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By : **Juggernaut**

OM is a talk show on which celebrities were interviewed by a talk show host SIR. A fictional character 'Chinnamma' was interviewed by SIR.



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Subba Rao

OM is a very popular TV weekly talk show on which the host Subhash Indrajit Roy goes by his initials â SIRâ interviews the celebrities. Everybody calls him Sir. He makes his celebrity guests very comfortable to draw them out slowly to open their minds thus the name of the show â OMâ for â Open Mind. The sound *OM* is very sacred to Hindus and celebrities were afraid to lie on a show named after sacred â *OM*.â fearing if they lie on the show it may come back haunting to ruin their reputation and career. And, the TV host Sir knows it and named the program cleverly â *OM*.â

On one of the shows Sir invited a very popular Keertana or devotional singer; a very attractive married woman in her thirties. â Welcome to our show OM,â Sir was polite and smiling.

â Thank you for having me on your show, to tell the truth I love your show and always want to be invited and here I am,â said the woman wearing a crimson sari, she wore no makeup and yet her skin looked radiant and her accent was impeccable.

â Your name Chinnamma sounds more like a nick name, I am sure it is not your real name?â Sir pressed his mustache with a finger to make sure it was in the right place.

â My given name was Rekha but once I started singing keertans, the public started addressing me as â Chinnammaâ and now I go by that name.â

â Tell me about your life before you became Chinnamma?â

â Well, I born into an agricultural family, my father was a tobacco farmer and later invested in movie industry and became a producer of movies, and then he started a chain of high-tech private hospitals across the state serving millions of people. I have two brothers both helping my dad in running the business. I am only girl in the family and I always want to go to America to study, so they send me to study at a university in Tennessee. After two years in college, one night I had a vision.â

â What, you had a vision?â Sir clasped his hands as if he was going to hear something spectacular, he wants his viewers fully engaged in the conversation.

â Yes, in my vision I saw Annamayya.â

â You mean Saint Annamayya of 15th century.â

â Yes, the same Annamayya, the great devotional singer of 15th century who dedicated his long life of 95 years to the devotion of Lord Venketeswara, the beloved god for all South Indians and some from North. In my vision, I saw Annamayya singing keertans with his hands inviting me to join him. I woke up confused and yet felt blessed. While growing up, I sang Annamayya keertans at home and everybody said I have a great soothing voice and ability to engage people when I speak but I never took seriously but after vision of Annamayya personally inviting me to sing his keertans, I could not resist but start singing few

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keertans I learned long time ago. My roommates at the campus thought I was crazy. I was signing while doing chores, driving and even in the class I was humming to myself. It was no doubt a calling from saint Annamayya, otherwise there I was attending a college in Tennessee, why and how I would be singing his keertans all of a sudden, I am sure I was not crazy. So, I spoke to my parents on coming back home. They were happy since I am only daughter and they don't want me living abroad anyway. But my family was in shock when I told them about saint Annamayya vision; they thought I am going through some period of confusion due to loneliness from living abroad away from the family. But after listening to me singing all the time the keertans they believed that I was truly had a calling and blessings of saint Annamayya.

It is fascinating imagine there you were in America, attending a college, got a vision and all of a sudden you started singing keertans of Annamayya written over 500 years ago. It is a miracle, Sir appeared very excited with his hand still clasped as if locked up in front of his face and begging Chinnamma to continue.

Then I started doing research on Annamayya and his life. He wrote over 35,000 keertans, all of them in devotion to God particularly Lord Venketeswara, each keertan or devotional song is very short only few lines. He wrote in colloquial language, no fancy or difficult words to pronounce. His songs were about morality, truthfulness, dedication, romance and even light erotica.

Sir jumped from his seat and pushed himself forward towards the guest. No, you say erotica?

Yes, some of his songs have a feeling of very light erotica. By today's standard, his lyrics were not qualified as erotica but if one sings with a voice and feels the way the lyrics intended, I am sure the listeners understand it is a step above simple romance.

I couldn't imagine a person like Annamayya can write even a light hearted erotica, Sir wants to stay on this subject little longer.

Very few people now that Annamayya over 500 years ago, coming from an orthodox Brahmin family of poets had two wives at the same time. While it may sound odd that tells that Annamayya was a romantic man and that reflects in his songs.

Are you trained as a singer either in classical music or devotional singing?

No, I have no formal training in vocals either classical or otherwise, I just sing from my heart.

I understand that you charge a hefty fee for your program or event or show or whatever you call it, may I ask how much you charge for each event?

My goal is to sing Annamayya keertans and interpret the meaning to common folks. Remember, Annamayya wrote over 35,000 short songs on a wide variety of subjects, though written over 500 years ago, each one of them has present day relevance.

Lack of better word, your show attracts thousands of people and it costs lot of money for lights, sound and other equipment and rental for the venue etc., how you pay the expenses?

I don't collect any money directly from my audience. The organizers would collect and pay all the expenses and whatever left goes to my non-profit charity.

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â I understand that you live in a better part of the city in a lavish home and travel in expensive cars, how this reflects your work as a devotional singer that interprets the works of Saint Annamayya?â

â It reflects very well. Living and enjoying good life was the motto of keertans, Saint Annamayya wrote these keertans in devotion to god for happiness, fulfillment and wealth. By interpreting his works, I am enjoying good life. There was nothing sinister about it. Have you seen the evangelists on TV in America, they look so rich and live lavish life styles, the God in a way providng all that.â

â Some of your distracters says you were not spiritual enough or has classical background to sing Annamayya keertans and it is all business to cash on Annamayya while his descendents were living in poor,?â now Sir was slowly drawing Chinnamma into an arena where he was good at.

â Not at all, there are scores of devotional singers and some of them could be envious of my success in attracting large crowds in my events. How anybody can measure spirituality in a person?â

â I am not sure but living a simple life and travelling without a large entourage in expensive vehicles could be a measure.â

â I donâ t see the connection. I did not come from traditional families that send their children to learn Sanskrit to study Hindu scriptures to earn their livelihood in religious order. When Annamayya composed the keertans in easily understandable verses, he has in mind precisely what I am doing now, to go the masses and interpret his thoughts. One does not need to know Sanskrit or Hindu scriptures to carry out his work. Through his keertans he preached fairness; maintain high moral values, be kind to all social classes including the lowest of the low caste people.â

â Since you lived in America have heard about Tammi and Tim Bakker?â

â Yes, I watched their show few times.â

â Have you fashioned your show based on their show, singing Lordâ s message for profit.â

â I would not say I copied their concept, remember I had a vision.â

â I know you had a vision of Annamayya inviting you to sing his songs and interpret to the people, but the way your events were conducted has some resemblance to Tammi Bakker show, I have a feeling that after watching her and other women preacher in US, you got this idea of singing Annamayya keertans as a business model. After all, there were scores of singers over the last 500 years who sang his music and even now there are singers that specialize in Annamayyaâ s keertans but none attract the kind of crowds you do. For one thing, the keertans of Annamayya are easy to sing and do not need years of training in singing, the songs were very short to remember.â

â Well, I agree I attract more people than anybody in this business.â

â So you agree it is a business,â Sir appeared as if he won the verbal battle.

â The way how my events are conducted requires business plan, in that sense, yes it is a business.â

What is your plan for the future?â

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â I want to build a theme park celebrating the life and works of Saint Annamayya. At an interactive center, all the keertans can be heard from Annamayya featured in different costumes. There will be rides taking through various stages of his life like in Disney Land for fun. Streets reflecting 500 year old architecture with gift stores and restaurants give the visitors a sense of travel back to 500 years ago. People will have fun and at the same time appreciate the work of Annamayya. Though people were singing his keertans for centuries nobody interpreted his music to the present day relevance as I do. Since my family is in movie industry, they can help build a theme park,â Chinnamma got all excited.â

â you mean like Disney Land started by legendary Walt Disney or Grace Land after Elvis Presley or Dollywood after Dolly Parton, a great American country singer or Tammy and Tim Bakkerâ s PTL Club.â

â Along the same lines but on a smaller scale.â

â What would be the name for such a theme park celebrating the life of Saint Annamayya?â

â I didnâ t think that far yet but certainly it reflects his life.â

â Since we are coming to end of the program, would you sing a nice Annamayyaâ s keertan for our audience, say a light romantic if not light erotica?â

â Certainly but this keertan is all about devotion to god, Annamayyaâ s music belongs to everybody not for a chosen learned few. Chinnamma started singing a beautiful Annamayya keertan with her melodious voice,â

Adivo alladivo sri harivaasamu

Padivela seshula padagala mayamu

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