

# TRANSLATIONS



CAESURAE: POETICS OF CULTURAL TRANSLATION VOL3: 1 (ISSN 2454 -  
9495)

Combined Volumes (3: 2 & 4:1)  
(ISSN 2454 -9495)  
2019-2020

## Hyderabad POEMS

\*Author: K.V. Tirumalesh

\*\*Translator: S. Jayasrinivasa Rao

### Haveli (*haveli*)

- 1 -

In this haveli now nobody lives.  
Who it belongs to nobody knows.  
The eyes of the old paanwala on the street outside  
look like they have soaked up the history of this haveli.  
But he's unwilling to reveal anything.  
His hands that fold the betel leaves are always quivering.

- 2 -

Wild creepers have climbed up to the terrace.  
Huge cobwebs have draped the windows.  
These days we won't be able to find masonry  
like this anywhere, that has supported  
all these rooms and concert halls.  
See, how tall this mansion stands  
amidst the towering bushes.

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- 3 -

Since such places have a lot of shade  
one can stand here and reminisce about  
almost anything;  
each one's smiles,  
each one's capers.  
Amidst all this,  
a sound from somewhere inside  
of clothes falling to the floor  
could well be real.

But, I know about one thing surely;  
When a stone is dropped into this deep well  
it takes several minutes before you can hear the sound –  
the time between these  
is filled with anxiety.

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**Them (*avaru*)**

He had a number of wives, no?  
What happened to them?

Oh, them? Some of them went back to

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their hometowns. They sought shelter from  
others. Some started stringing garlands,  
selling them at Charminar.  
The dust of the old city lies on all the flowers.

Some of them became dancers.  
They blushed when touched.  
They truly fell in love.  
They sang in different ways for  
different people.  
As they passed on by and by,  
nobody built their graves.

And some of them became endless  
lanes.  
The ones you walk on  
The ones you search for.

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## **Crossing the road at Abid's (*abidinallirastedaatuwudu*)**

You want to go to Bulchand's clothes shop now, right?  
As someone who seeks variety, you have chosen the

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right shop. Now, we have to cross the road.  
Wait for a while. It's always crowded here in the evenings.

Those vehicles coming in a line from the left,  
let them pass. They are coming in from the right too.  
Crossing the road at Abid's means you have to  
hold your life in your pocket. See, how the  
windows of that double-decker slashed through  
Bulchand's lights!

But they are sparkling brightly again.  
Bulchand's lights are always like that.

Now! Rush across! Let's cross the road between  
this car and that scooter. That snarl  
you barely heard was the scooter fellow cursing.  
That policeman's whistle that you heard ...  
was actually the screech of the car's brakes.  
So, after finally  
crossing the road, how do you feel?  
That you have slashed through this relentless road?

But see how soon they have become one again –  
as if we had never crossed the road at all.

Abid's roads are always like that.

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## Pentayya's Shirt (*pentayyanaangi*)

Coal-seller Pentayya had  
just one shirt.  
When he delivered coal to houses,  
when he slept at night,  
when he went to the market –  
it was in this same shirt.

It looked like it had been dipped in  
the sludge of the Musi river.  
Upset because of this, Pentayya  
saved every paisa, and purchased  
after many a day, as he longed for,  
a spanking new shirt. A movie  
he'd wanted to watch long ago, *Adavi Ramudu*,

he'd go this evening, he thought – forgetting  
that the policeman's house urgently needed coal.

A crisp white shirt. It might crack  
if touched, its creases might fade  
if worn – he feared,  
as he put it on and set out.

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He so walked past the coal shop as if he  
had nothing to do with it. Just as he  
was beginning to feel victorious,  
who should he come up against,  
who else, but the policeman!

From that day onwards ... why that day,  
from that moment onwards, Pentayya's  
white shirt was never  
white anymore.

§

## **June in Hyderabad (*hyderabadinallijune*)**

As soon as one says, 'June in Hyderabad,'  
what we want is  
the pleasure of cold drinks  
in glittering glasses,  
a face that each of us desires  
to look at,  
to speak to.

A draught of breeze sneaks in once in a while,  
if we are lucky.  
Somewhere in that breeze,  
the moisture of waves,

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mingled with  
the heat of many dry fields and banks  
the breeze would have passed through.

It will rain tomorrow, if not today,  
or maybe the day after, but  
surely next week,  
the rain will come.  
Till then,  
it is but natural to ruminate on  
our past romances.

Won't it be better if the  
evening lamps are lit a bit later?  
Why should the light of the sky  
be driven away? We are our own lamps –  
as long as we glow for each other.

Apart from that,  
see how many divine faces are present  
at this evening's celebrations!

Aah! What was that sound?  
Ohh, it's nothing.  
Just an unexpected

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drop  
of  
rain  
falling  
on  
the  
glass  
window  
pane.

§

## **Monday's Cart (*somavaradagaadi*)**

See, how it's trundling along,  
this Monday's cart.  
Moving through each lane,  
lane by lane,  
crushing tar and gravel,  
leaving crooked wheel-marks.  
A huge crushing wheel  
leaving behind a long furrow.

Eyes are many, but only  
words hang on to words  
forming a bridge.  
There a stream, here a stream,

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below is a crocodile mouth ajar.  
In case of a breach  
all goods would go under.  
Belief in god  
is the ultimate reason or rhyme.

Quli Qutub Shah's ghazal  
cannot be sung during the day.  
When the bakula flowers sprinkle  
on the minar  
in the evenings,  
it's time for Bhagyamati to dance.  
She, the eternal maiden of the poets,  
standing on ancient graves and  
appearing in our dreams.

Of all the forms and metaphors  
why did you like the one you liked?  
Or else, would you prefer to buy the  
language in its bare form?  
What would you do after buying it?  
How many of these words are actually correct?  
Would the same weekday come again  
after it's already arrived once?

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## Chintal Basti (*chintalbasti*)

Chintal Basti Chintal Basti  
Poor people's cheap property  
More than heaven we trust this basti

Ramudu Bheemudu Parameshwarudu  
Kaji-bi Geeji-bi Gori-bi  
For all of them, this is the only roof  
As for all of them only one Allah, the only proof!

Plain ground on one side, train tracks on the other  
Wherever you touch or tread is filth  
But life has to go on forthwith  
If you feel the urge, you have to piss

Chintal Basti Chintal Basti  
For those without hope you give security

In the streets during days and nights  
Flicker the esteemed government's neon lights  
The ruling factions, the un-ruling factions  
All seek their votes to win elections

Telugu Desham Bharata Desham

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Indira Gandhi's Congress Desham  
None of them will forfeit this chance  
All are spinning in this frenzied dance

Chintal Basti Chintal Basti  
For the hopeless you provide hope  
For the hopeful too you provide hope!

§

## \*Translator's Note and Introduction to Author

These 7 poems of K. V. Tirumalesh translated from Kannada that appear here are part of a slightly larger translation project of around 30 poems of Tirumalesh that have Hyderabad as their backdrop. These poems are selected from *Mukhamukhi* (1978) and *Avadha* (1986), his fourth and fifth collections of poems respectively. Tirumalesh came to Hyderabad in 1975 to study for his M.Litt. at the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (now The EFL University) and stayed on, going on to complete his PhD and also joining CIEFL as a lecturer in 1977. For Tirumalesh, Hyderabad is home now.

Tirumalesh's first collection of poems, *Mukhavadagalu*, was published in 1968. Two more collections, *Vathaara* and *Mahaprasthanana* were published in the next two years. This early part of Tirumalesh's poetic journey is marked by his identification with the **Navya** school, regarded as the Modernist period in Kannada poetry. *Mukhamukhi* appeared in 1978, seven

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years after *Mahaprasthanā*. His desire to explore and experiment with both form and content came out in the form of *Mukhamukhi* and is considered by Kannada literary critics as his breakthrough collection. With *Mukhamukhi*, Tirumalesh seemed to have carved his own path, a path that took him in a different direction from the Navya tradition. The earliest Hyderabad poems appear here in the second section of this collection called **ondupattana** (a city). *Mukhamukhi* is a slim collection compared to his next collection *Avadha* (1986) that contained 165 poems. *Avadha* established him firmly as a prominent post-Navya poet. There are more Hyderabad poems here.

Tirumalesh's explorations and experiments with form and content continued and he was on a different trajectory altogether. *Akshaya Kavya* (2010), for which he received the Kendriya Sahitya Akademi award for 2015, is in the form of fragments. He calls it a poetic experiment that violates more norms than it obeys. Tirumalesh's desire to write lyric poetry made him write his next collection of poems, *Aadu Kannada Haadu Kannada Maathaadu Kannada* (2011). Five years (in two stints) in Yemen resulted in *Arabbi* (2015). His most recent collection, *Avyaya Kavya* (2019), is a poetic creation in the form of a symphony, he says. This traveller of verse goes on untiring, exploring new poetic forms and breaking new ground in Kannada literature.

Though Tirumalesh is primarily known as a poet, he has explored all possible genres in Kannada literature. Apart from his ten collections of poems, he has written short stories (5 collections), poems for children, four novellas, two plays, more than ten volumes of criticism and other prose writings, and translated novels and essays into English. And this is apart

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from his books and essays as a renowned linguist. He is similar in many respects to true renaissance litterateurs of Kannada of the Arunodaya period.

I came to Hyderabad in 1992 to study at the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages. I hadn't read anything by Tirumalesh before, and when I saw *Avadha* in the library, I was surprised to see so many poems on Hyderabad. Places near CIEFL like Tarnaka, SeetaphalMandi, and Arts College, and other well-known locations like Salar Jung Museum, Charminar, Tank Bund, ChintalBasti, Hyderguda, etc., were all subjects of his poems. Then in 1995, I got a copy of *Mukhamukhi* and discovered more Hyderabad poems there. The Hyderabad of 1995 hadn't changed much from the Hyderabad of 1986 and I was able to identify with these spaces that Tirumalesh incorporated into his poems. V. B. Tharakeshwar once mentioned that not even Telugu poets have written so many poems about Hyderabad. The urge to bring these poems into English that started in 1995 has reached some sort of conclusion now. Hyderabad has changed so much now, and through these poems I go back to Hyderabad of the eighties and the nineties. I don't know what Tirumalesh would say to this kind of nostalgia.

It was at an annual literary-cultural event in December 2018 that Dr H. Nikhila had organized in memory of her father that I did a reading of some of these poems. The positive response that the English translations elicited gave me the courage to go ahead and translate the other Hyderabad poems that I had selected. Upon my request Nikhila also read the entire set of translated poems and offered detailed comments and suggestions for improvement. Dr. Shruti Sircar was the first reader of these translations. Her perspective as a non-Kannadiga

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reader proved to be invaluable. I wish to thank Nikhila and Shruti for all the support and help.

## **\*\*About the Translator**

**S. Jayasrinivasa Rao** is a literary historian and translator living in Hyderabad. He received his doctoral degree from The English & Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, for his work on translation and the early novel in Kannada. He translates from Kannada to English and has translated an early Kannada novel, *Chandramukhiya Ghatavu*, poems, stories, and essays for the anthology *Steel Nibs are Sprouting: New Dalit Writing from South India*, and Kerur Vasudevacharya's 'original' Sherlock Holmes story *Vismayajanakavada Himseya Kramavu* into English. Jayasrinivasa Rao's research papers on translation and Kannada Arunodaya literature have appeared in academic journals like *Translation Today*, *Journal of Karnataka Studies*, *CIEFL Bulletin*, and *Language in India*. He has also written study modules for courses in Communication Skills and Comparative Literature for IGNOU, New Delhi. He teaches English at Aurora's Technological and Research Institute., Hyderabad.