Chapter 3
Song Cultures in Telugu

3.0 Song Cultures in Telugu

The historical outline of the song cultures in Tamil, Kannada and Hindi as narrated in the previous chapter has enabled us to trace the development and the themes of song cultures in broad outlines. Starting with the substantial background of the song cultures in India from pre-historic times has given an idea to understand the depth of the song composition, singing and how the songs are alive in the present era. The previous chapter also gives us an outline that how the scholars understood and treated songs in their studies in the modern times. The present chapter will narrate song cultures, the movements and the famous poets of song cultures in Telugu.

Oral literature means peoples' songs, Vedas, folk tales, and oral stories. We call all the oral forms as oral literature. So the oral literary forms are there in every language of every country in the world; oral forms are there in Telugu before the scribal development. The oral songs and stories were composed and communicated in colloquial language. Since an oral song is not written, the song must be heard but not to be read. The major difference between the oral song and written song is that a written one can be read and understood. An oral song could be understood by listening only. But when we read a text of an oral song it can't make much impact.
Language and writing both are important to any culture. But language is there before the writing and script has been developed. But without writing there is no literature. And at the same time we can’t even say that oral literature is not important. It is a wonder to us that the oral forms survived from immemorial ages without text that is without writing.

Since the oral literature has no textual form, it failed to draw the attention of the literary scholars and researchers. Text of an art or work is the base for the research in literary world. So no recognizable research is done in the field of orality in Telugu language. The researchers also undervalued the oral literature as it is only meant for village, uncivilized and uneducated people. Thus the importance or greatness of Telugu oral literature is not brought out.

There was no right name for the oral literature. Before the scribal and education system was developed they were called songs, tales, and stories. Oral literature is a name given by the educated people to help them to make a clear division between the oral and the written forms of literature. After the development of scribal system the whole literature is divided into two major kinds. They are: the written literature and unwritten literature or oral literature. They also called it Folklore, folk literature and Desi literature. Whatever the name given by the elite literary intellectuals the names did not suite the immense importance of the oral literature.

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The language in oral poetry is like the language we use in our every day conversations. The song composition and singing occurs at the same time. In oral literature, the composer himself sings the song. So the singer is none other than the composer of the song. But in written literature it is quite different because the writer of a song and singer are different. First writer writes the lyrics for a song and the singer adds a tune and sings it. So the writing of a song and singing happens in different times. But at the same time it must be noted that not all written work is sung in the literary field.

In oral literature, the composer divides a song into any number of divisions. There are no rules for an oral song. Each part or division is called a unit. The composer gradually weaves a song. The composer of oral poem first selects a story or a subject and then he slowly weaves it into a large piece of song. In oral literature word means a unit of sounds. So we must understand that words mean units of sound but not the combination of letters (alphabet). In oral literature the analysis can't be done on the basis of language and scribal system.

Another significant characteristic of oral poem is that it has a lot of flexibility. afterwards a new song also could be composed on the same tune with a different theme. The oral poetry has no rules as the written poetry. So the oral poet can compose a song as lengthy as the subject needs and supports.
The major negative aspect in oral poetry is that an oral poet-singer cannot show any proof for his story and argument. But in written poetry the poet or singer can easily defend himself by showing a written document or a book for his argument. But there is no proof for an oral poem and poet’s argument since it is now written. Thus the written literature and writers gradually became stronger than the oral poets and oral literary forms. The people believed more in written evidence than the oral poem and songs. The oral literary forms became weaker because there is a lack of written substantiation. Thus there was a strong need for the oral poets to have script for their song lore. So the oral forms of poetry have been written and archived in thalapatra leaves.

3.1 Distinction between written and oral poetry

Oral poetry, oral poet and the audience are from the same social strata. And also an oral song needs no interpretation. The language of an oral poem is simple and easy to listen and follow. The oral poets make use of the simple and local idioms of peoples’ language. The poet also needs training. But the training will be simple - the trainer will listen to the song and practice it. No language training will be given to the oral poets because the language of an oral poem is taken from the daily conversations. In oral poetry the singers come from the listeners only.

In Telugu language the tradition of writing poetry was started from Nannaya Bhattu. Nannayya is considered as the father of the Telugu literature. Nannayya worked a lot for the development of the Telugu language. He is the first writer=poet because his translation of Sanskrit epic Mahabharata was the first available text in Telugu literature. He takes some Sanskrit words into Telugu languages and made the language wider. So he is called the father of (written) Telugu literature but not for the whole Telugu literary forms like songs, and other forms of oral literature. So we can say that there is literature like songs, tales and stories in Telugu before Nannayya’s period.
The tradition of *Purana* is quite different from the oral poetry. Oral poetry meant for working class people, the singers and composers are from lower classes. The writer of *purana* is from upper classes and an educated man. But *puranas* are even for lower class or common people. The common people could easily understand an oral poem. But they could not understand a *Purana*. So they need an educated person to read the *Purana* and describe it clearly. Oral poem is composed at the time of singing spontaneously. But *Purana* is read by its teller after it is composed. The audiences are in front of the oral poet while he is singing and composing. But there wouldn’t be any audience in front of the *Purana* poet while he writes the *Purana*. The audiences will listen to the *Purana* while the *Purana* teller reads it for them.

In oral poetry the role of audience is very important. Since the audiences are in front of the singer there is chance of a direct impact of the audiences on the singer. The oral poet or singer can feel the emotions and responses of his audiences. The composition, singing, of an oral song and the amalgamation of the audience of the audiences happens at the same time. But the poet or writer of the *Purana* can’t have these experiences because of the absence of the audiences. But the reader of *Purana* can have the experience of examining the response of the audience. The *Purana* writer has a chance to take a pause in his writing and think of the subject. The writer of a *Purana* can check what he has written.
The other differences between the oral poet and the Purana writer are: oral poet has no knowledge of education and writing system and the knowledge of Sanskrit language. The poet-writer of Purana is educated and has the knowledge of Sanskrit language. He also can read the two languages Telugu and Sanskrit. He also has the knowledge of well read poetry and books in the languages. The prosody of oral poetry is easier then the written poetry. The prosody of written literature is critical because there was an impact of early poetic works and Sanskrit language. So that is why the listeners will be there in the Purana writer’s mind though they are not in front of him. The poet keeps the audience in his mind and writes Puranas.

3.2 Prabandha revolution

Prabanda poetic forms are famous around 16th century. Prabandhas are long written poems. The most famous writers of Prabandhas worked under the kings and as court poets. The theme of the poetry would praise king and his achievements. The poetry talks of the greatness of the kings with exaggeration. The Prabandha poets faced criticism that they were paid workers under the king to write poetry. These poets haven’t written about the common people and realistic issues in the society. It is long descriptive poem in Telugu literature.

What are the distinguishing features of song cultures in Telugu, as compared with the song culture in other languages in India? What individual and characteristic note do they
make? Do they take or continue anything from song cultures of the other languages, regions and periods of India? When the song-poets sing the songs and perform, the embodied memory plays a vital role in their performance. In such a context we are made to ask: do the scholars in the modern times consider memory and understand the role of the body in the arena of mnemocultures?

The song-poets of song cultures in Telugu are remarkable creators of the songs in their own times with different perspectives of the society and religion and region. Song cultures in Telugu are if not as old as the song cultures in other languages, they are as important as the other song cultures in India. The song-poets in Telugu created some new genres in the local song cultures. When we study the song composers such as Annamayya and Ksetrayya we will come to know that there are new themes such as “sringaara” that came into existence. I will discuss about various themes of their songs in the following sections. Song cultures in Telugu are extremely rich that they contain all major features of the song cultures of the world.

The categories, which were classified in various languages such as Tamil and others by scholars across the world, would be found in song cultures in Telugu. Some of the unique features of Telugu song cultures like Puranas can be found in them. They are very rich not only in terms of variety of genres but the huge size of the repertoires of various performing Jatis and singers in all the communities. Totality of song cultures in Telugu
can be classified on different aspects. The first aspect is the basis of genres, second is on the poets and their periods; the third is on the themes of the song composition. I would be following the same order to discuss song cultures in Telugu to bring out their significance of them.

The song cultures in Telugu have a thousand year old history and song tradition. Song cultures in Telugu language carry the art, wisdom, beauty and the culture of the people who belong to several Jatis in Andhra Pradesh. The songs regulate the life of man are too precious to be lost and ignored. Every man of the region needs to understand the values and the persistence of the songs composed by various poets for centuries. The main aim of the present chapter is to study the historical background of the themes in the song-poems of saint-poets like Annamayya, Kshetrayya and others. To understand how the song-poems are linked up with the wide-ranging collective experiences of the common man Telugu land. The songs of people’s cultures cannot be appreciated until they are correlated with the people of the region or Jati. The saint-poets or the song composers from the 16th century seem to have had a closer relationship with the Kannada song cultures of 12th century.

The remuneration to the song-poets is nothing more than an admiration, distinction and the gratefulness of his audience for their renderings. The song-poets are immortal as the song cultures continue to live in people’s lives. The song composers of the early centuries
are still alive in the memory of the people because of the songs he/she composed about the important matter of the common man and his living. The song-poets in any song cultures of India use very simple language and compose songs briefly for the benefit of the common people who don’t have any formal education. The language used is also understood by anyone in the village areas.

Telugu is another most spoken language after Hindi in India, in Andhra Pradesh region. It was derived from Sanskrit and was also influenced by Prakrit Language. It also has been influenced by Urdu especially in the Telangana Region. The history of Telugu song cultures had survived over centuries. Song cultures were one of the most invaluable literary genres produced in Telugu literature. The Telugu song cultures are incredibly rich with its songs, stories, oral poetry, puranas, and folk tales.

The origins of Telugu song cultures cannot be traced. Andhra Mahabharatam was the first written text available in Telugu literature that came into existence in 11th century. It was composed by Nannaya Bhattu, who was one of the literary giants in Telugu literary tradition. Nannaya, Tikkana, Yerrana were the poets who composed the Mahabharata in Telugu. They were called Telugu Triumvirate. The Telugu language and literature is very rich with its literary production; many well-known poets and song composers such as Palkuriki Somanadhudu, Annamayya, Thallapaka Thimmakka (a Telugu poetess),
Vemana, Kshetrayya, Thyagayya, Bhakta Ramadasu and others composed glorious verses in Telugu. They all belong to different ages of Telugu literary map.

3.3 Palkuriki Somanadhudu

Palkuriki Somanadhudu was an eminent poet and song composer in Telugu song cultures. He lived in the 13th century. He was born at a small village named Palkuriki in Warangal district. His parents were devotees of lord Siva. He was similar to the group of vachanakaras in Kannada song cultures. He composed poetry in a simple Telugu language and to be very easy to illiterate people. His poetry is famous for simple imagery. Basava Puranamu and Panditharadhya charithamu are the famous works produced by Somanadhudu. He composed Vachanas in Kannada language. He also composed poetry in Sanskrit language. Dwipada is his composing style in his days.

3.4 Famous Song-Poets in Telugu Song Cultures

3.4.1 Annamayya

There is only one God
There is only one supreme God
There is no such thing as low person as in every one
The lord or the god resides in the heart or the sole
Here, all living things are one
As in everyone and everything

The sleep of king is same like the sleep of his workers
The greater land of Brahmins is same like the earth of the chandalas
The sense of pleasures of the great celestial beings is same one like
Those experienced by the animals’ kingdoms too.

The above song is one of the famous and philosophical songs of Annamayya Sankeerthanas. The poet equalizes every one. Annamayya says that all feelings and pleasures such as physical and mental are same to everyone including the gods. So there is no difference among the people. He teaches the people to lose the material pleasures and discrimination in the society. When it comes to sleep, the sleep cannot differentiate whether the person sleeping is a common man or king. Like that every human is equal there are no differences.

Annamayya is one of the famous Telugu saint-poet in Telugu song cultures in early classical periods. The legend, filling out his image, claims he refused to sing before one of the Vijayanagara kings, Saluva Narasimharaya; his devotion was exclusively focused upon the god. Apparently, supported by the temple establishment at Tirupati, located on the boundary between the Telugu and Tamil regions, he composed thousands of song-
poems in Telugu Language. Thallapaka Annamacharya known as Annamayya was born in 1408 in village named Thallapaka in Chittur district. He composed 36,000 songs in a form called Keerthana in Telugu language. He was an official singer at lord Venkateshwara temple at Tirupati. Annamacharya had lived for about 94 years. He was immersed in devotion in 1503 by singing his last song for Venkateshwara.

The musical form that he used in his poetry heavily influenced the music and song cultures of Karnataka. He also regarded as the father of song writing in Telugu song cultures. His wife Thimmakka is famous for her work Subadra Katyanam. She is considered as the first woman writer in Telugu language. They had one and only son whose name Pedda Tirumalacharya and he is also a well known composer in Telugu. Annamayya poems were meant to be sung, although the precise, original manner of singing them fell into disuse and have only recently been partially reconstructed. The poet himself indicated the raga in which each poem was to be sung, as we see from the copper plates. The standard padam format includes an opening line or lines, pallavi, followed by three charanam verses, each of which returns to the pallavi refrain. The padam is thus a highly integrated, internally resonant syntactic and thematic unit.

Annamayya's poems were editorially divided – already in the copper plates – into two major categories, *sringara* (erotic) and *adhyatha* (meta-physical). The former, which comprise nearly three-quarters of the entire surviving corpus, deal with the infinite verities and nuances of the god's love life, which the poet knows intimately. Usually these poems are couched in the female voice. So-called *adhyatha* poems are by way of contrast, sung in the poet's own voice and deal with his sense of himself as an agonized, turbulent human being in relation to the god he worships. These two categories are superbly complementary; taken together, they explore and articulate a wide range of human experience. In that sense, they are universal poems. Annamayya songs represent his love towards lord Venkateshwara. He sings, dances, and even quarrels with the lord through his poetry. The whole ranges of songs of Annamayya are divided into three parts according the genres and themes that they were composed. Some of the 36,000 songs were divided into songs of devotion, erotic or romantic (*sringara*) songs and the third genre is called *sankeerthanas*. The genre “erotic” poetry or *sringara* songs have been continued from its formative period from the tenth onwards, south Indian devotional poetry was permeated by erotic themes and images.

In the Tamil poems of Shiva Nayanmars and the Vishnava Alwars, god appears frequently as lover, in roles inherited from the more ancient Tamil love poetry of so-called *sangam* period in the first century AD. Poems of this sort are generally placed,

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alongside their classical sangam models, in the category of Akam, the inner poetry of emotion, especially the varied emotions of love in its changing aspects. Such Akam poems-addressed ultimately to the god, Siva or Vishnu, and contextualized by a devotional framework, usually that of worship in the god's temple—are early south Indian examples of the literary linkage between mystical devotional and erotic discourse so prevalent in the world's major religions. Among the sankeerthanas, there were wake-up songs, Bhajans, and other preaching songs of the lord Venkateshwara. Annamayya represented his Bhakti as a devotee through sankeerthanas. The other songs among the keerthanas were written on morality, social, caste and other dogmas in the society. His poetry suggests that he also has composed songs on equality among the people in the society for instance.

Annamayya also composed a good number of songs on romantic theme. The songs written in erotic theme describe the personal and romantic life of Venkateshwara and his wife Alamelu Manga. Annamayya also composed a marriage song for the wedding occasion of Venkateshwara.

Seeing is one thing,
Looking is another.
If both come together,

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That is god.

If you look for an elephant,
He comes as an elephant.

If you look for a tree,
He’s a tree.

If you look for a mountain,
He’ll be a mountain.

God is what you have in your mind.

If you look for empty space,
He appears as space.

If you look for an ocean,
He’ll be an ocean.

If you look for a city,
He will come as a city.

God is what you have in your mind.

If you think of the god on the hill,
Married to the goddess,
That’s who you’ll see.

What you look for
Is the god in you?

What you see
Is the god out there?
Within Telugu literature, Annamayya is something of an island. His name is virtually ignored in the Telugu literary canon that was in place by the early sixteenth century. Similarly, musicologists and musicians generally fail to mention him (until the middle of the twentieth century) as one of their predecessors, despite the vast musical production that he left behind. The medieval grammars of metrics never cite him. Annamayya was a maverick, outside the grand genres and lines of force of Telugu literary ecology. Yet he effectively created and popularized a new genre, the short *padam* song that spread throughout the Telugu and Tamil regions and later became a major vehicle for Carnatic musical composition. *Padams* were composed throughout India; early examples in Sanskrit can be seen in Jayadeva's famous devotional poem, the *Gitagovinda*.

In south India the genre assumes a standardized form in the second half of the 15th century with the Telugu padams composed by the great temple-poet Thallapaka Annamacharya, also known as Annamayya, at Tirupati. This form also includes an opening line called pallavi that functions as a refrain, often in conjunction with the second line of *anu pallavi*. This refrain after each of the Charanam verses. *Padams* have been and are still being composed the major languages of south India: Telugu, Tamil and

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Kannada. However, the *padam* tradition reached its expressive peak in Telugu, the primary language for south Indian classical music, during the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries in southern Andhra and Tamil region. In general, Telugu *padams* are devotional in character with wider corpus of south Indian Bhakti poetry.

The early examples by Annamayya are wholly located within the context of temple worship and are directed toward the deity Venkateshwara and his consort, Alumelumanga, at the Tirupati shrine, later poets, such as Kshetrayya. They nevertheless usually mention the deity as the male protagonist of the poem. Indeed Kshetrayya serves an identifying "signature" *Mudra* for each of these poets. The god assumes here the role of a lover, seen for the most part, through the eyes one of his courtesans, mistresses, or wives whose persona the poets adopts. These are the devotional works of an erotic cast, composed by male poets using feminine voice and performing by the woman. As such they articulate the relationship between the devotees and his god in terms of an intensely imagined erotic experience, expressed in bold but also delicate nuanced tones. Their devotional character notwithstanding, one can also read them as simple love poems. Indeed, one often feels that, for Kshetrayya at least, the devotional component, with its suggestive ironies, is overshadowed by the emotional and sensual

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immediacy of the material\textsuperscript{69}. Before going any farther, we should listen to Annamayya’s distinctive Voice and take note of his chosen form:

Where is my wisdom?
Where is my good sense?
Time is lost, like an offering
Poured into the dust,
I think I need this thing, or maybe that thing.
I never get beyond such hopes.
I keep on waiting, and time lures me
Like a deer behind a bush,
An offering poured in the dust.
There’s always this plan, or maybe that one,
And my problems will be over.\textsuperscript{70}

The song is a \textit{padam} (also \textit{sank\textpi\textmu\textntana, \textit{“poem of praise”}): three (rarely two, sometimes four or more) short stanzas (\textit{charanam}) proceeded by a \textit{pallavi} opening, which also serves as a refrain, tying together each of the stanzas and imparting a certain unity. The \textit{pallavi} often gives the theme, which is then expanded in the \textit{charanas}. Each stanza

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid. P.2.

reconnects to the *pallavi* syntactically or semantically or both; thus, in performance, there is a tendency to sing the *pallavi* at the conclusion of each stanza. The final stanza invariably refers directly to Venkateshvara, the god on the hill, this reference indicating the approaching end of the song. Repetition of the *pallavi* creates a spiral-like architecture of sound and feeling, ultimately enveloping the listener in awareness, or an experience, of the god's presence.

We know today—a highly dynamic and successful entrepreneurial system built around a god of individual, subjective temperament, responsive to each of his visitors. Annamayya invented a style of lyrical intimacy that became a form of worship. His surviving poems are also, perhaps, the most accessible and universal achievement of classical Telugu literature, one of the major literatures of pre-modern India.

### 3.4.2 Kshetrayya

Kshetrayya was a creative Telugu poet. He was born in a village called Movva in Andhra Pradesh. His original name was Varadayya. His name was changed as Kshetrayya because he uses to travel from a place to place singing his songs on various temples that he came across. He composed more than 4000 songs. But only a few of them survived. He was a deep devotee of lord Krishna. He is famous for his writings in a poetic genre called *Padam*. The *padams* were sung with the accompaniment of music and dance on religious occasions. His songs were generally divided into two or more parts. The first
parts are called Pallavi and second and third are called anu pallavis. This is one special style that Kshetrayya developed and gifted to the world of song cultures. Most the song writers follow the same writing system in present times including the film song writers. In that way, the padam has been perfected by Kshetrayya’s contribution. Thus Kshetrayya’s work played major role in changing the composing songs in the song cultures. Kshetrayya also has composed a good number of erotic songs on god Krishna as he calls him as his Movva Gopala.

Woman! He’s none other
than Cennadu pf Paalagiri.
Haven’t you heard?
He rules the worlds.
When he wanted you, you took his gold—
But couldn’t you tell him your address?
Some lover you are!
He’s hooked on you.
And he rules the worlds
I found him wandering the alleyways,
Too shy to ask anyone.
I had to bring him home with me.
Would it have been such a crime?
If your girls
Had waited for him by the door?
You really think it's enough
To get your money in your hand?
can't you tell who is big, who is small?
Who do you think he is?
And he rules the worlds
This handsome Cennadu of palagiri,
This Movva gopala,
Has fallen to you lot
When he said he'd come tomorrow,
Could not you consent?
Just a little?
Did you really have to say no?
What can I say about you?
And he rules the worlds.\(^{71}\)

In the above song the courtesan is chiding her younger colleague. God himself has come as a customer to this young woman, but she has treated him rather haughtily-taking his money but refusing even to give him her address. The madam finds him wandering the narrow streets of the courtesan colony, to embarrass to ask for direction. Although his real nature and power are clear enough-as the refrain tell us, this customer rules the

\(^{71}\) Ibid. P.15.
worlds—it is the woman who has the upper hand in this transaction, while the deity behaves as an awkward and essentially helpless plaything in her control. He wants her, lusts for her, and yet she easily eludes him. Their relationship, such as it is, is transactional and mercenary, and the advantage wholly hers. But it is not always the woman’s voice we hear in Kshetrayya; one rare occasion, the male deity-lover is he speaker.

But the image of the woman—the human partner in the transaction—is on the whole quite consistent. Usually, again not always, she is a courtesan, practiced in the arts of love, which she freely describes in graphic, if formulaic, terms. She tends to be worldly, educated, articulate, perhaps a little given to sarcasm. In most Padams she has something to complain about, usually her divine lover’s new infatuation with some rival woman. So she may be angry at him—although she is also, at times, all too easily appeased, susceptible to his facile oaths of devotion. Indeed this type of anger—a lover’s pique, never entirely or irrevocably serious—is the real equivalent in these poems to the earlier ideology of Viraha in Sanskrit poetry. Therefore, the erotic theme has become one of the major love poem-songs in Telugu song cultures.

72 Ibid. P.16

73 Ibid. p.18.
3.4.3 Vemana: Teaching of way of life all the way through song cultures

As Vemana had been a keen diviner of men and the material things, the message of his philosophy as song culture was not only significant for his age but it can also be the source of inspiration and guidance for the man of the world of every age. For this reason, Vemana’s poetic message can become distinctly audible even today as it had been in his time too. Though, he was born and lived in his age for his age, it is a universal appeal in his message of humanization that can be more comprehended and appreciated by every individual of any country. This universal aspect of vemana’s poetic-songs attracts the people towards them.

The only instruments of teaching the way of the life to the common people are his voice and the human voice and the words. The two instruments are the things which are shaping, reserving and transmitting the knowledge and science form the generations to generations. The song-compositions of Vemana in the realm of Telugu song cultures may be valued as reactions of gifted soul to the world around. And as a system of philosophy, revealing a great seeker’s reinterpretation of the truth, the undying sayings of this Telugu song composer is worth theorizing and studying. The compositions of the song-poet cover a remarkably great variety of topics and social problems, such as religion, social differences, human good and life.
Vemana’s poetry is unlike anything written before him or after him. His diction of the poems is too short. Its souls are aphoristic. Vemana responded to the happenings around him through his spontaneous recitation -all in an evaluative tone- by going beneath the skin of the people’s behavior that became poetry for his readers. This could have been one of the reasons why his verses often sound didactic-like a father chiding his kid to behave. Vemana’s poetry sprang out of *Bhavavesam* - the verses are spontaneous outpouring of his noble ideas - outpourings of his querying heart at mankind’s irrationality in its disposition towards the society. That why, though many of his verses are of great force and beauty, of noble sentiment and of pastoral sweetness, some have a touch of indecorum. Yet, they are well-rooter in the native soil emitting an all –too-familiar flavor. The message through his compositions of teaching the way of the life is so simple and unsophisticated. Well-conversant with the low cultural level of the common people as well as of the higher strata of society he has to plain talking through his songs.

Vemana has been a keen saint-poet of human nature and was such has pondered deeply upon every phase of human life. His argument through his poetry is that human life is governed by the biological laws. Physical fitness of unfitness is determined by mental and emotional conditions of man. Vemana elaborated the theme in the below poem.

If the body be the well

The real nature of our course clearly seen
But when the body falls into weakness,
We cannot perceive the truth of our state.

He has been aware of the fact that the disturbance in the balance of life forces created man a feeling of helplessness, leading to his incoherent thinking or thoughtlessness and is responsible for his ruination. Erratic thinking is an expression of mere words, but it is the mind alone that makes thinking coherent and meaningful. He says the mind is more to be depended on than one's mere words. As there is no sense in the existence without life, thinking has to serve the cause of life while in existence.

Kumaragiri Vema Reddy is also known as Vemana. He belongs to the reddy community of the Telugu social order. He was lived in the 17th century. He was a well-known poet in the old Telugu song cultures. Vemana has attended great celebrity in the country and in the other adjacent regions of Andhra Pradesh. The verses of Vemana communicate hardly any ideas of his history or personal life and like all solitary ascetics he has dropped his family name—calling himself Vema or Vemana sometimes at pleasure. His life of yogi or a solitary life has led him to address all the verses to himself, which is not to be recollected. The way of addressing himself looks like the grossest egotism. The practice is far indeed from being peculiar to Vemana. The poems of Vemana have attended a great popularity in Telugu society and some of the texts are translated to the other languages like Tamil and Malayalam. the terse closeness of expression of his poems sometimes renders them to difficult to translated with elegance; but such poems exemplify the manly
force of a language the in the common dialect is often weak and verbose. Many of his aphorisms have become common proverbs. And some parts of them are evidently taken from the Sanskrit language.

The verses of Vemana could be divided into three classes: moral, satirical and mystic. In the moral many of his verses occur, breathing a spirit of devotion truly from Hindu devotion. The satirical part is chiefly against the national, religion and social practices and social hypocrisy and none of them is personal attack on anyone. The mystic part of his verses is of chiefly of use as exemplifying the powers of the language.

He composed thousands of poems on innumerable themes such as yoga, wisdom and morality. He taught moral values to the society through his poetry. He is also known as Yogi Vemana. He composed a number of poems in a form of four lines. Each poem ends with a special line Vishwadabhi Rama Vinura Vema. So the theme and the meaning of the poem are explained in the other three lines of the poem. By his travel and singing he gained a lot of fame as a poet in the whole region of South India. With the usage of colloquial speech patterns of Telugu language, he contributed his poetry to the Telugu song cultures. Most of his poems are still used in the present times as aphorisms or proverbs in appropriate situations. The writings of Vemana were collected, translated and published by C. P. Brown, a western man at the time of British rule.
What is the purpose of custom sans inner purity?
What is the purpose of cooking sans cleanliness of vessels?
What is the purpose of worship Siva sans purity of mind?
Beloved of the Bounteous, Vema listen!

That could be understood very easily by common people. The European officer CP Brown of British Government who was an officer in the related district where Vemana roamed and lived has done great amount of labour and research work. Some of his Telugu poems are translated and into English language that send a universal message to the people of the world.

His poems reflect the social and political conditions of that age in simple poetry. He is critically speaking about the artificial practices in the society. He asks that why should we have social practices where there is no purity of mind. Moreover he condemns the whole race of humans saying what is the need of cooking when the pot is unclean? He adds why to preach the lord Siva when the soul itself is impure. He leaves his signature by the last line reminding the people to make them moral.

There are many that find faults with others,
Everyone in the world has faults
The people who count faults do not know their own faults,
Beloved of the Bounteous, Vema listen!

The poetic style of Vemana is simple and more meaningful. That is why his poetry is still alive in the Telugu speaking world. In the above poem there is a critical attack on
hypocrisy. He is criticizing the two-faced men in the society in a simple language. He says that many men try to speak about others faults but they are unaware of their own. There is no man who is perfect and without having any fault. So he is asking the people to think of these simple issues in the society.

A mean person always speaks pompously
A good person speaks softly
Does gold reverberate the way brass does?
Beloved of the Bounteous, Vema listen!

This is another attack on the hypocritical people in the society. The distinctive style of Vemana's poetry is that in a small poem he sets the world in a right and meaningful way. The section that he covered in the poem he not only talked about the behavior of the men and also he compared them with metal. Good person is compared with gold and the bad is with brass. In this way he composed a number of poems and taught about righteous behavior and moral values to the society. Thus Vemana contributed richly with his poetry to Telugu song cultures. After Vemana's poetic period, the themes of the poetry or oral literature was gradually shifted to the social issues of the contemporary issues. Modernity has taken its part in writing poetry in Telugu. The writers have given a space for women in the composition in the poem-songs and I will discuss about the changes of the themes of poetry in the following part of the chapter.
3.5 Poetic Revolutions in Telugu Orature

3.5.1 Gurajada: an unfinished revolution

Modernity was the word used in the 20th century to the whole literary world, means new or fresh or contemporary. The word is used to illustrate the poetry of 20th century. The word modern itself shows that the poetry of the present times is different from previous literature. It also shows the most important swing in the themes, characteristics, approaches of the literary works.

The modern revolution in poetry is named after Gurajada Apparao. He was one of the famous writers and poets in Telugu language in the modern period. We can observe great change in the Telugu poetry with him. Earlier poets used to write in bombastic language and long narrative poems. Gurajada used a simple language and small poems which are easy to the common people of Telugu language. The theme and subject matter has shifted from the kings to the common people and their problems. He wrote poetry on realistic matters.

Telugu is one of the Dravidian languages that is derived from the Sanskrit language. Gurajada Apparao is the father of the modern Telugu literature. Gurajada was the foremost poet among the Telugu modern literature. He is also well known as a social reformer. The modern scholars and academicians did not consider him as a writer. They
did not recognize his writing as a part of written literature. Gurajada is one of the writers in 20th century who tried to add life to the forms of orality.

The major distinction in Gurajada’s poetry is that, he has taken sources and forms from oral poetry. But the themes are modern. Though he wrote poetry to be sung but he belongs to the written literary category. The features and characteristics of oral poetry are different from the features of written literature. There are many poets in Telugu who used oral forms to express their thoughts through their writings. They are like Duvvuru Rami Reddy, Krishna Sastri, Nandini Subbarao, Sri Sri and C. Narayana Reddy.

There are two kinds of opinions in Telugu literary world about his writing; one is: whether he is a writer or not? Another, is he the father of modern Telugu writing? Sri Sri says that Tikkana was the old Telugu poet, Vemana middle Telugu poet and Gurajada is the modern Telugu poet. Velcheru in his book Telugu lo Kavitha Viplava Swaroopalu says that Dr. C. Narayan Reddy is the one who worked on Gurajada’s writings. The methods that Narayana Reddy used to study the poetry are written literary methods. And there was no basic concept in his analysis except an aspiration to look at the work of

76 Ibid., p-57.
Dr. C. Narayana Reddy also claimed that Gurajada was influenced by two poets; one is Wordsworth and the second one is Rabindranath Tagore\(^\text{77}\). But when we look at Gurajada’s writing it seems that he was interested in Desi literature. And there are no similarities between the writings of Gurajada and Wordsworth because Words Worth is Romantic Poet and Gurajada’s writings are not mere romantic poems. Gurajada’s themes are not based on his imagination. He took up the themes from the social issues. His famous works are ‘Neelagiri songs’ and ‘Muthyala saralu’. The language and theme is very simple and a common also should understand it. For example;

Where is gummadi

Oh! Beautiful,

Where is the gummadi

Where is he?

The literary critics, who examined his poetry, measured his ‘Neelagiri songs’ as oral literature and ‘Muthyala swaralu’ as the written literature. The reason is that ‘Neelagiri songs’ are able to be sung as songs. It is not to be read silently. But in fact ‘Muthyala swaralu’ was an extension of his ‘Neelagiri songs’. In this sense we can assume that

\(^{77}\) Ibid. p.57.

\(^{78}\) Ibid. p.67
literature means for scholars only a written one but not the sung one. The methods of written literature are not suitable to study and examine oral poetry. The scholars in the modern times feel that kavi means only a writer but not the one who composes song-poetry. In India oral poets are named as folk poets, balladeers, or the song composers. Still they are not considered as the writer at least. In contemporary times Gaddar and Gorati Venkanna are called balladeers or people's singers but not writers. Since we have no appropriate names to the oral poetry and the oral poets, we have not looked at the development of proper techniques to study the oral poetry. It is a major disadvantage for the oral literature and academicians who work in the field of orality.

Though Gurajada's works are less but they are well known. Some of his works are not to read silently but they are to be sung. His poetic work became famous for singing but not for reading. The other part of his work is just kept in books because that was meant for reading. His well known song are one is a patriotic song and the song of Poornamma. The two songs were as praised and also criticized. Some people said Gurajada's patriotic song is only a song of principles. But Sri Sri said that is a song of common people. As we know that the themes like nationalism adjoin an additional importance to a song. For instance we have Vandemataram and Jana Gana Mana as our National hymns. They have been sung and been treasured since they are not just set aside for soundless appraisal. If they haven't been singing for years ago, they would have been unrecognized all over the world. So the singing characteristic makes a literary piece more famous and brings it more near to the people. Gaddar also feels that when a song must be owned by the people
the song must have singing as its feature. He shares his ideas about the peoples songs in his book “Never-Ending Treasure: The history of people’s songs”, when he talks about how to make famous in the society. So the two written songs of Gurajada’s were famous because of singing is their main feature. They have the value of resonance and they have the sense to magnetize the audiences. It seems to me as per the analysis in the chapter that the impact of Gurajada’s writing mode on the later writers in the Telugu literature was significant. It also helps us to comprehend whether Gurajada is different from the earlier literary revolutions of Telugu literature.

3.5.2 Romantic Revolution

The founders of the revolution were Rayaprolu Subbarao and Abburi Ramakrishna Rao. Nature is the major theme of this revolution. The poet has become boundary-less. The poet is part of the nature. Dr. C. Narayan Reddy was well recognized one who has done most significant study on this poetry. There are no rules for the poet of this movement. The poet is free soul to write poetry. He or she can imagine the nature as lover or beloved. There are no limitations for his imagination.

The movement was only one movement which faced a lot criticism and also was admired. The movement has bundle of influence on later writers. The impact of this revolution on the other writer was clear and deep. The movement was endured only for two decades. There were many people who recognized the importance of the romantic revolution and worked on it. Dr. C. Narayana Reddy was one among them.

\[\textit{Merugu kallajollu, girijaala saradaalu} \]
\[\textit{Bhava kaviki lenivevi levu} \]
\[\textit{Kavithayandu thappa} \]
\[\textit{Gattivaadu amintai} \]
\[\textit{Vishwadabhi Rama!} \]
\[\textit{Vinura vema!} \]
The above poem was written by Krishna Shastri to criticize the whole sect of romantic poets in Telugu. The meaning of the poem is nothing but a hilarious criticism. Krishna Shastri says that the poet of Romantic revolution is stronger at everything except in writing poetry.

When poetry changes the rules of compositions also change. Whenever a new form of poetry emerges there should be new methods or concepts to study poetry. The old method can't be well-matched to study the forms and the features of poetry. Also there should be a change in the methods of research. So when someone wants to study poetry, he should not apply outdated methods to study contemporary poetry. That means old methods are not suitable to study the new forms of poetic-writing.

In study of poetry, the most common things we must look at are subject, poet, poem, audiences. The poet is a creator, poem is his creation. The differences between the classical Telugu poets and the Romantic poets are: the writers who write puranas and prabhandas must have the enormous awareness about the world beyond the common man. The Purana and Prabanda writers must be able to think further than an ordinary man. They must have the complete knowledge of the humankind. But in case of romantic revolution, the poet dwells in his imagination. He has no relations with the realistic world of the human. So in this revolution the poet is needed not to be a highly knowledgeable
person. So a common or an innocent man also can write poetry. The lover, a mad man, and the poet are in the same stratum who can write good poetry.

3.5.3 Progressive Revolution

The poetic-revolution became part of working class communities. The communication system was developed and access to and reading of world literature have increased immensely. There was a lot of impact of western and Marxist ideology on the Indian and Telugu literary figures. The writers and poets were influenced by the world revolutions like Russian revolution and peasant movement. “Fight against the injustice” a slogan has become one of the themes of the progressive poetry. Writers like Sri Sri were famous in the period. Their poetry united the workers to fight against looters and capitalists. The relation between the workers-owners, labourers-looters was another important theme of the progressive poetry.

Srirangam Srinivasa Rao is well known as Sri Sri in Telugu literature. The progressive revolution started with the writings of Sri Sri.

Today
Today
The whole world is changed
The beginning of new life
And a new morning
The poem is extracted from his most famous work is Maha Prasthaanam. His writings have influenced numerous upcoming song composers and writers in Telugu literature. We have pointed out the major forms of Telugu literature. The earlier literary revolution was written and read for personal pleasure. Though the revolutions were great and influential in themes and forms they did not talk about the peoples’ problems and lively issues. But in the 20th century the poetic diction has changed a lot. Since the printing press was invented there were a lot of changes seen in Telugu poetry.

In the romantic revolution poetry has seen as an imagination and it was read for physical and mental pleasures. The romantic poetry has no direct relation with the lives of the people. Even the people were habituated with romantic poetry. People did not accept the progressive literature in early stages. People looked at the progressive poetry by keeping the features of romantic poetry in their minds. So to reach people the progressive poets also have written literary pieces of romantic poetry.

Kadupu dahinchuku poye
Padupu katthe raakshasa rathi
Uri theeyabadda sirassu cheppina rahasyam
Same kattina kooleela
bhaarya biddala haahakaaram\(^80\)

Thus, for the first time the hunger of a common man, unity among the labourers has become the subject of poetry in progressive revolution. Earlier the people were divided according to their caste, theory of Karma. But according to the poetic-ideology of Sri Sri, there are only two divisions in the world. They are workers-owners, creators-looters, commons-capitalists. The division is not done by the pity. Thus the people were divided into working class and industrialists.

Andaramu kalisi chesina
Ee vasthu samudhayam antha
Evado okadu vachi
Ettuku pothunte choosi
Ayaayam anyaayam ani memante
Anubhavinchali mee kharma antadu

Sri Sri wrote a song named ‘He’. In the song he says that the theory of Karma and traditions are created by looters to possess their property and money. Like that Sri Sri writes poetry about the inequalities and injustice in the society.

3.6 Audience of traditional and romantic poem songs and its paradigms

Audience means any individual who perceives the sound of a song or a poem. In times of Purana literature, a group of people used to be the audiences. In times of Prabanda
Revolution, the audiences were read and explained aloud. And it was also done for pleasure sometimes.

But when the romantic revolution arrived in Telugu literature, there was enormous change in the audience. The romantic poetry has to be read by someone for his personal pleasure. The listener of a romantic poem should be in an imaginary world to understand the poem or song. The public bliss is not possible to the audiences of romantic poetry.

3.7 The Shift in Themes

The themes of *puraṇic* literature were taken from the real occurrences like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. The two epics portray the troubles in the lives of the heroes. The *Mahabharata* describes the problems and their heroic achievements of *Pandavas*. The *Ramayana* depicts the life of Sita. So the resources and the themes of the two epics were taken from the lives of human existence.

The sources of *Prabhanda* literature are not taken from any other eras but from the same age of the poet. The source could be life of the kings and the kingdoms. There were rules for writing *Prabhandas*. Though there is no freedom in the writing, but the poet has no boundaries in selecting a topic for his poetry. The romantic poet is free to take a source for his poem. The topic of the poem is imagined by the poet in his personal imagination. The topic of poem is not born in the civil society. He is not even from the material world. The poetry is created from the imaginary world of the poet.
Sri Sri says that a powerful romantic poem must touch the inner feelings of the people. The poet is free to see the realism of the world. The poem would represent the experiences of the poet. The poet is more important than the poem. The personal life of poet and his relations are preferred in the study of poetry. The listener became the singer in the romantic revolution. The relation between the listeners and singer was changed. The reader should feel the imaginary world of poet to understand a poem.

Balagangadhar says that, the shape of the feelings of the poet must touch the readers' soul. Poetry must open new light of new experiences. The poem must move the hearts of the readers. The poems must be genuine and the poets'. The lines of poems must come within you. The poem must have progressive thoughts. The classical poets wrote their poetry for the readers and the audience. But the romantic poet writes and sings for his own personal happiness. Understanding the poem or the song is the duty of the reader. The concept of the romantic poets is that they sing their poetry in their heart but they won’t sing aloud for anyone. They won’t write poetry for the sake of others like traditional writers. So they don’t care the critics and their criticism on their poetry. Consequently, in romantic poetry, the subject of the songs and the outcome or the result of the songs is occupied by the writer. The poet is the whole and sole creator of the song.

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He never thinks of the problems in the real world. He never cares any criticism of the people. He is a free man in the world. His feelings are powerful lines of his poetry.

The poet can change himself into a male or female. He becomes a part in the nature. In romantic poetry the relation between male and female is love and affection. The heart is important for the romantic poet but not the body. In prabhandā poetry female means her body parts. She has no heart and feelings. For romantic poets female means heart not the body. The female in the prabhandā poetry has no heart; the female in the romantic poetry has no body.

Hungry? Or thirsty?
Or tensions?
Should I become a part
In search of madness,
Should I stay back in the forest
However! Should I stop here
However! Should I stop here

It's called bhava poetry is because bhava means feeling. We have to understand the feeling of the poet and the meaning of the poem. In romantic poetry, the woman is the primary figure and she dominates. The man pays tributes to her magnificence, touches her feet. The romantic poet makes a woman deity and he becomes her devotee.
3.8 Conclusion

In the present chapter I have studied the themes and compositions of Annamayya, Kshetrayya, and Vemana. To understand the major shifts in the themes of Telugu song cultures, I will have separate chapters on indigenous elements in songs or *patalu* composed by song-poets like Gaddar and Venkanna, who added an extraordinary expression of the true earthen smell to Telugu song cultures in contemporary times. Conceivably, there is geographical difference among the song cultures of Annamayya times and song cultures of Gaddar and Venkanna the present times. The song cultures of 4th to 16th century were predominantly occupied with themes related to the God; whereas the song cultures of the present times are filled with the problems of ordinary man like land, labour, water, and the woman. A close study on themes and time of the poets is done on a time basis; this distinction will come into a relief. The song composers in the contemporary times like Gaddar and Venkanna are the worshippers of the haunting melody in their compositions. Their songs and tunes and themes haunt their audience. The songs of Gaddar and Venkanna in the present times express their powerful feelings for the people of villages. That is the creativeness of composing songs, the gracefulness of emotion, and sweetness of word choice that draws their respect to song cultures in the present day. The songs are set to music; concerto and lovability is its soul.