

# Translations



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

**DECEMBER 2018**

**(UGC APPROVED E-JOURNAL, SL NO 118; JOURNAL NO 41668)**

## ***Not Christ, Paadri's Daughter***

**\*Kannada: Kuvempu**

**\*\*Translation: Vijayakumar M. Boratti**

I won't tell his name. He is nameless now. Nobody in the world utters his name. Now he is merely an empty man after losing his luminous *Purushaakara* of the bygone days!

Eight years ago, there was none who had not heard of him in Maharaja's college. There was none who did not talk about him. There was none who did not praise him to the heaven. There was none who did not feel elated predicting his glorious future. There was none who did not think that he would bring laurels to the country. This is my own experience. I saw it with my own eyes; heard with my own ears. Such a person is now nameless and has become merely 'He'.

He was my classmate. My friend. He was the teacher who shaped my conscience too. He would always fly in the sky with wings of lofty ideals. He would never hover on the land even for a minute. Students in the college respected him a lot. His character, dignity, wisdom, talent earned him lots of respect from the college professors too. Many people would gather to listen to his lectures in the College Associations.

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It was not possible to keep a count of histories read by him. He had read and internalised the biographies Mahatmas, saints, poets, sculptors, painters and warriors. He had studied the English poets and emulated their ideals. We would feel thrilled when with his stentorian voice he would declare that he would remain a bachelor to serve *Bharata Maate*. With him around, our machismo got relegated to a corner. He had the persona of a leader.

He never liked Christian priests or Christian missionaries. He accused them of deception. This was deep-rooted in him. His goal was to reform Hindu society, uproot the problems and the lacuna in it; purify the Hindu Christians and reconvert them into Hindu fold and to check the havoc of Christian missionaries.

He had already contributed many articles to monthly magazines. Those who read his articles were amazed at his style, simplicity of diction and the manner in which he articulated the subject-matter. All people around considered him as the most talented. It is highly surprising to know that such a man's personality became vacuous.

After obtaining M.A. degree, we departed. So what? I enjoyed his articles in monthly magazines. I received his letters now and then. Three years passed thus. Later, the frequency of his letters came down and ultimately stopped forever. Articles in the magazines too stopped. I enquired with many people. But I could not get any information about him. Gradually, his memories dimmed in the horizon of my mind.

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A few days back, I boarded a motor to visit and enjoy the charm of Gerusoppe waterfalls; to reach the shores of Arabbi ocean; to view the sunset in Agumbe Ghats. The amazing and beautiful Sahyadri Mountains on either side of the road wished me a safe journey. It was a feast to my eyes. My heart swelled with ecstasy. Out of ecstasy and emotional zeal, I wished to compose a poem 'Sahyadri' of five or six hundred lines. On the spot I composed a few lines and sang it to myself softly,

*Sahyadrigala Saalu Meriyutide Nodu  
Swatantrya Lolarige Idu Sogada Beedu  
Durgagala Rachisidaru Veeraravarilli  
Swargavannu Yogigalu Saadisidarilli!*

(Look at the jubilant Sahyadri furrows

It is a splendorous abode for freedom-seekers

The gallant built forts here

The mystics achieved heaven here)

The motor stopped in a place. I will not tell you its name. Let it be 'some place' as I am telling the story of a man who is nameless! Thus, 'he' is a resident of 'that some place'. The motor stopped next to a cloth shop. That is, in front of a hotel. As I was new to 'that place', I started observing everything curiously. At that moment, someone who was having coffee was ogling at me. I too saw him with examining eyes. But I diverted my attention after sometime as I thought that it would not look nice.

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All fellow-travellers got off the motor and busied themselves in sipping coffee; having breakfast; sniffing tobacco; smoking *beedis* and other unavoidable activities. The driver too was not in the motor. I was sitting in the motor all alone.

At that time, I thought somebody called me and the voice came from my left. I was looking towards the right and then turned left to see who called out. It was the stranger in the hotel. He came and stood next to me.

As I turned to him, he asked, “*Swamy*, forgive my intrusion. Where are you from?”

I told the name of my place. He was surprised at first, but later the smile came back to his countenance. He stood there, thinking and staring at the ground. Until then, I had not observed him properly. I got a chance to scrutinize him when I started conversing with him.

At first, when I saw him I was filled with revulsion. A man of average height, he looked impoverished and weak. There was no charm in his face. His eyes had no radiance and they looked like the eyes of a corpse; cheeks had sunk in; wrinkles on the skin, eye balls deep inside; black lips, his hair had not been washed and combed for a long time and a stink emanated, his clothes were very dirty. He had a *panche* around his waist and a vest covering his upper part of the body. They too were torn!

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After sometime, he raised his head and asked, “Weren’t you studying in Maharaja of Mysore?”

I was surprised and replied, “Yes”.

“Don’t you know me?”

“No”.

“Don’t you remember having seen me somewhere?”

I felt annoyed and thought: “Why does he want my life history? Of what use is it to know him? ”. I said, “No. I don’t remember having seen you”.

“Leave it. Do you at least remember your roommate?”

His eyes sparkled brightly when he mentioned “roommate”. Like lightening, his eyes shone briefly and the radiance vanished quietly.

“Oh, how can I not remember him? His name ‘M. Dha. . .’ Before I could complete the sentence, that strange man interrupted me and screamed, “No! No! Don’t utter his name”. The brightness on his face lasted for a second and disappeared. Memories came in flooding and I shuddered. I observed the weak face of this man keenly. As if memory awakened in me,

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I told myself, “He is that man. He is definitely that man”. To avoid that unpalatable thought, I told myself, “Che, can I compare that man to this man? Can I compare a dog to a lion?” He remained quiet for some time and said, “He passed away!”

I felt as if lightening struck my heart “Who?” I asked.

“That fellow. Your friend”.

“When? Where? What did he die of? Get into the bus, and sit”. He too sat in the motor upon my invitation.

“Approximately four years back. He was murdered in this very place”.

There was a surge of emotions within me and I urged him curiously, “Who murdered him? Why? Tell me elaborately”.

Shedding tears he revealed, “Some Christian people! Because he was against their religion.”

Tears rolled down from my eyes as I heard the murder of my friend! I would not have felt so bad if he were a common man. I regretted the death of an extraordinarily talented person.

The stranger next to me spoke after a minute: “But he is still alive”.

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I felt besieged by madness and screamed angrily, “What are you saying? Meaningless chatter!”

He did not show any emotion and nonchalantly disclosed, “Yes, he is alive. A life of death”.

I thought it would be better to hear everything from the horse’s mouth and asked the stranger, “Where is he now?”

The stranger gazed at the motor engine and said, “He is here”.

“Where? Come. Let us go. I will give you something in return”, I stood up.

Fixed to his seat, he revealed, “Here. Next to you”. I turned back at these words. “He is me. Chandu, did you not recognise me still?” he said.

I could not believe his words. I stared at his face again and again. I still had doubts. “Are you him, truly?” I asked.

“Yes, Chandu. It is he! The Mahatma! The talented! The patriot! The social reformer! The eternal-bachelor! It is me! This wretched soul! This unwise man! This traitor! This anti-social! This immodest!”

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His body was shivering as he uttered these words. His voice choked. His eyes became stars. His face glowed. He sobbed continuously after completing his life story. All my doubts were cleared now. But my heart felt wounded to see my friend in such pathetic condition. It was not clear as to how the lion became a dog. What I heard about his death before should have been true, I felt.

I held his hand. Taking lenience from the earlier days, I addressed him, “Yogin, what is this? No glow on your face like earlier times? No spark in your eyes! You have become unrecognisable. What brought you to such miserable condition?” I asked him.

Lowering his head, he replied, “I converted to Christianity”.

I was flabbergasted. I could not understand how he became a Christian. He was the one who always propagated that Christian preachers and missionaries should be gotten rid of.

“Yogi, you too were beguiled by Christian preachers? Was it impossible for you to escape their trap?” I enquired.

“Chandu, would I be beguiled by those wretched ones? What can those lesser mortals do?” he retorted.

“If not those Christian priests, it must be a Christian who made you another Christian! Did you think that Christian ideals are the best?” I said.

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“What are you saying, Chandu? The roaring Vedanta Kesari, and the meek cry of Christ – what a comparison!” he said. Pride came back from the past, hovered around him and hid itself.

“In that case, why did you become Christian? Who converted you?”

To this question, he replied obsequiously, “Chandu, the mystery behind my conversion to Christianity is a different story altogether. The one who converted me is not Christ, but Padri’s daughter!”

I wanted to know his life story clearly and asked him, “What is the fact, Yogin?”

Meanwhile, the motor signalled all the passengers to get back. All of them returned to the motor. It was time for the motor to leave. I gave him my address and requested him to write to me and share the entire story of his life. He agreed. I took his address.

Before leaving, I told him, “Yogin, all will be well if God leads the way. You are a Vedanti. There is no end to a Vedanti! I will help you. There’s always a chance to ‘purify’, isn’t it? *Namaskara*”.

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He too reciprocated to my *Namaskara*. The engine revved up and the motor began moving fast, honking all the while. With a forlorn face he stood on the road watching me. After some time, he disappeared. But he never disappeared from my mind.

It was two days after I had returned from my pleasure trip. Around 2 pm that afternoon I started reading the entries I had made in my dairy about it. I had written about my accidental meeting with 'him' like this: "Today is a memorable day. Because I had the *darshana* of a friend whom I had not met in the last eight years! It was a very sorrowful *darshana* though! The falcon which was in free flight, in the pure breeze of the skies, caring about none, had become a worm decaying in the gutter emanating a disgusting smell! I had never dreamt that he would hit such a low! I conversed with him for some time. I could gather only the constituent parts of his strange story. He has promised me that he would write to me all the details of his life story. Who can predict about one's future? Who can comprehend the strange ways of this universe?"

I closed the dairy after reading this part and contemplated over him deeply. The moments I spent with him in those college days sparkled in my mind, one by one, and they vanished. But I could not crack the mystery behind his present condition of misery. I wondered at the words he uttered, "Not Christ, *Paadri*'s daughter!" and was curious to know what was hidden in the womb of those words. As I thought about him and our meeting, it seemed to me like a daydream.

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I woke up at the arrival of my younger brother. He kept on the table many letters and cards delivered by the postman and went out. I read them all. After that I opened an envelope and saw that it was from him. More than happiness, I was overwhelmed by anxiety, and kindness. More than curiosity, melancholy overshadowed me. The letter was very long. I started reading it. It did not contain any name of place or date.

“Dear friend Chandu,

First and foremost, I have a submission to make to you. That is, you should never, ever reveal my name anytime in future. You can use this autobiography of mine as per your wish and will.

I do not wish to write my story in great detail; I don't have the patience for it. It will be a brief account. Forgive me, dear friend! Being a wretched and unlucky man, I do not want to waste your valuable time by writing my inauspicious history endlessly.

Both of us departed from each other after our M.A. graduation. For the next three years, I lived my life with great ideals. I established several social reform associations, delivered several lectures, taught morality, wrote very good articles. You may have read some of them. My name became famous. I tried my best to check the influence of Christian priests. Their nuisance too decreased. I used to narrate these things to you through my letters.

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My family members persuaded me several times to get married. The pride of my bachelorhood did not allow me to be persuaded by them. I had proposals from many beautiful young girls. But I did not get trapped by them. The passion to dedicate my life for the service of *Bharata Maate* had not yet disappeared. My thoughts and practices were not liked by my family members. They asked me to take up a job. Being a freedom-seeker, I did not agree to this. They asked me to become an advocate. I did not agree to this also, as I thought legal profession is unethical. Everybody in my family thought that I would bring prosperity and happiness to the family. Their wish and expectations proved to be a lotus in the sky. My conduct and behaviour tested their patience. Ultimately, they drove me out of my house after giving me my share of property. This too did not deter me. I rented my lands for cultivation and lived a quieter life.

Despite several personal difficulties tormenting me, I did not stop working for the welfare of the society. I incurred the wrath of my family; but earned the love and respect of people. Everywhere I was recognised. All people respected me. I presided over many programmes. My *khadi* attire itself was respectable. Lots of people had conferred on me the position of sage!

As the sun of my good fortunes was rising, it became too the basis of my decline. Alas, my friend! At that moment, I don't know where my wisdom, rationality and knowledge had gone? The fire which I wanted to extinguish burnt me. In my village, a fair takes place once a year. During this time, the preaching by Christian priests exceeds all limits. Once I encountered a Christian priest and started giving lectures on *Dharma Shastra, Vedanta,*

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*Bhakti*, etc. Thus, a day passed. Second day arrived. That day, as if bringing *Maya* along with him, the priest brought his daughter who was sixteen years old. He knew clearly that beauty can win when lectures fail. I delivered lectures on that day too. But my attention was on his daughter.

Dear friend, let me narrate whatever happened after that briefly. I wanted to remain a bachelor throughout my life, but I fell for the priest's daughter. Chandu, how can one measure the depth of the well that one falls into knowingly? I spent lots of money for her sake. That Christian priest told me I could marry her if I became a Christian. He got lots of money from me by deceiving me. My entire property was lost to others. In panic, I agreed to become a Christian. My previous sacred name was erased. I became John William. When I think about it now, my body shivers. Considering me as insincere, all rejected me. I lost money, friends, well wishers; I reached the abyss, all these things happened for that priest's daughter! Like taking refuge in Satan after forsaking God, I took refuge in the priest.

As long as I had money, the priest respected me a lot. His daughter too loved me. As I became poor and helpless, they started rejecting me. Friend, why do you want to listen to my difficulties, bitterness, malediction, rejection?

At last, the priest's daughter rejected me for I did not have enough money or property. My heart was broken. I did not get that thing for which I sacrificed my entire fortune (Good that I did not get!) and reached the lowest level in my life. She married and ran away with some unfortunate man who also fell into her trap. I was burnt and reduced to ashes out of

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disappointment and regret. I gave up the hopes of betterment of my life and condition. I thought self-destruction was the only way out. I abandoned self-respect. I started consuming alcohol, opium to mitigate my sorrow. Ultimately, the heathen life to which I was cursed became hell! My life's ship hit a rock called the priest's daughter before it reached the shore and was broken into several pieces. I became a part of the sea. Never will I reach the shore; because I am in the middle of the sea. From there, I cannot even dream of a shore. Leave it, friend. Whatever happened, is now in the past. Now I do not have the wish to reach the shore. How does it matter to a broken ship whether it is the sea or shore? Now death's melancholy is better than life's merriment! I find the sorrow that I am doomed to is superior to happiness with which one survives. I have dived into a depthless heathen state! Nobody can lift me. Nobody should.

Friend, this is the brief history of an unfortunate man. I was ecstatic to know your success and progress. Even though I am in the abyss, I have not yet lost the heart for rejoicing when others soar high. In future, you will never see me anywhere. Nobody will ever tell you about me. This is my last *Namaskara* to you".

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**\*About the Author of the Short Story:** Kuppali Venkatappa Puttappa (29 December 1904 – 11 November 1994) popularly known by his pen name Kuvempu, was an Indian novelist, poet, playwright, critic and thinker. He is widely regarded as the greatest Kannada poet of the 20th century. He is the first among Kannada writers to be decorated with the prestigious Jnanpitha Award. He was against casteism, meaningless practices and religious

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ritual. His writings reflect his resentment against these practices. The present short story (**Kristanalla, Paadriya Magalu**) is translated into English to highlight Kuvempu's relevance for contemporary period marked by religious bigotry.

**\*\*About the Translator:** Dr. Vijayakumar M. Boratti is an English teacher in University Evening College, a constituent college of University of Mysore. He has doctoral degree from Central University of Hyderabad. He has published two books on medieval Kannada literature (in both Kannada and English) and several international publications on colonial studies on vachanas (12<sup>th</sup> century Kannada literature) and folklore. He has published several translations of social science literatures on Karnataka and its culture. They are all translations from English into Kannada. They are published in *Loka Jnana*, a journal of Tumakuru University. He has also published several short stories in Kannada.