

The Forgotten Anthology: Hattiyangadi Narayana Rao's 'Aangla Kavitali,' the first collection of English poems translated into Kannada

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The beginnings of the changes that took place in Kannada poetry can be traced back to the Christian missionaries who translated English and German Christian hymns into Kannada that could be sung to Western melodies. For this, they had to abandon the existing metrical patterns in Kannada. Some of the collections were the 1845 Basel Mission anthology of 61 Kannada hymns translated from English and German, G. H. Weigle and Hermann Moegling's 1847 collection of hymns called *Kraista Geetegalu*, and Weigle's *Prarthanegalu* (1862). G. Worth's anthology *Prakkavya Malike* (1868), makes a move towards inclusivity by including Brahmin, Veerashaiva and Jain hymns along with Christian hymns.

S. G. Narasimhacharya, Hattiyangadi Narayana Rao, M. Govinda Pai, Panje Mangesharao, and B. M. Srikantaiah were the prominent Kannada litterateurs who translated/rewrote English poems into Kannada under the influence of English poetry while keeping in mind the prosodic changes that were suggested by the missionaries. Among these writers Hattiyangadi Narayana Rao and B. M. Srikantaiahⁱ published anthologies of their translated poems.

Much has already been written about B. M. Srikantaiah's *English Geethagalu* in Kannada as well as in Englishⁱⁱ and his service to the cause of Kannada literature and language has been well documented.

Browsing through the literary histories of Kannada and articles and sections on the early days of poetry translation in Kannada, one often comes across Hattiyangadi Narayana Rao's name and the fact that he translated English poems into Kannada and also came out with an anthology of his translated poems called *Aangla Kavitali* in 1919. There was some confusion about the name of the anthology too. T. N. Srikantaiah in his foreword (written in 1952) to B. M. Srikantaiah's *English Geethagalu* refers to Hattiyangadi Narayana Rao's anthology as '*Aangla Kavitasara.*' S. S. Renukaradhya also uses '*Aangla Kavitasara*' to refer to this anthology. This could be because this anthology had sort of disappeared from public view and critics and writers had heard only whispers of its existence.

By 1900, M. Govinda Pai remembers, Hattiyangadi Narayana Rao had already started translating English poems into Kannada. Most of his translations were originally published in various issues of the monthly *Vagbhushana* (from March 1918 till January 1919) published by the Karnataka Vidyavardhaka Sangha, Dharwad. These were published in the journal under the title *Aangla Kavitasara*. Some more translated poems were embedded in his articles, *Kannada Kaviteya Bhavitavya* and *Kavitavardhana*, as illustrations, and were published respectively in the April 1918 and January 1919 issues of the *Karnataka Sahitya Parishat Patrike*. Narayana Rao collected all the poems that appeared in *Vagbhushana* and *Parishat Patrike* and published them as a book with the title, *Aangla Kavitali* around March-April 1919.

Though the book was printed in Puttur in Karnataka, it was self-published from Mumbai by Hattiyangadi Narayana Rao. And because of this distance, Panje Mangesha Rao felt, very few copies of this book trickled down to Karnataka and copies of this book had become 'extremely rare' in Karnataka. One such copy, shorn of cover, came into the hands of Panje Mangesha Rao. He mistakenly thought that this 'cover-shorn copy' was titled *Aangla Kaivitsaara* and as this lone copy of *Aangla Kavitali* circulated among eminent Kannada writers and scholars of the time like Govinda Pai, T. N. Srikanthiah and others, the belief that this collection was called *Aangla Kaivitsaara* strengthened, so much so that it reached a point in the mid-1970s when it was believed that there actually existed two separate anthologies, *Aangla Kaivitsaara* and *Aangla Kavitali*! It took some time for this confusion to be sorted out.

It was in 1985 that this anthology resurfaced through the efforts of Dr M. N. V. Panditaradhya, who, when he managed to find a copy, edited it, and added the original English poems beside each translated poem and published it. Ten years later, the Karnataka Sahitya Akademi published a reader of Hattiyangadi Narayana Rao's works under the series 'Mareyalaagada Barahagararu' (Unforgettable Writers) which was edited by Prof. Srinivasa Havanur, that indefatigable chronicler of Kannada Arunodaya literature. This reader, though slim, is a mine of information and contains not only the forgotten anthology, but also seven of Hattiyangadi Narayana Rao's brief articles on Kannada poetry and prosody; articles on Kannada, Marathi, and Konkani languages, and a representative article on philosophy.

Aangla Kavitali was published in 1919 and has 25 poems (see Appendix for list of poems with names of English originals). Out of this, 24 are translated poems and one is self-composed. Among the translated poems, ten are translations of stanzas from

Shakespeare's plays, collectively titled "Subhashita Kalaapa." The rest of the poems are translations from Milton, Gray, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, among others.

What were Narayana Rao's motivations in translating English poems into Kannada? Though there is no specific statement about intentions that many other writers of this period came outⁱⁱⁱ with, his writings on Kannada poetry reveal that he thought intensely about the present state and future of Kannada poetry and put forth his case in an intellectual manner bringing all his scholarship and reading to the fore. He argues for changes in prosody in Kannada poetry following the influence of English literature and provides instances from the past history of Kannada poetry to substantiate his views.

In his essay titled "Kannada Kaviteya Bhavitavya" (The Future of Kannada Poetry) written to be read at the Karnataka Sahitya Sammelana (Kannada Literary Conference) at Dharwad in 1918, he draws the future of Kannada poetry with strong strokes. No copy or manuscript of this 'speech' is available, but a report of the conference published in the journal of the Kannada Sahitya Parishat gives the main points of Narayana Rao's speech (along with his Kannada translations of Milton's and Shelley's poems as examples):

1. The influence of English poetry would result in changes in (Kannada) themes, composition, and figures of speech in Kannada poetry.
2. Poets will start paying more attention to national, social, historical and other 'worldly' issues than the 'other worldly' issues they were dealing with until then.
3. Poets will start writing shorter lighter poems than longer epics.
4. Poets will create new metrical patterns.
5. The new figures of speech would disregard the ability of inanimate objects to acquire powers of speech and emotions to acquire forms. (Narayanarao, 1918; excerpt of report in Havanur, 1994: 3) (translation mine)

And in his two articles “Kavitavardhana” (January 1919) and “Hosagannada Kavyagalu^{iv}” (July 1919), he spells out some of these points and gives reasons for adopting these views. In “Hosagannada Kavyagalu,” while answering objections raised by adherents of Halegannada (Old Kannada) to the enthusiasm shown by poets towards composing poems in Hosagannada (New or Modern Kannada), he says Hosagannada has been in use in literature for almost 800 years and one cannot turn back the clock; and the argument that Hosagannada should not be used in poems is as absurd as saying that Maharashtrians should write only in Sanskrit! And to the objection that English poems should not be translated into regional languages, Narayana Rao says that some of the important plays of William Shakespeare have already been translated into Kannada by scholars in Mysore, the court poet Basavappa Shastri being one of them and Sri Govindacharya has written around 500 sestets based on a Greek story. Narayana quips that even if Pampa (902 AD; known as ‘Adikavi’ – the father of Kannada poetry) himself materialised and proclaimed that these should be stopped, who’d listen to him! To the third objection against creating and using new metrical forms, Narayana Rao replies that the forms created by Nagavarma (author of romances in 10th century) are not seen in Nrupathunga’s works and later editions of ‘Chandombudhi’ (first work on prosody in Kannada; written by Nagavarma) have incorporated some metrical patterns which were not used earlier. Narayana Rao continues his argument and says that it is not sure how many ‘ragale-s’ (ragale = a kind of metre having equal length [in terms of metrical units and their groupings] in each line, but without limit on the number of lines) Nagavarma knew. Experts who identify *Lalitha*, *Mandanila*, and *Utsaha* as three kinds of ‘ragale,’ say that the *Utsaha* metre should have 24 feet, but Pampa put in 35 feet! (Narayana Rao, 1919b, 8-9).

Despite Narayana Rao's support for all kinds of changes, including prosodic, it comes as a surprise that he stuck defiantly to 'rhyme' and was not willing to let go of it! In his essay "Kavitavardhana" he argues thus in favour of retaining 'rhyme:' Some people ask why can't one write poems without rhymes. Why not? What if the 'saree' does not have a 'pallu'? What if the forehead doesn't have a 'bindi'? He then uses the example of music to support his argument and says, 'It is said that any raga should have a 'vadi' (the dominant note of the raga) and 'samvadi' (concordant note next in importance to the 'vadi'; 'samvadi' stands in relation to the fourth or fifth note from the 'vadi') notes and musicians say that repeated singing of 'vadi' and 'samvadi' notes brings out the beauty and clarity of the 'raga,' and if this is violated, music will perish. He then suggests two more reasons for Kannadigas' fondness for rhyme. He says that it is an accepted custom to set popular poems to rhythm, so that they can be sung, and it is a useful practice to insert rhymes to sound like *samvadi* notes; and when there is no hindrance to meaning, it is easier to hide the lack of metre through a rhyme, which is not easily achievable through any other figure of speech or prosodic element (Narayana Rao, 1919a, 4-5).

Finally, he says resignedly that he has composed around thousand lines of verse, but his ears have never surrendered to abandoning rhyme. For Narayana Rao, abandoning rhyme was akin to tonsuring the head, what he called *praasamundana*, removing an essential part of the poem^v (Narayana Rao, 1919a, 6).

What about Narayana Rao's translations? What kind of method did he adopt? His translations are examples of extensive rewritings. Of all his translations, not one adheres to the original stanza or line scheme. We can say that his poems are 'roopantara-s' (adaptations) and in most cases, follow the 'saaranuvada' or 'abridgement' principle. The

abridgement is so severe in some cases that the translated poem is less than half of the original – Milton’s ‘L’ Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ are shortened from 152 lines to 44 lines and from 176 lines to 58 lines respectively; the 118 lines of William Collins’ ‘The Passions’ comes down to 52 lines in the Kannada translation; the 128 lines of Gray’s Elogy is reduced to 68 lines in the translation. These are only the major abridgements. But in some of the shorter poems, the abridgements are not omissions. One example would be the translation of Longfellow’s ‘A Psalm of Life.’ In the Kannada translation, a close reading shows that the first 20 lines in the original have been captured in 10 lines and the first 5 quatrains are shortened into two and a half quatrains without any loss of meaning revealing a remarkable felicity with Kannada, a keen knowledge of English, and a rare economy of words:

In the world’s broad field of battle,

In the bivouac of Life,

Be not like dumb, driven cattle!

Be a hero in the strife!

Is translated into Kannada as

Jagada ranarangadali jeevitada paalyadali

Yugabaddha pashuvalla kaliyagi horadu

ಜಗದ ರಣರಂಗದಲಿ ಜೀವಿತದ ಪಾಲ್ಯದಲಿ

ಯುಗಬದ್ಧ ಪಶುವಲ್ಲ ಕಲಿಯಾಗಿ ಹೋರಾಡು

Narayana Rao follows his pet rhyme scheme meticulously in his translations, so much so that he inserts rhymes even when they are not there in the original. The best examples would be his translations of Shakespeare's verses from his plays. In Narayana Rao's translation of 'All the world's a stage' verse from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, he follows a rhyme and metre scheme and converts the blank verse of the original into a 20-line 'ab-ab' rhymed poem. Similarly, all of Shakespeare's verses selected from his plays have been turned into stanzaic poems. Narayana Rao even converts Shylock's speech in prose in *Merchant of Venice*, 'Hath not a Jew eyes,' into a rhymed poem.

As can be seen in most translations of English poems into Kannada during that time, Narayana Rao too follows the 'roopantara' (changing the shape; adaptation) method, where 'Western' references are 'adapted' or 'replaced' to suit the tastes of the target language. References to Greek/Roman gods and goddesses are changed in Milton's poems as they'd be alien to Kannada and they are replaced by their qualities or representations. 'Orpheus' in the verse from *Merchant of Venice* (V, I, 69-87) is omitted and 'Erebus,' the dark place in the underworld in Greek stories is changed to '**naraka**' (hell). The angry speech of Shylock, 'Hath not a Jew eyes,' (*Merchant of Venice*, III, I, 46-53) is converted into a benign poem about equality and peace among people belonging to different castes and beliefs by the omission of 'Jew.'

Hattiyangadi Narayana Rao's Life and Other Works

Hattiyangadi Narayana Rao was born in a poor family on 11 February 1863. He completed his primary schooling in 1879 in Karkala and passed his matriculation from Government College, Mangalore. He went to Madras for his BA course and graduated from Madras Christian College in 1884. He was a bright student and completed his school and college studies with the help of student scholarships.

Soon after he obtained his BA degree, he got a job as a teacher in Madras. He was transferred to Madikeri next year. He worked in Madikeri for three years till 1888, when he was promoted and transferred to Mangalore. While working in Mangalore, his wife and children passed away, plunging him into deep sorrow. He resigned from his job in 1891 and went to Madras and completed his Bachelor of Law degree and began practice as a lawyer. He could not sustain this profession due to his innate honesty and truthfulness and abandoned it after practicing for only six years and returned to teaching and worked as the headmaster of Hindu High School in Triplicane, Madras.

When he lost his wife and children, Narayana Rao must have been around 30 years of age. There was pressure on him from his family and well-wishers to remarry. By that time, he had become a firm believer in social reform for the country and asserted that, since he is a widower, it is only appropriate that he marries a widow. He fell afoul of the religious head of his community and other senior members. But he was never to argue or debate with them. He stuck to his convictions and eventually married a widow named Ambabai, when he was almost close to 50.

Narayana Rao's tryst with journalism/writing started around this time. His articles used to appear under the initials HNR in B. M. Malabari's monthly, *Indian Spectator*, published from Mumbai. Narayana Rao came to Mumbai around 1903 to settle down there. After Malabari's death in 1912, Narayana Rao served as the magazine's editor for a brief while.

Narayana Rao also wrote in *The Times of India* under the byline 'Behind the Indian Veil' every week. He used to write with clarity and gravity on issues of national importance concerning politics and society. But according to Srinivas Havanur, one does not find the author's name at the end, not even his initials. Another monthly, *East and West*, also used to

publish his articles. Apart from his erudition and competence in writing about politics and society, he knew a host of languages – Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali, Marathi, and Gujarati, apart from Kannada, Hindi, and his mother tongue Konkani. In addition, he loved English literature and was knowledgeable about Indian culture and traditions. All these helped him in becoming an accomplished writer.

According to Havanur, Narayana Rao started writing in Kannada and about Kannada literature and language slightly late, around 1916. Havanur feels that the establishment of the Kannada Sahitya Parishat in the previous year (1915) must have inspired him to write in Kannada. His articles started appearing in the Parishat's journal right from its first issue. He wrote mainly prose articles about Kannada language and etymology in the Parishat's journal. He also used to write in Karnataka Vidyavardhaka Sangha's (Dharwad) journal *Vagbhushana*. It was in this journal that he mostly published his Kannada translations of English poems. *Swadeshabhimani*, published from Mangalore, was also one of his favoured journals. He also brought out a book of articles on Kannada language and etymology called *Kannada Kathanaka* in 1919.

He was as much interested in Konkani, his mother tongue, as he was in Kannada, the language of the land. He wanted to see Konkani develop and progress and, in that direction, wrote '*Konkani cho mooladarshu*' in two brief volumes, in 1917 and in 1919 respectively.

Gayatri, *Kannada Krithigalu*, and *Brahmageetha* are three more books that Narayana Rao published. In *Gayathri*, he writes about the origin of Gayatri Mantra, and gives English and Kannada translations of this mantra. *Kannada Krithigalu* is a book of bhajans. Havanur says that, some of these bhajans could be identified as written by Purandaradasa, some are translations of Marathi abhangs, and Narayana Rao himself might

have written some. As Narayana Rao was an ardent member of Brahma Samaj, he wrote *Brahmageetha*, a book of songs especially written for Brahma Samaj followers.

Apart from these, Narayana Rao also published a series of small books under the broad term *Tracts for Thinkers*. Under this, he brought out titles like *Nature's Creed*, *Brahma Vijnana*, *Abhangamalike*, *The Faith of the Sages*, *The Faith of the Ages*, etc.

Towards the end of his life, Narayana Rao was planning to create an English-Kannada dictionary on the lines of the famous Kittel dictionary. One of the reasons for this project was that he wanted to create new words for those English words that did not have equivalent words in Kannada. But he passed away on 17 June 1921 before this task could be accomplished.

Havanur writes that it is difficult to find anything more than these unverified bits of information about Narayana Rao and the reason Havanur gives is Narayana Rao's aloofness and modesty. It is also quite possible that he wrote all his articles and translated his poems from Bombay and got them published in Karnataka and that could also be the reason for the lack of critical analysis of his translations and articles, because not many people knew him!

This paper is only a brief introduction to Narayana Rao's forgotten 'anthology' and to his writings on Kannada poetry. Not many poets have written with such scholarship, intensity, and pioneering zeal about poetry during the early days of Hosagannada poetry as Narayana Rao did.

Notes

¹ This anthology is the much-acclaimed *English Geethagalu*. The first edition appeared in 1921. The 1924 edition had 24 poems and 1926 edition had 65 poems. The 1926 edition is considered the definitive edition.

¹ See Vanamala Vishwanatha and Sherry Simon. 1999. "Shifting Grounds of Exchange: B. M. Srikantaiah and Kannada Translation." *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*. Eds. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi. London and New York: Routledge. 162-181; and references to B. M. Srikantaiah in English versions of literary histories, including a Wikipedia entry.

¹ Excerpts from prefaces (translated by the author): Gundo Krishna Churamuri, a worker at the cotton ginning factory in Hubli, who translated Shakespeare's *Othello* into Kannada as *Raghavendra Nataka* in 1885, despairs in his preface:

All of us have been witnessing the condition of our language, which has become as critical as a person afflicted with leprosy. In spite of this, many great Kannada scholars, skilled like doctors, are mercilessly allowing the language to die. Unable to tolerate this, I, like an incompetent doctor, with knowledge of only a handful of remedies, am trying to revive it.

Similar sentiments have been echoed by Tammannappa Satyappa Chikkodi in the preface to his play *Ushaparinaya* (1883):

If any language is to develop, it is desirable that books on various subjects be written in that language.

Prose works in various genres are not available in our Kannada language. We don't have even one newspaper which can help in improving our language. Novels, plays and works, which offer entertainment, are very less in number. I feel sad and surprised at this condition of our Kannada mother. It is the duty of every scholar to write books and not just feel sad about it.

And by Lakshman Bhimarao Gadagakara in the preface to his novel *Suryakantha* (1892):

No language will reach a position of eminence if interest in reading is not awakened amongst its peoples. If this interest is to be awakened, it is absolutely necessary to have books like novels, histories and plays. Desirous of alleviating this shortcoming to the best of my abilities, I have written this short novel.

¹ These two articles were published in different journals. ‘Kavitavardhana’ was published in *Kannada Sahitya Parishatpatrike*, January 1919 and ‘Hosagannada Kavyagalu’ was published in *Swadeshabhimani*, July 1919. Srinivasa Havanur reprinted them in *Hattiyangadi Narayanarayaru: Sahitya Vachike*.

¹ Hattiyangadi Narayanarao comments on his reluctance to relinquish ‘rhyme’ in his article “Kavitavardhana” published in *Kannada Sahitya Parishatpatrike* (January 1919, 22-28). This article is reproduced in Srinivasa Havanur, ed. *Hattiyangadi Narayanarayaru: Sahitya Vachike* (Hattiyangadi Narayanarao: A Reader) (Bangalore: Karnataka Sahitya Academy, 1994) 4-8.

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