapāka Annamayya and Nandi Timmana. Tāllapāka Annamayya (ca. 1424-1503 C.E.), a Smārtta brahmin from the village of Tāllapāka, became a Śrī vaisṇava after the god Venkatesvara 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 (sānki ṛtanaḷu), 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 Kṛṣṇaḍevara, composed an epic poem (maha ṛprabandha) titled Pārijaṭāpaharanamu (Theft of a Tree). Timmana’s prabandha employs a range of Sanskrit and vernacular meters and literary conventions, including citrakaṇya, to tell the story of Kṛṣṇa’s theft of the pārijaṭa 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.