

**BOOK REVIEW OF
ECSTATIC WONDER OF ALLAMAPRABHU
BY BASAVARAJ NAIKAR
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Ecstatic Wonders of Allamaprabhu contains an English Translation of Allamaprabhu's 582 vachanas from Kannad along with their critical analyses for the benefit of the international and national reader from Naikar's point of view. It is useful to all those Indologists and Orientalists, who are interested in comparative global philosophy, mysticism, and literature. Allamaprabhu was a great mystic and super Sivayogi of twelfth-century Karnataka, India and easily comparable to other religious and mystic poets of the world like Kabiradasa, Namdev, Jnanadev, Chaitanya, Sri Aurobindo, John Donne, George Herbert, St. Augustine and Swedonberg and so on.

Dr. Basavaraj naikar is a bilingual writer in Kannada and English. He is the reviewer of Indian Literary works- World Literature Today USA. He has translated many works from Kannada into English and vice-versa. He has specialization in teaching and research include

Shakespeare Studies, Indian English Literature, Indian literature in English Translation, Anglo-Indian, Post colonial Literature, Translation: Theory and Practice.

He is the recipient of Gulbarga University Award for translation. And more are to his credits. He has published many books like- Sarvajna: The poet Omniscient of Karnataka, critical articles on Nirad C. Chaudhary, the Sonnets of Shakespeare, and more.

Allamaprabhu is a 12th century mystic- saint and Vachana poet, he is Vachanakara of the Kannada language. Allam Prabhu is one of the celebrated poets and patron saint of the Lingayat movement that reshaped medieval Karnataka society and popular Kannada literature. Allamprabhu is known as Allama, Allmaprabhu or Prabhudevaru. He is the most important leader of the virasaiva (Saivism of Karnataka) movement along with Basavesvara.

Allamprabhu is difficult because of lack of proper historical, epigraphical, and written records about him or any other saint or anything. His inner dynamic and mystic achievements are quite evident in his utterances or vacanas but external evidence is very scant.

Usage of Poetry form- Allamaprabhu used poetry, part of vachana Sahitya literature, to critique rituals and social conventions, to break down social barriers and to emphasize moral values and devotional worship of Shiva. It is well accepted that though Basavanna was the inspiration behind Lingayat movement and earned the horrific “elder brother” (anna) at the “mansion of experience” (Anubhava Mantapa), Allama was the real Guru who presided over it.

According to E.P Rice- Vachana poems are allusive poems each ends with popular names local names of Lord Siva and preaching the common folk detachment from worldly pleasures and adherence to devotion to Shiva Bhakti's.

Poetic narratives of Allamaprabhu- concerned with Allamprabhu as the central thematic concern are: Harihara's the Narrative of Prabhudeva, Camarasa's the Frolic Play of the Lord, The Legend of Prabhudeva. Other poems which deal with the life of Allamaprabhu are Raghavanka's Story of Siddharama, Bhimakavi's (1400. AD) Legend of Basava. In addition to these works the philosophical anthology entitled Sunya Sampadane edited by Sivaganaprasadi Mahadevayya projects the life and philosophy of Allamprabhu in a distinct manner.

Historical Facts- According to some historical facts, the native place of Allamprabhu is a small village Balligave in Sivamogge district. Harihara suggests that his parents were in the dance teaching service of the local palace. Allama is known by other variants like Allayya, Allamaprabhu, and Prabhudeva. When Allama was growing, he got attracted to a lady named-kamalata. When he was playing on his drum at the Goggeswara temple, Kamalata happened to see him and fell in love with him. Both lived together in a passionate company for years as if they were only minutes. But one day Kamalata dies due to high fever. Allama got shocked and frustrated. When he was into deep frustration he was in deep sorrow, he happened to see the crown of temple in the earth. There he digged and found a temple of lord Siva hidden in the mud. There he had an unexpected darshan of Animisayogi, which transformed his life. Allama who entered temple as a grieving man, came out as a great yogi. He accepted Animisayogi as his guru, whom he remembers in many of his vachanas.

According to Camarasa's idealistic depiction, Allama was born on this earth only to show to the world how one can conquer the attraction for maya and achieve spiritual expertise. When he renders his artistic service at the temple of Lord Madhukeswara by playing on his drum, Princess Maya happens to see him and fall in love with him. Allama does not yield to her sensuous attractions as he has already transcended the limits of the mortal world. He must have suffered the pangs of the dark night accomplished his spiritual expertise in course of time. After some time, he left the city of Kalyana and went on his tour. Some scholars assume he must have travelled widely on foot over the vast sub-continent of Bharata Khanda, met a few saints and yogis and acquired expertise in many kinds of yoga like Hathayoga, Rajayoga, and finally with his own Sivayoga. He went to the north and visited the sacred places like Kedara Himalayas, and practiced penance in the caves of Himalayas. And during his transcendental meditation in the caves, he seemed to have heard a call and went back to Kalyana. He returned to Kalyana after twelve long years.

Naikar's view for Prabhu as a guiding Source - Allamprabhu returned to the Kalyana and his chair of Divinity – Sunya Pitha was waiting for him to be the guiding source of mystics of the world. He guides both Saranas (male devotees) and Saranas (female devotees) on the spiritual path as he is strongly armed with his eclectic, syncretic, and esoteric knowledge. As a culmination of his humanist and secular philosophy, he gave his approval for the inter- caste marriage between cobbler and bramin's daughter.

Allamprabhu seems to have observed all these disconcerting events, he seems to have altered them and directed them as to what to be done next. Thus, after giving them the right guidance,

he went towards Mount Srisaila, where he spent his last days until he had his mystic union with lord Guheswara there. Camarasa's biographical picture is idealistic and Harihara's is more realistic. The vachanas that he composed are simply astounding in their philosophical seriousness, mystic height, and poetic beauty.

Basaveswara followed the path of devotion (Bhaktiyoga) Allamprabhu followed the path of knowledge (jnanayoga). He was known for his bright intellectuality, mystic height, and candour of expression. Allamprabhu's style of life is comparable to socrates'.

Naikar's beautiful translation with good images-Like William Blake, he combines the pan-Hindu and Virasaiva philosophical symbolism with his highly original and personal symbolism. Like John Donne, George Herbert, and other Metaphysical poets his imaginary is highly puzzling.

The implied meaning is that one should know how to manage the worldly life rather than escaping from it into the other world. He should have the courage to be and exist and face all anxieties of life. The Virasaivas believe in the view that illusion lies not in the phenomenal world but in the beholders mind or attitude. Example Allam Prabhu says in his famous Vacana:

They say that gold is maya, but it is not maya.

They say lady is maya, but she is not maya;

They say land is maya, but it is not so;

It is the desire in the mind itself that is maya

O lord Guheswara!

Thus, Allam Prabhu attaches great importance to the mental transformation of attitudes. So beautifully the meaning of maya is addressed by the author.

Will the tiger spare your life

If you enter a forest in your fear of a thief?

Will the serpent spare your life

If you enter a snake-hole in your fear of a tiger?

Will the karma spare your life

If you become a devotee in your fear of Death?

How shall I describe the hypocrites?

Who have become morsels in the jaws of Death,

O lord Guheswara?

Hence Allamaprabhu' concept of Sivayoga may be described as natural yoga (sahaja yoga) which preaches the devotee to be amid this worldly life and yet be detached it to accomplish his spiritual height.

If you become a devotee in your fear of Death?

How shall I describe the hypocrites?

Who have become morsels in the jaws of Death,

O Lord Guhéshwara?

Sri Aurobindo attached great importance to this mental or spiritual transformation in his Integral Yoga. In Śiva yoga the mental or spiritual transformation happens right from the beginning stage.

In the Eight-Phase yoga there are yama, niyama,

Asana, pranayama, pratyāhara, dhyāna and dhāraṇa.

Naikar highlighted two kinds of yoga-

One is uniting with Him by dissolving oneself; Another is uniting with Him without dissolving oneself; Between the two kinds of the latter is more difficult one to accomplish, O Lord Guhéśwara!

In the first kind of yoga, the individual self merges with the Universal Soul by totally dissolving itself or forgetting its identity, whereas in the second kind, the individual soul merges with the Universal Soul without dissolving itself. In other words, in the first kind of yoga there is only ascent to divinity and no return from there to the mundane world. But in the second kind, there is ascent to Divinity and there is descent also to the mundane world with an intention of uplifting the society and educating the other seekers. Thus, there is both ascent and descent in Śivayōga.

Allamaprabhu's yoga recognizes the transformation of the human mind into the super mind, which is rid of all desires (good and bad) It is this transformation of the mind into the divinized mind that articulated in his vacana:

What shall I meditate on?

My body itself has become Kailāsa,

my mind has become a deity;
My body has become a shrine.
Is there a God to meditate on?
Is there a devotee to see Him?
Lord Guhéśwara has disappeared.

The Image of Dead body- The image of dead body is conspicuous. The human existence is compared to a cadaver i.e. life without spirit or divine consciousness. Allama's great poetic talent may be sensed in his articulating a metaphysical truth through the images drawn from the realm of geography. He compared worldly life to a cluster of littoral and aquatic images or similes like river oceans and waves.

He set example of whore which symbolizes the principles illusion or appearance (maya). Through the example of whores and woods he presented how a being is wasting his entire wealth in the pursuit of illusory pleasures. He also highlighted that it is better to be satisfied with the modest achievement and limited happiness.

Naikar's proper justice with the usage of images used by Allama- Allam Prabu employs a chain of images- of maternity, agricultural image, financial image, and ritual image to drive home his point of view. The Vacana 17 highlights the concept of jivanamukti or liberation in life and shows futility of liberation after death (Videhamukti). He emphasized on 'here' and 'now' concept 'there and 'then'. Because he implies one need not to go away from the worldly life to have a mystic life itself.

Allama has shown the futility of a man taking precautions to protect his house, his position and status etc., by following certain external protective measures, without practicing deep devotion to Lord Siva.

In **vachana 20** he vehemently attacked on the society. Lord Guheswara does not like people who show double standards.

. **Vachana 27** is attack on fake devotees found in contemporary society of 12th century Karnataka. Allama satirizes the futility of mere talking about God- experience and clever disputation. He points out that a devotee can't achieve God-realization through the path of devotion until he stops his indulgence in empty rhetoric. He implies that he, who has the God-realization, will take recourse to silence rather than to empty eloquence.

Vachana 33- points out how a true devotee should be free from the worldly feelings of social or caste, pride, conceit, and indulgence in bodily pleasures. A devotee is expected to offer the three temporal things- his body (physical service), mind (mental service) and wealth- to the three eternal things like guru, the Absolute Linga and a jangama respectively and earn the triple prasada or grace from them thereby getting his body, mind and wealth sanctified.

Allama highlights the contrast between the Absolute Lord's detachment as well as his frolic play.

Vachana- 42

Don't dart your arrows at the saranas unnecessarily, or lord Kama.

Are the six enemies like lust, anger, greed, infatuation, pride, and envy not enough for you?

O stupid Lord Kama

Here he beautifully highlighted sixfold enemies and asked lord Kama not to distract saranas who are devoted to lord Guheswara. He also gave the example of husband wife who can shun the physical desires and become the devotees of the spiritual Husband- The Absolute Lord.

In vachana 46-

The example of eight elephants is another archetypal image found in Sanskrit Hindu mythology. He equates eight elephants with eight prides and rendering them symbolic seems to be highly original. He also said. What is the use of denying the five senses? and seven elements of the body?

What is the use of denying the six enemies- lust, anger, greed, infatuation, pride and jealous. He said a real devotee is egoless-ness and non-possessiveness. He should consider everything in this world as the gifts of God.

I as a reviewer found the repetition of certain things in paragraphs time and again. Like repetition of six enemies, Siva yoga, and six illusions like caste, varna etc.

Festive imagery of a tress and a swing- is quite familiar to Hindu women, who play upon it during the festival of Panchami around July-August. Naikar has not lost touch while translating them too.

In Vacana 108- He strongly said that when you spend your time in worshipping the external symbol, your heart is filled with spiritual darkness and your awareness disappears. Result of it mind gets fritters away its energy I worldly matters. You should not waste your time in the dilemmatic condition of whether to tie or not to tie the istalinga around your neck. This vachana brings to our mind a poem of Tagore in which he says that all his time is wasted in stringing and unstringing his instrument, but he never got the time to play upon it.

Images of Microcosm and Macrocosm- The jivatama or microcosm and Paramatma or macrocosm or the Trandental Lord Siva are constituted of eight elements like earth, Moon water, sky, fire, ego, and soul. The devotee should rise from the level of Individual soul to that of universal soul and not bother about losing or misplacing the external symbol and about the people commenting upon him as an agnostic or immoral person.

In Vacana 112

he said

You built a house in a forest,

But alas, you couldn't live in it.

You lit a lamp in the mid-waters,

But left it in the care of blowing wind.

O Lord Guheswara, your saranas presented the symbols to the devotees, but he couldn't use them to conquer their worldliness.

He who can't overcome his attachment to the body but only talks about breath-God is called angasamsari. Such devotees who indulge in just talking or empty rhetoric are a shameless lot. Allam Prabhu's righteous anger and candor may be sensed in this vacana.

In Vachana 115

They show the triple path of devotees- Ida, Pingala and Susumna and fail to follow the unique path of Siva. They divide the one consciousness into nine external manifestations instead of unifying the nine external manifestations into one inner consciousness.

Again, they are prevented by the three faceted maya – meditator, meditated and meditation. From a achieving the harmonious relation or bond with their own breath-God dwelling inside them. **The graveyard is spiritual equivalent of divine bliss and silence.**

You cannot enjoy the ambrosial water of a well.

Until you cross the current of cold water.

A devotee cannot enjoy the spiritual bliss until and unless he crosses, he hurdles of worldly life.

In Vachana 121-

he said a devotee should burn his sexual desires, clean up the worldly attachment and hold the soul that one may enter the realm of divine consciousness. Avoiding pride and envy one should see Lord Guheswara is not an imaginary being but Absolute lord of the universe.

The human life is compared to a swing that continuously swings up and down. The swan or the jivatma's consciousness should be expressed in its continuous cooing, enjoying the bliss of spirituality.

Once we understand the Transcendental Reality, we will not be attached to this material world. Our detachment from worldly life is compared to the kicks of the swimmer holding a raft, which are not imprinted upon it permanently as they disappear instantly.

In 158 vachana – Image of eighty-four lakhs yonis

he talked about the birth of jivatama takes birth in eighty-four (84) lakhs of wombs or yonis repeatedly and it keeps on entering and coming out from eighty-four lakh of gates.

The example of mango tree, sun moon village beautifully presented pure being with pure mind and pure knowledge.

Symbols-

Allamprabhu's use of ophidian, jewelry, pottery, and celestial symbols is noteworthy and remarkable and holds mirror to his great genius. There is no need of searching God or Lord Guheswara elsewhere. Such a god who pervades the entire universe may be experienced within the soul of a devotee himself and it is not necessary to go out in the world to search for him. He is beyond the comprehension of mere worldlings or agnostics.

Beautiful usage of worldly mystic literature-

World mystic literature archetypal symbols are used through the image of mountain of spirituality. The fleeting motions of Time and feels merged into immortality in the bliss of union with God. It is like Blake's idea of seeing eternity in a moment.

Usage of Kannada word- Tumbi

Beautiful Kannada word 'tumbi' is used which means a bumble bee and filling or being full.

203 compared with sonnet by Shakespeare on the effect of Time on human life.

The ritualist wastes all his time in conducting the external rituals like worship. These people practice only the external rituals and duties without delving deep into the mystic experience of being united with the Absolute Lord Guheswara.

Bhakta should stay at home to practice devotion to God. You should move gently and pleasantly as the cold breeze of the spring. If you wish to be jangama (wandering preacher dispensing spiritual knowledge to the devotees). You should not be fierce like the raging storm, breaking the huge trees.

They will not be true saranas
Until they unify the triple aspects
Like the knower, the known
And the knowledge,
O Lord Guheswara.

Reference to Kinnars-

Just as lower metals are transformed into gold by the touch of alchemic stone(parusa) same way all the devotees are divinized by the worship of the symbol of God. Suras and Kinnaras could not be totally divinized as they asked for boons- power. But a true Sarana's devotion is self-less and non-utilitarian.

He also highlighted that the inner journey is more important than the outward journey to place of pilgrimage. He says going to holy shrines Varanasi, Haridwar, Kedar, Srisaila or taking baths in rivers like Ganga, Godavari, Narmada, Malaprabha or going to Mt Meru will not help a devotee to be close to God. The pure light of spiritual awareness is very much important. The true renunciation should be achieved naturally without any negative or positive purposes.

Image of Flood for worldly life- Vachana 287

The worldly life is symbolized by the fully flooded river on which the individual soul must ferry his boat and paddle it cautiously. The boat can be sunk by the crocodiles symbolizing Time, maya and greed. In that case one can't cross the river and attain salvation. But if one who peddle their boat cautiously with spirituality during the river of worldly life, will reach the shore safely and attain salvation.

When the absent world became the present,
One should live in it with detachment. (287)

A devotee has no beginning.
Hence, he has no present living.
He has no end.
He will to there where he has come from.
And dwells there eternally
O Lord Guheswara!

In Hindu thought, entrails are supposed to be the seats of emotional attachments to their kith and kin, just as heart is said to be seat of feelings and emotions.

When the devotee reaches the inmost center of his triple body, he realizes God and attains liberation from the laws of karma and the cycle of mortality.

When the Absolute God enters the mind
And mind is overwhelmed.

With the divine spirit

There is neither merit, nor sin;

Nor happiness nor sorrow;

There is neither Time, nor Karma;

Nor birth nor death.

See, O lord Guheswara!

Your saranas is a great man indeed!

Wordings obsessed with sex and other sensual pleasures cannot achieve real union with God thereby enjoy the spiritual bliss.

The vachana teaches a lesson that man can not realize God until and unless he overcomes his attachment to his body and worldly life by rending the veil of appearance and by reaching the transcendental principle. Mere abstaining from alcohol and non-vegetarian food does not qualify a man for spiritual bliss. But he should conquer his eight kinds of pride and attachments to the worldly life. Only then union with God is possible.

How shall I describe people,

Who wears the mask of elephants?

But bark like dogs?

He says true mystic is one, who has removed the darkness of maya with the light of his spiritual knowledge.

The mystery of Siva experience is not so easy as is said.

It is not a matter of mere logical arguments,

Or of gossip in the lane.

Allamaprabhu shows how the severe austerities practiced by great ascetics like Sanaka and Sananda were motivated by utilitarian desires of attaining heavenly positions and residence and not oriented towards God-realization.

He says a realized soul always dwells in the bliss of union and never indulges in meaningless debate, disputation, and cross questioning. A man cannot attain self-realization until he overcomes his body-consciousness.

O Lord Guheswara,

Your true sarana is afraid.

Of neither mortality nor karma.

A real devotee of Lord Guheswara is free from falsity, Half-heartedness, passion, and sensuous desire.

A tree was born in the field without the earth,
Eight blossoms of the color of lightning
Emerged from it and nuts appeared on the branches.

....

Image of mortal body-

What should be shaved: your mortal body?

Or your body-consciousness?

O Lord GUheswara!

The disciple offers food of devotion to his guru, and the guru offers the food of knowledge to his disciple.

What difference does it make?

Whether he feasts or fasts?

Whether he touches his wife

Or practices abstinence?

He does not die, because he does not birth.

He lives spiritually by dying physically,

O Lord Guheswara!

vachana 481-

A devotee should divinize his body (or senses), mind(thought), heart (feelings) and speech and enjoy the transcendental ecstasy. An all-round purification and divinization of one's being is highlighted.

When you claim to have understood God

Again and again, you betray your ignorance.

A true devotee should destroy his sense of duality, stop thinking of his smallness and finitude and merge with the lord thereby experiencing absolute awareness.

O Lord Guheswara would love
Only those, who know their self.
Before the die.

Thus, Dr. Naikar very beautifully explain the signification of the existence of Allamaprabhu, his life and his association with the people around. The way he presented life struggle of Allamaprabhu to be an Allama is very enlightening. His careful use of beautiful images, symbols, similes and metaphors, alliterations while doing translation is profound. Keeping audience in mind he also beautifully given explanation after each vachana. Somewhere repetition of same context, images, similes, and symbols were not appealing. But it nowhere hampered his inimitable narrative style. Rest, his work is very effective. And reader like me from north, it really helped to understand not only Allamaprabhu and his existence rather I also got to know the Lingayatism and its influence.

References:

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