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## Translator as Cultural Ambassador

### Basavaraj Naikar

Professor Emeritus  
Former Professor & Chairman  
Department of English  
Karnatak University, Pawate Nagar, Dharwad 580003

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**Corresponding author :**  
[bsnaikar@yahoo.com](mailto:bsnaikar@yahoo.com)

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#### ABSTRACT

In this article I have examined Dr. C.R. Yaravintelimath's adventurous translation of Allamaprabhu's Kannada *vacanas*, which are said to be the most difficult ones to understand and interpret, as they are loaded with obscure symbolism derived from the mystical and metaphysical tradition of Virasaivism in particular and of pan-Hinduism in general. I have analyzed this translation in the light of modern theory of translation and shown how the element of foreignization outweighs that of domestication and suggested the need for the interpretation of Allamaprabhu's *vacanas* in translation from a larger perspective of Comparative Indian and World Literature, especially mystic literature.

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A majority of English Professors in India suffer from the pitiable condition of Trisankus as they belong neither here nor there; neither to India nor to the West. As most of them are monolingual, they do not know their own regional language and literature sufficiently well. Hence they are alienated from their immediate surroundings. On the other hand they cannot make a name in the West because they cannot contribute anything that is original in terms of critical theories or ideologies and impress the Western scholars and earn their appreciation and admiration. Hence they spend their career and life time in mere teaching of the English language and literature without connecting it to their context or culture. They lead an insulated and alienated life. Such Professors form a majority in Indian Universities. There is a second category of English Professors in India, who having realized the difficulty of contributing anything significant to the realm of English Literature, turn their attention to the relatively easy creative writing in their mother tongues or memorizing or summarizing the Western theories and thoughts into the regional language and become 'famous' and 'well known' critics in Kannada or Marathi or Bangla and so on. There is also the third category of English Professors of India who make both their career and life meaningful and fruitful by contributing something significant to the realm of literature and being highly useful to the Indian culture and literature by translating the regional classics into English thereby impregnating the global literature with the local one and enriching the realm of world literature. Such Professors truly fulfill the important post-colonial agenda of going native and global at the same time thereby justifying their careers and life. Dr. C.R. Yaravintelimath (1939--) belongs to this third and best category of English Professors of India.

The English Professors of India should realize that there is a great academic and

moral responsibility on their shoulders. Instead of selling their souls to the Western literature and culture, they should use the colonially handed English language to highlight the importance of Indian regional literatures through English translations. I firmly believe in the view that at the present situation, India needs a greater number of translators than creative writers. If every English Professor had translated one regional classic of his area, by now the Indian Literature would have easily become part of world literature and achieved greater visibility. We may note here that many of our regional writers like Kuvempu and Shivaram Karanth could not be considered for Nobel Prize simply because their works were not available in English translation, and because of the lethargy and negligence of English Professors to undertake the great task of translation.

Viewed against this background Dr. C.R.Yaravintelimath's importance as a translator can be understood. He has rendered yeomen service as a translator and acted as a cultural ambassador from Karnataka to the Western world. For he has translated many Kannada mystics like Basaveswara, women saints and now, Allamaprabhu into English and made them available to the Western world thereby paving the way for the study of translation theory and practice and comparative world literature.

He belongs to the galaxy of pioneering translators of *vacana* literature like F.G. Halakatti, S.S. Basawanal, K.R. Srinivas Iyengar, Devendra Kumar Hakari, Theodore, S.M.Angadi, Armando Menezes, A.K.Ramanujan and Kamil Zwelebil whose works have been quite popular in the Western Universities, including Chicago University.

Indian Literature in English Translation has been studied in the American Universities for the last two hundred years or so, but it is not studied seriously in our own country, which is tragic and unfortunate. Neither the English linguists nor the Dravidian linguists of India have formulated any conspicuous and original theories of translation from regional languages to English and *vice versa*. In Marathi Dr. Vilas Sarang has written an important book dealing with the difficulties and problems faced by Marathi scholars in translating from Marathi into English, but in Kannada there is not a single book like that. Translation Studies has not been institutionalized in our Universities for various mentionable and unmentionable reasons. Hence the individual translators who have dedicated their careers for the great task of translation are utterly neglected because of lack of institutional recognition, encouragement and rewards. This is indeed an academic tragedy in India. India with its countless languages happens to be a gold mine for translators, but our scholars have not opened their eyes to this important task due to their colonial hangover and blindness. But recently the Harvard University of America has started a mega project of getting the important classics of India translated into English by experts in the field, thereby putting all the Indian Universities (both state and Central) and Sahitya Akademies (both state and Central) to shame.

There is an International Association for Tamil Translation, which recognizes and awards great works of translation from Tamil into English, but unfortunately there is no such International Association of Kannada translation, simply because of our parochialism and lack of wider vision of life. Hence our translators are utterly neglected and thrown into the limbo of oblivion.

Coming to the field of translation of *vacana* literature, I would like to state from my little experience in the field that translating the *vacana* literature into English happens to be more challenging and problematic than translating Vedantic texts, because the technical vocabulary or phraseology of Vedanta has been stabilized by great scholars by their common practice and consent. But such stabilization of technical vocabulary has not taken place in the case of *vacana* translation, perhaps because many scholars have not worked in

this field with great dedication and in a team spirit.

Among all the *vacana* poets, Allamaprabhu happens to be the most difficult one, as his *vacanas* are characterized by mystic height, metaphysical paradoxes, and obscure yogic symbolism. That is why even the Kannada scholars are not in a position to understand and interpret them satisfactorily. One has to be deeply grounded in the pan-Hindu philosophy to understand and interpret the yogic symbolism ingrained in his *vacanas*. Then translating such a difficult mystic poet, obviously, is the most difficult task. That is why many translators who have rendered the *vacanas* of other *saranas* like Basaveswara and Siddharama have not touched those of Allamaprabhu so far. One is easily frightened by the element of mysticism, metaphysics, and philosophical concepts masquerading as obscure symbols. But Dr. Yaravintelimath has dared to translate such a difficult *vacana* poet, for which he should be congratulated. He has translated not just a few *vacanas* ranging from 50 to 100, but covered all the 1636 *vacanas* available in print running into 1192 pages, an evidence of his sustained and patient work for years together. His deep knowledge of Virasaiva philosophy and dedication to the study of *vacana* literature all through his career has enabled him to undertake this adventurous task.

Allamaprabhu's *vacanas* are generally known as 'fancy' *vacanas* characterized by riddles, paradoxes, pan-Hindu philosophical symbolism and a mystical and metaphysical elevation. Even the Kannada readers are frightened by the element of obscurity in his *vacanas*.

Dr. Yaravintelimath has dared to enter the cave of the tiger and has had a dialogue with the tiger as it were. The title of his translation is *Lord of the Cave*. It shows Allamaprabhu's philosophy which believes in the view that the Infinite God dwells in the heart cave of the individual soul and not elsewhere in the outside world. So the title is quite appropriate and points to Allamaprabhu's basic philosophy of life. At the same time Dr. Yaravintelimath has wisely rejected A.K.Ramanujan's ridiculous and undesirable habit of translating the proper names acting as the signatures of *vacana* poets. He employs Guheswara as the signature of Allamaprabhu, which is welcome and desirable in order to create the flavor of the local Kannada culture.

He begins his magnificent work with a detailed biographical sketch about Allamaprabhu. As we all know the Indian writers of yore never cared to publicise themselves as they believed that their work is more important than their biography. This belief is also part of their religious achievement of effacement of ego. Because of this belief many of our great writers have not left sufficient details about their biographies. Likewise Allamaprabhu also has not left sufficient information about his personal life. But we have to reconstruct his biography with the slight and slender material that is available in Kannada inscriptions, narrative poems and his own *vacanas*. Dr. Yaravintelimath has offered a comprehensive picture of Allamaprabhu's life as available both in Harihara's *Ragales* and Camarasa's *Prabhulinga Lile*. The detailed biographical sketch helps the non-Kannada and Western reader to a great extent.

Dr. Yaravintelimath has endeavoured to transfer the meaning of the *vacanas* (utterances) from the source language of twelfth century Kannada to the target language of twenty first century modern Kannada and made it as appealing as interesting.

We may examine a few of the *vacanas* in his collection and have a foretaste of the aesthetic delectation. The very first *vacana* reads as follows:

Like the spark in a stone;  
Like the reflection in water;

Like a tree in the seed;  
 Like silence in sound  
 Is your kinship with your devotees,  
 O Guheshwara.(1)

This *vacana* is, obviously, known for its utter simplicity and profundity at the same time. Since it shows the immanence of God in the world and its objects, it is universal and not culture specific. The poet shows the immanence of God with the help of a chain of similes and indirectly suggests that a mystic should understand this mystery by traversing from the visible to the invisible. The translator has achieved the correct equivalence between the source language and the target language by retaining the similes, although the original mellifluity of Kannada cannot be reproduced in an alien language like English.

The following *vacana* shows the stark materialism of humanity and their tendency for sensuous pleasures and enjoyments:

Millions died for gold,  
 Millions died for woman,  
 Millions died for land.  
 I do not find any  
 Who died for You, O Guheshwara. (1633)

This *vacana* shows the combination of simplicity, profundity and universality of truth about humanity. In the source language, Kannada, Allamaprabhu has used the word 'crore'. He says crores of people have died for gold, land and woman. But in the target language, English the fiscal term 'crore' is not in usage. Hence the translator has achieved a cultural equivalence by turning 'crore' into million thereby communicating the basic idea of the poet to the target language audience successfully.

Allamaprabhu has composed many satirical *vacanas* commenting on the gap between personal ethics and public ethics. The following *vacana* shows one of such gaps:

Can a person be called a jangama  
 By tying jingle bells to the knee  
 And by wearing the garb?  
 Missing them, he is no jangama, look!  
 They do not know  
 How to become a jangama from within,  
 Guheshwara is the Great Absolute  
 That is beyond the reach of such disguisers. (470)

In this *vacana* Allamaprabhu has exposed the yawning gap between outward religiosity of a *jangama* who ties jingle bells to his knee and goes about begging, but he has not internalized the true ethics of a *jangama*.

In another satirical *vacana* Allamaprabhu highlights the conspicuous gap between private suffering and public infliction of suffering on others:

Like a fisherman feeling pain  
 When a thorn pricks his leg;  
 Like a butcher bewailing  
 When someone dies in his house;  
 Like a thief feeling sad  
 When a cup is missing,  
 A cunning person's devotion is false.



Our Guheshwara will not be pleased  
With the worship of a cunning devotee. (122)

In yet another satirical *vacana* Allamaprabhu highlights the conspicuous gap between external rituals and scholarship and the internal hollowness:

Those who are well-read in Veda,  
Shastra, Purana and Agama, and  
Don the outer garb of Vibhuti and Rudrakshi  
Are elders observing rigid rules.  
They are like the mud doll,  
That waits at the door of him  
Who gives food and clothing.  
If you ask why, the reason is:  
It is said,  
“Elders versed in Veda, Agama and Shastra  
Are servants, waiting at the door of him,  
Who is elderly in respect of wealth.”  
So all the elders are door-keepers  
At Goddess Laxmi's door,  
O Guheshwara! (1636)

The *vacana* shows that everyone is a Mammon worshipper at heart though outwardly they may be great scholars known for their so-called pursuit of spirituality.

In these satirical *vacanas* the translator has brought out the central idea of Allamaprabhu in a very clear fashion and achieves the goal of easy communication to the reader of the target language.

In the following satirical *vacana* Allamaprabhu, like Basaveswara, denounces the temple-craft widely practiced by people in the twelfth century as it gave place to priestly high-handedness, cunning and exploitation and the evil of *devadasi* system and commercial transactions like lending money at exorbitant rates of interest. This socio-religious movement is reflected in the following *vacana*:

You build a stone house  
And make a stone god.  
If stone falls on stone,  
where should that go?  
Arch hell awaits those,  
Who install a Linga,  
O Guheswara. (212)

In the following *vacana* Allamaprabhu, like Basaveswara, advises people to convert their being (or body) itself into a temple so that all the evils connected with temple-craft may be avoided:

My legs became pillars,  
My body, temple,  
My tongue a bell and  
My head a golden cupola –  
What is this, O Sir!  
My voice became a throne for the Linga.  
I lived without disturbing the installed Pranalinga,  
O Guheshwara. (195)

In these two *vacanas*, the translator has brought out the satirical and the affirmative element quite aptly thereby appealing to all the readers as the message is universal and not highly culture-specific.

Allamaprabhu's riddle like and paradoxical utterances containing the philosophical and numerological symbolism may be seen in the following *vacana*:

On the tip of a thorn,  
Four and eighty lakh towns were built.  
A headless watchman kept guard  
On those four and eighty lakh towns.  
That headless watchman's sister  
Was very clever in talk.  
Carrying on her head a pot without bottom  
With a coil of snake under it,  
She went to fetch water from a well without water.  
In that waterless well, grew a plant without roots.  
When that plant grew into a tree,  
A monkey without legs climbed it up;  
A blind person saw it;  
A lame person, holding a bow without strings,  
Discharged an arrow without blade,  
Which failed to hit the monkey,  
But wounded the embryo within its womb.  
Our Guheshwara was amazed to see it! (1013)

This is one of several *vacanas* composed by Allamaprabhu wherein he exhibits the height of his mystic achievement. When mystic experience reaches its height, it abandons realistic language and has recourse to symbolic language. Here Allamaprabhu has employed philosophical symbolism, and the technique of paradox thereby making it very difficult for the ordinary readers to decode its meaning. The translator has made a sincere attempt to bring out the enigma of the *vacana*. It is only the reader (like Sri Siddheswara Swamiji of Jnana Yogasrama of Vijayapur) who is deeply steeped in Hindu philosophy can decode the meaning coherently and satisfactorily. The translator has done his best to offer the key to the understanding of such *vacanas* by interpreting the meaning of such philosophical and numerological symbolism in his Notes.

It is a well known fact that technical terms of any discipline of knowledge create a great problem and challenge for any translator because of cultural difference. Therefore it may not be possible for him to achieve equivalence between the source language and the target language easily. He may either domesticate them or foreignize them according to his wish and ability. The following two *vacanas* may be examined to illustrate this principle.

When the Linga on the palm penetrated the body,  
It became Kaya Linga;  
When such great Linga penetrated Prana,  
It became Prana Linga;  
When such great Linga penetrated Bhava,  
It became Bhava Linga;  
When such great Linga penetrated Jnana,  
It became Jnana Linga;  
Therefore  
To our Guheshwara's Sharana,

Awareness having shrunk and  
 The sign becoming perfect,  
 The sense of one-self became nil,  
 Like the camphour consumed by fire. (1058)

In this *vacana* the translator has, obviously, followed the technique of foreignization by using the technical words like Kaya Linga, Bhava Linga and so on, which are not understood by the reader of the target language. Hence he has to depend upon notes and annotations offered by the translator and struggle to understand the meaning of the *vacana* belonging to a different culture.

A similar technique of foreignization is employed in the following *vacana*:  
 In Adhara, Brahma dwelt;  
 In Swadhisthana, Vishnu;  
 In Manipuraka, Rudra; in Anahata, Ishwara;  
 In Vishuddhi, Sadashiva and in Ajna,  
 Maheshwara who is beyond compare.  
 I saw all these  
 Born and brought in Void,  
 Wearing the Linga called Void,  
 O Guheshwara. (201)

The technical terms of Patanjali's yoga system and those of Virasiavism are combined in this *vacana*, (as also words like Ayatalinga, Swayatalinga, Nada, Bindu, Kala, Bhakta, Mahesh, Prasadi, Pranalingi and Aikya and so on in several other *vacanas*) which alienate the Western reader, because he cannot easily understand the meaning of the *vacana* due to his unfamiliarity with Hindu religion and philosophy. The use of such technique of foreignization may be quite useful to the native reader of the *vacana* who knows both the source language and the target language; in other words, to a bilingual scholar but a Western reader is bound to be confounded by these technical words, in which case he has to wade through the detailed notes and annotations offered by the translator. How much of domestication and how much of foreignization should be achieved in a translation are left to the sweet will and ability of the translator. The critic remains rather helpless and cannot dictate his terms to the translator. But one thing is certain that a translation with too much of foreignization will not be totally useful to a Western scholar, though it may be quite helpful to a bilingual (and bicultural) scholar. It is desirable for an ideal translation to have minimum foreignization and maximum domestication. In spite of the excellent printing and production of the book there have crept many spelling mistakes into it, which could be corrected in the next edition. The dignity of this magnificent work would have increased further if the diacritical marks with the attendant international spelling were used therein. The price of the book is not mentioned in the book perhaps because it is priceless.

On the whole, it may said without any hesitation that Dr. Yaravintelimath has accomplished a monumental and daring task, which had not been done by any other stalwarts of Kannada language. It holds mirror to his sustained hard work and dedication, perseverance and patience, scholarship and creativity. He has met the terrific tiger in its cave and has held dialogues with it successfully and come out safe and alive. He has immortalized Allamaprabhu by releasing him from the local orbit of Kannada into the larger global market. In turn he has immortalized himself as an efficient translator. He has turned out to be a great cultural ambassador to the West. May his tribe increase! At the beginning of his translation, Dr. Yaravintelimath quotes T.S. Eliot saying "In my beginning in my

end.” But we may reverse and adopt it to our context and say that in the end of his translation is the beginning of Translation Studies and Comparative Literature. His translation has, obviously, generated the possibility of further scholarship in the field of comparative religion, literature and mysticism. Three cheers to Dr. Yaravintelimath!

Dr. Yaravintelimath's translational achievement is not appreciated and admired by our scholars now as they have not opened their eyes yet to such rare and difficult accomplishment. Perhaps another fifty years have to go before translation theory and practice as well as Comparative Indian Literature become institutionalized and standardized in the universities of Karnataka and India. Perhaps it is only the Christian scholars and Western scholars in Western Universities who can understand the extraordinary importance of Dr. Yaravintelimath's translational achievement and use it for extending the frontiers of knowledge and wisdom. His work needs greater publicity and advertisement to attract the attention of the scholars interested in the field of Comparative Religion and Mysticism. Late Dr. D.R.Nagaraj has done an excellent study of Allamaprabhu's *vacanas* by placing him in the pan Indian or Hindu philosophical tradition and interpreting him from a comparative perspective. Now that Dr. Yaravintelimath's translation has emerged refulgent in the field, the Western scholars may undertake a comparative study of Allamaprabhu and the Western mystics like St. Teresa and St Augustine and so on profitably and arrive at the principles of mystic universals. Likewise it is possible for adventurous Indian scholars to codify the typical nature and stages of Hindu or Virasaiva mysticism as a parallel to what the great scholar, Evelyn Underhill has done in the West.

#### **Work Cited**

Yaravintelimath, C.R. *Lord of the Cave*. Bengaluru: Basava Samithi, 2016. (All the numbers of *vacanas* are from this edition.)