

# Rev. Mother Annammal – A study

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**Abstract:**-- Rev. Mother Annammal was born in 1836 at Varaganeri, Palakarai in Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India. Her father is selvanayagam and her mother is Arulayaammal. The family of Rev. Mother Annammal was fairly rich and belongs to a high vellala caste. Her father was a tradesman. The parents of Rev. Mother Annammal were devoted catholic and she was brought up in the faith. In the age of 17 she got married and her husband was a victim to the dreadful disease Cholera. He died after six month of marriage life with Annammal. Being a widow at the age of twenty she was inspired to become an instrument of God. Her mission was extended to the poor, welfare of the widows and the illiterate of Thrichirappali. The sacrificial life lead her to the glory. Mother Annamal who has been declared "servant of God "on 22 April 2017.

**Keywords:**-- Mother Annammal, high vellala caste, widow, mission work, servant of God.

## INTRODUCTION

Rev. Mother Annammal a widow who was the foundress of religious congregation, the Sisters of St. Anne of Tiruchirappalli. Being a widow she founded the congregation with nine widows on 2nd February 1858. The sole aim and unique purpose of Rev. Mother Annammal was uplifting the social status of poor, weak, marginalized and destitute young women, particularly widows from the unethical and evil forces of the society.

The Congregation which was founded by Rev. Mother Annammal, canonically erected as a Diocesan Congregation in 1880 and elevated to Pontifical Status in 1977, has grown into a worldwide organization of Religious Women in the Catholic Church. This congregation functions under the Generalate and territorially it is divided into six provinces. At present, more than 1000 sisters are carrying on her mission by rendering committed and dedicated service to widows, women, female children, orphans, tribals, differently abled and other vulnerable people. With the support of the local Church, the Congregation has expanded its ministry in several dioceses in India and in Foreign Countries. The eminent service and ministry of Rev. Mother Annammal made her to be declared "Servant of God "on 22 April 2017.

### **Early Life of Rev. Mother Annammal**

Rev. Mother Annammal was born in 1836 at Varaganeri in Tiruchirappalli in the state of Tamil Nadu, India. Her father is Selvanayagam. The family of Rev. Mother Annammal was fairly rich and belongs to a high Vellala caste. Her father was a trades man.

The family of Rev. Mother Annammal was a pious Catholic family. In the family a girl child Arputha Mary was born. After the birth of Arputha Mary the parent longed for a boy child. Unfortunately again another girl child was born in

the family and they named her Annammal by baptism at Palayakovil parish church. The parents of Annammal were devoted Catholic and she was brought up in staunch Catholic faith. Annammal completed her elementary education in the village school.

### **Religious life**

She expressed her desire and ambition to become a nun to her parents. Her parents were initially reluctant to accept the idea of their daughter to become a nun. However she was persistent. Finally her parents conceded to her desire and ambition. They took her to Pondicherry and admitted in a convent.

At the age of 14 Annammal was admitted in a congregation in Pondicherry to become a nun. She was with full of energy and enthusiasm performed the spiritual activities and other works entrusted to her at the novitiate. In spite of her good will, spirit, piety and obedience, she was not allowed to continue at the convent to become a nun. Because of her vicious and vibrant character, she was asked to leave the convent. She had to return home after two years of her active life in the novitiate and the convent in Pondicherry. She was not at all interested and showed no inclination to marry. So she strangely opposed the wish and desire of her parents. However her parents continued to persuade her to marry.

### **Marriage life**

Annammal finally got married at the age of 17. She married the bridegroom whom her grandmother had already arranged to her. She was not able to do anything against her grandmothers' wish and so she accepted the marriage. She started to live her married life with her husband happily which unfortunately did not last long. Very soon her happiness was completely shattered because of an unfortunate and unpleasant event that occurred in her married life.

Annammal's young husband was the victim to the dreadful disease cholera. He died after six months of married life with Annammal. She became a widow all the sudden. She could not bear the painful loss of her husband within a short period. She was extremely sad and grief stricken. She had conceived at the time of her husband's death and that was her only consolation.

As a widow, she lost all her respect and rights in her family and in the society. She remained secluded in her house and was never permitted to attend the social functions. In the meantime Annammal bore a girl child whom she named Teresa.

### ***Religious Life after marriage***

When she was at the age of 20, she inspired to become an instrument to work for the mission of God and to spread His kingdom on earth. She had a deep God- experience and heard the Divine Call for a very special mission and strongly felt that God called her to work for the welfare of the widows. Leaving her little daughter Teresa in the house under the care of her parents and against tradition and custom that forbade the widows to come out of their homes into the society openly, Annammal came out boldly to break away the shackles of widowhood and face the society courageously. Annammal went about begging to give some succor to the poor and the sick in the hospital. she went to the church of Sakkiliars (cobblers), a group of people who were considered untouchable and looked down upon in the society as they belonged to the low outcast, to attend to their prayers and to mingle with them freely and brought the little children there together to instruct catechism. She started to create awareness among the young widows and appealed to them to join her to serve the poor and breaking the evil customs and orthodox conventions of the society. Because of the act, she was mocked, ridiculed subjected to severe criticism by the people of her place. Unmindful and undeterred by the abusive onslaught of the people on her, she continued her activities with total faith.

Annammal continued her charitable work that inspired four other young widows they joined with her. It was the time when caste difference and untouchability were at the peak in the society. She organized the four widows and they prayed together and doing service to the people of Dharmanathapuram, a slum in Tiruchirappalli where the Sakkiliars lived. They mingled with them closely and developed intimate conversation with them and consoled them in their distress. They taught religious truth and prayed with them and helped them begging. They cared and nursed the sick and old at homes and in the hospital and prayed for them. Soon the people of the town started to appreciate Annammal and her companions for their work and service to the poor. Even they were working courageously for the

people who were affected by the contagious disease in the village of sakkiliars. The missionaries working in Tiruchirappalli and the entire mission also came to know of their service.

### ***A Congregation for Widows***

Inspite of the success in her service to the poor and the oppressed, Annammal thought of nothing else but a convent for the widows. She along with the four widows approached the then Bishop Alexis Canoz and requested to permit them to form into a community and establish a convent for themselves. Bishop Alexis Canoz explained to her the financial and other difficulties to start a convent in Tiruchirappalli. Annammal promised that she would never ask any financial support the Bishop and appealed to him for permission only. She stated that "no money but only the permission". Bishop was greatly impressed by her request and finally gave her permission. Thus the convent for widows was established in Tiruchirappalli on 2 February 1858. Mgr. Alexis Conoz named it, the Congregation of St. Anne for widows under the patronage of St. Anne. Annammal sowed the seed for founding the congregation for widows for liberating them from the shackles of inhuman and irrational evil customs and social practices and for empowering them. Annammal took the responsibility of feeding the community by means of hard labour. Annammal and her companions supported themselves and to the poor by what little they earned by pinning of paddy. Their earning was not sufficient. They never hesitated for any hard work and prepared for any sacrifice.

In 1881 the constitution of the congregation was formulated by Annammal in the general chapter and was approved by Bishop Alexis Conoz. Mother Annammal worked hard since 1877 to rejuvenate and direct the congregation into the right direction. She was seriously ill in 1883 and died on 8 June 1883 at the age of 47.

### **CONCLUSION**

Rev. Mother Annammal, being a widow, started a religious congregation for the widows of Tiruchirappalli and served for the downtrodden of the society. The service and hard work of Rev. Mother Annammal with courage inspires not only the widows but also the whole of Humanity. This is what made her to be declared her as the servant of God.

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