Chapter IV
Crushed by English Poetry?
Making of Vacana ‘Poetry’ and the Virasaiva Community

Vacanas have occupied a very significant place in the cultural map of modern Karnataka. Scholars in Karnataka and elsewhere consider them as compositions of high literary value and immense significance. Both Kannada as well as non-Kannada scholars have contributed greatly to the popularity of vacanas. In fact, the twelfth century Viraśaiva movement is also known as 'vacana movement' because it is the general perception that the vacanakaras, also known as Shiva Sharanas, composed vacanas to convey their ideals of a casteless and egalitarian society based on the principles of dignity of work and equality. The vacana movement has attracted lots of critical attention and creative engagement by many scholars and creative writers. We have already discussed some of the literary works (*Sankranti, Mahachaitra and Tale Danda*) and shown how the plays have interpreted the movement for expressing their concerns and addressing problems of the contemporary period. We have also dealt with some relevant questions raised by these plays for comprehending the nuances of literary manifestations around the themes of history. They have proved that certain essentialist assumptions about the movement and vacanas cannot be taken for granted. Even the literary controversies, discussed in the previous chapters, are centered on some of the important icons of the movement. We have demonstrated that Shiva Sharanas are not mere historical personalities. They are significant cultural symbols of Karnataka to both the secularists and the communitarians. For both the groups the movement signifies a revolution for freedom, individuality, democracy and equality. For some others it also indicates religious reformation against orthodoxy. Over the last one hundred years, countless number of scholarly works is produced on several sides of vacanas and the movement.¹

¹ Social scientists, creative writers and linguists have always been interested in exploring the vacanas. They have studied vacanas from different perspectives such as: religion (Kumar Swamiji; 1967), sociology (K. Ishwaran, 1983) literature (Chennavira Kanavi; 1967, A.K.Ramanujam; 1972 and G.S.Shivarudrappa and et.al.: 1983), philosophy (M.Yamunacharya: 1967), gender (Vijaya Dabbe: 1998), linguistics (Giraddi Govindaraju: 1997) and Dalit politics (Javarayya: 1991). Besides these, there are studies discussing if vacanas contain anti-Vedic and anti-Brahminic elements (K.G.Nagarajappa: 1985) or reflect Vedic impressions (T.N.Mallappa: 1967 and A.M.Sadashivaiah, 1967).
In this chapter we discuss that the 'discovery' of vacanas in the early twentieth century (roughly from 1920-1950) signalled a new shift in the representation of the Vīraśaiva history and the 'collective' self-representation of the Vīraśaivas. This shift reflects the changing equations between communities; between Sanskrit and Kannada; between history and myth and between the nationalists and the conservatives. It is important to understand the shift because the present day conflicts between the secularists and the communitarians are the result of this shift that took place in the colonial period.

The chapter is sequenced in the following manner. The first section is devoted to look at four stages of modern history of vacana publication so as to trace the crucial periods in which the vacanas acquired cultural-literary significance and institutionalisation in Karnataka. The second section briefly talks about the role of nationalists in the cultural domain of Karnataka and their relationship with vacanas. The third section discusses the nationalist moorings of Hālakatti and his efforts to orient Vīraśaivism towards nationalism. The fourth section deals with the relationship between pan-Indian nationalism, Kannada nationalism and Vīraśaivism. The fifth section illustrates the challenges to Hālakatti’s nationalist interpretation of vacanas and his efforts to overcome the challenges as well as manufacture consensus. The last section of the chapter examines the historical conditions that necessitated projection of vacanas as part of Kannada lyrical poetry by the Vīraśaiva nationalists.

I

Publication History of Vacanas

In the Kannada academic circles, it is a general belief that the vacana tradition of the twelfth century was rejuvenated in the early twentieth century. The whole eighteenth and the nineteenth century are seen as 'dark ages' in the history of the vacana tradition because the tradition was completely forgotten until Hālakatti’s pioneering work in replenishing the popularity of the vacanas. M. M. Kalburgi's work on the publication history of vacanas in the modern period is one such attempt in which we come across the discourse of 'dark age'. Vacana Saahitya Prakataneya Itihasa (The History of Publication of Vacana Literature, 1990) edited by Kalburgi gives details about the
publication history of vacanas from the late nineteenth century to 1970. In an introduction in to book, Kalburgi notices the lack of interest in the vacana tradition in the early twentieth century and how it required to be regenerated. He gives credit to Halakatti in replenishing the forgotten wealth of the Kannadigas. Though we cannot provide accurate historical reasons for amnesia about vacanas in the eighteen and the nineteenth centuries, it will be revelatory to see different stages and academic studies on vacanas.

Kalburgi has divided the modern publication history of vacanas into four stages, which, spans more than hundred years (1883 to 1989). The first stage, from 1893 to 1923, is identified as pre-Halakatti period. The second stage (1922-1950) is called the Halakatti period because Halakatti, as said in the beginning, did a pioneering work in establishing the vacana studies on modern lines. The third stage (1950-1970) is associated with the Dharawad Kannada Adyayana Peetha (The Centre of Kannada Studies, Dharwad). This phase represents the institutionalisation of vacana studies. The fourth stage (1970 onwards) is called the Mutt period. The Viraśaiva mutts took initiative in promoting and popularising Viraśaivism in this stage.

In the first stage, there was an overemphasis on Shatstala philosophy of vacanas. Marishankara Dyavru, a Vyshya Shetty, was the first to publish the vacanas of Akhandeshwara in 1883. Basava's vacanas were first published in 1889. It was edited by Marishankara Dyavru and published by Koneri Shetru. Later on, some vacanas were included by R. Narasimhacharya in Kavi Charile (History of Poets, 1909), one of the earliest literary histories of Kannada literature in the modern period. Early publications of vacanas had many shortcomings. They were published in prose style and they were not studied with academic or scholarly interest. According to Mallapura, vacanas were vague and unclear in these early publications. These vacanas, he writes, were published to create an awareness of Viraśaivism among the Viraśaivas and they were full of

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2 Different scholars have understood the concept of Shatsthalas differently. Venugopal, a sociologist, explains them as such “the doctrine consists of six planes which are successively attained by the Jeeva in pursuit of ‘merger’ with Shiva. These planes are respectively Bhakta, Mahesha, Prasadi, Pranalingi, Sharana and Aikya. These six planes roughly correspond to the six levels of the Kundalini doctrine of Rajyoga” (Venugopal: 146). Lingayaths believe that Shatsthalas are their original contribution to Viraśaivism among the Viraśaivas and they were full of
metaphysical elements of the *Shatsthala Siddhanta* i.e. the doctrine of six stages of salvation.

Hiremath considers the second stage as the age of Halakatti. This stage is called by his Halakatti’s name because he heralded the ‘golden period’ of vacana studies in the early twentieth century. He evolved a systematic and scientific study of vacanas during the 1920s and laid a strong foundation for the vacana studies. Hiremath says that Halakatti set a model for others. Halakatti travelled widely in the northern parts of Karnataka during 1901-1920 and collected, classified, collated and edited the vacanas. In 1923, he published them in *Vacana Shastra Saara–I*. He emphasised *Shatstalas* and moral elements of the vacanas. Up to 1950, he collected several vacanas of Basava (1926), Akkamahadevi (1927), Ghanalingi (1927), Devara Daasimayya (1928), Hadapada Happanna (1929), and Mereminda Deva (1950). He also gathered many manuscripts of several *Viraśaiva puranas* and Kavyas. His collection of manuscripts runs into more than 10,000 pages. There were also others who supplemented Halakatti by collating and editing the vacanas. S.S.Basavanal's contribution to the vacana studies is worth mentioning here. He was the younger contemporary of Halakatti and was mainly responsible for *poeticising* the vacanas. If earlier vacanas were printed in prose style and printed in the linear fashion, Basavanal re-wrote them in the modern poetic style. He showed *lyrical* elements in them. He also discovered many new vacana compositions. Hiremath also mentions observes that several other scholars like B. Shivamurthy Shastri, S.S. Bhusanurmath and Uttangi Chennappa have done commendable job in establishing vacana studies.

M. V. Shiroor calls the third stage as *Dharawad Kannada Adhyayana* stage. In the post-independence period the **Dharawad Kannada Adhyayana Peetha** (the Centre for Kannada Studies, Dharwad) was in the front in promoting Viraśaiva studies in an unprecedented manner. From 1960 to 1980, the *Peetha* published eighty works related to Viraśaivism. Out of eighty books, forty books were on vacanas. M. S. Sunkapur, L. Basavaraju, Veeranna Rajur and S. Vidya Shankar did a remarkable work in this direction. Viraśaiva mutts and the university establishments institutionalised the studies
on vacanas with the generous support of the Government of Karnataka. Many more vacanas were discovered and added to the existing repository. Another milestone in this period was the inclusion of vacanas in school and college syllabus.

In the 1970s onwards, the Viraśaiva religious institutions vastly promoted the Viraśaiva studies. Thontadaarya mutt (a Virashaiva mutt in Gadag of northern Karnataka) established the *Viraśaiva Adhyayana Samsthe* (Viraśaiva Study Centre) in 1975 for the purpose of promoting and propagating Viraśaiva works. The mutt has published forty-five scholarly works on vacanas, which together run into about six thousand pages. Besides this mutt, *Murugha* mutt of Dharwad, *Sutturu* mutt of Mysore, *Mooru Savira* mutt of Hubli, etc. have done a memorable job in advancing research and publishing anthologies of vacanas.

The history of vacana publications by Kalburgi’s is based on the teleological notion of the evolution and growth of vacana literature. It neatly and unproblematically traces the history of publications, even though there are overlapping interests and "the incidence of interruptions" (Foucault, 1972: 4) in all the four stages. The linear and coherent progression of history of vacana publication as depicted in Kalburgi’s work overlooks the historical contexts in which these publications appeared and the socio-political imperatives resulting in publications. What lends credence to such historiography is the tendency among a section of the Viraśaiva intelligentsia to construct their community's identity around the vacanas by publishing them in many numbers. Therefore, we intend to move beyond the notion of 'coherence' and the teleological model of the above work in order to look at a series of gaps, ambiguities, contradictions and histories that eventually resulted in what we today recognize as the vacana tradition of the twelfth century.

The popular belief that vacanas are Kannada lyrics is the consequence of modern perspective on vacanas in the colonial period. According to Giraddi Govindaraju, a critic in Kannada, the evolution of vacanas as poetry is a recent phenomenon. He says, "Vacanas had to cross many anxious moments before they were considered commonly as
poetry" (Giraddi, 1997:1). He points out that several scholars contributed towards making vacanas an indispensable part of Kannada literary history. Basavanal published the new vacana forms with exclusive literary and linguistic annotations in 1952 under the title *Basavannanavara Shatsthalagalu*. Introducing this work, Rahamat Tarikere, a Kannada critic, points out,

Vacana literature had been imprisoned in the communal framework of classical or religious tenets. Basavanal did not discard this framework completely. He showed for the first time that vacanas could be read as literary works going beyond the religious framework. This was a decisive departure from the earlier practices of reading vacanas. It was natural for the Navya scholars to see vacanas as poetry in the 70s. But in Basavanal’s context, it was no doubt a ‘revolutionary’ step (Tarikere, 1998: 76).

Therefore, the first two stages are very significant in the modern history of vacanas because it was during these stages that we come across a new shift in the representation of Viraśaivism and the collective imagination of the Viraśaivas.

II

Crushed by English Poetry?

Social transformation and political orientations in India during the colonial period was the product of the native middle class literati’s exposure to modernity unleashed by the British colonialism. The discourses underlying modernity, social transformations and the political interests of the English educated middle class male were forming a larger "social consciousness" (Sudhir Chandra, 1994). There are many other scholars who have drawn our attention to the forming of a social consciousness among the Indian intelligentsia as part of "nationalist discourse" (Ashish Nandy, 1988; Partha Chatterjee, 1994; Sudipta Kaviraj, 1998). The social and nationalist consciousness was characterised by resurrection of the past, an identification of modernity in tradition, nostalgia for tradition, its achievements, modernisation of language/literature and a zeal for social

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3 Sudhir Chandra traces the history of social and cultural discourses of several native reformists/intellectuals in the colonial period. He considers that the native intellectuals were very much under the influence of English education and the western knowledge. He uses ‘English poetry’ as a shorthand or synecdoche to denote the entire range of western intellectual influences on the native intellectuals. It also symbolises, according to him, the hegemonic hold exercised by British colonialism. For an analysis of Chadra’s concept of social consciousness and colonialism see Vijay Boratti’s article “The Brahmin Community and the Secular Self (2002)
reformation. The nationalist consciousness of the middle class also tells the story of one's entry into modern spaces marked by citizenship, secularism and discourses of civilisation. Better position in social-political hierarchy, the role of English education facilitated the middle class in mediating the local tradition to the west on the one hand and modernity to the natives on the other. It is in the process of mediation that only selective aspects of culture, community and language were constructed as 'traditional' against 'modernity'. Simultaneously the middle class nationalists circulated authoritative discourses of modernity and tradition indicating what kind notions of family, sexuality, individuality, literature and language have to be inculcated among Indians. We see,

...how the English educated class sought to achieve 'progress' according to modern universal norms, attempting therefore, a cultural re-equipping and recreation of the individual and the family. It also dwelt on recasting of social identity arising out of a confrontation not only with 'tradition' but also with certain forms of the modern (Padikkal, 2001:2).

However, the obsession of the nationalists with tradition, modernity and social reformation was not universal and unified throughout the colonial period. The process of social reformation and nation building underwent changes. Social reformation in the colonial Karnataka, witnessed two stages, viz., early social reformation and later social reformation. The early social reformation (the late nineteenth century) was focussed on debates pertaining to going abroad, sea voyages, widow remarriages, education, etc. It was more oriented towards economic and political mobility of several communities. Second stage of social reformation (roughly from 1920 onwards) was very much under the influence of nationalist politics of Gandhian type. In this stage, retrieval of the Hindu tradition (especially Varnashramadharma), social reformation, cultural re-grouping was tempered with the discourses of rationality, Universalism, secularism, democracy, liberalism, etc. They were more influenced by the Gandhian wave of social and political reformation. By 1920 onwards, extended sobriety and self-retrospection had found a place in the intellectual endeavours of the middle class nationalists.

Modernity, nationalism and secularism did not remain the sole assets of the middle class Brahmin intelligentsia forever. In the late colonial period, due to the entry of several non-Brahmin communities into the modern space, they were sites of struggle
between the Brahmins and the emerging\(^4\) non-Brahmin middles classes. A close attention to the discourses of modernity and nationalism indicates that the middle class nationalists were addressing their specific caste/communities. The struggle between the communities, therefore, was "for equal spread of power over culture" (Aloysius, 1997:15) and it was waged to achieve the position of ideological influence in the society. However,

...the interests of various castes/classes, structured in hierarchical relations, as a process of building their respective hegemonies had to be fought in terms of a struggle between various forms, i.e. the common discourses of literature or culture. They can compete for their respective hegemonies at the ideological level only if there exists a common framework of meaning shared by all the forces in the struggle and if there is no recognizable common framework, one has to create it. In this struggle, the interests of various forces will consist of antagonistic and appropriative efforts in which each group presents itself as the authentic representative of the "people" and of "common interest" (Vijay Boratti, 2003: 20)

In the present context of our study, vacanas provided the common framework for the Brahmin and Viraśaiva nationalists to represent the "common interest". Re-writing the vacana history and thereby Viraśaivism became part of intellectual exercise of the Brahmin as well as Viraśaiva nationalists in the 1920s. Viraśaiva scholars like Halakatti, Hardekar Manjappa, Bile Angadi, Basavanal and the Brahmin scholars like Masti Venkatesh Iyengar, M.R. Shrinivasamurthy, R.R. Diwakar, T.S. Venkannaiah, thus, were active participants in the nationalist discourse. But they always exhibited differences over what should make a nation and what is nationalism. The differences were always premised on the social background and ideologies of each individual. We will discuss this aspect in the later part of the chapter.

Within the larger body of the Viraśaivas existed a class of people exposed to English education and with membership of the emerging professional class represented the winds of 'progress'. It is this class that thought of social reform as well as the new literary forms. Efforts to shape new language and a desire for new literary form were indicative of the changed political needs that required a new language. As the consolidation of the individualism progressed, the search for new forms of articulations

\(^4\) The term 'emerging community' is used to imply the beginning of upward mobility of a community in social, political, economic and cultural spheres in the colonial period either in competition with other dominant communities or in collaboration.
was foregrounded by the emergent middle class of the Vīraśaiva community. This was not always welcomed by the majority of the community who still continued with the conventional ways of perceiving the world. Though they did not see any threat from modernity, the educated class was sure that the community identity was under seize. Their efforts were to culturally re-equip the community through reform. This move was obviously resented by others. Nevertheless, the differences were articulated taking recourse to the tradition and of course, highlighting certain phases and elements in the Vīraśaiva tradition. In the next section, we discuss the secular discourse of Vīraśaivism, articulated by Halakatti and others, which was the product of and participant in nationalist discourses.

HI

Foregrounding the Vacanas and Occupying Secular Spaces

Pakirappa Gurubasappa Halakatti was born into a poor Nekara (weaver) family. But his father always encouraged him to excel in education. Halakatti’s college education began in St. Xavier College of Mumbai. After his B.A., he joined L.L.B. and became a legal practitioner in 1904. By this time he had already acquired a lot of interest and curiosity in vacanas. He was a committed journalist and a renowned legal-practitioner. Being a Gandhian, he developed nationalist feelings towards India and Karnataka. Both pan-Indian nationalism and Kannada nationalism went hand in hand. He spent lot of time

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6 Halakatti started two journals namely *Shivanubhava* (Experience of Shiva) in 1926 and *Navakamataka Patrike* in 1927. In the inaugural issue Halakatti writes,

The purpose of Shivanubhava was to discover social history, politics and religious tenets of Vīraśaiva society. Since a long time, many saints, seers, religious leaders of Vīraśaiva community have enriched religious life in Karnataka. It is necessary for the Karnataka people to cherish their values and works. Likewise, we should also remember brave kings and dynasties who emerged in the past and promoted Vīraśaiva religion. This journal was meant for religious and cultural dissemination and no commercial interest was involved (Halakatti, 1926:1).

He started *Navakamataka Patrike* in 1927 and it was devoted to discuss the socio-political and economic matters of Karnataka and nationalist politics.
and energy in mobilising the Viraśaivas for Karnataka’s unification movement. His
diverse public life made him an active participant in all the important political and
religious events in the colonial Karnataka. Such participation shaped his scholarship on
Viraśaivism.

He was introduced to vacanas for the first time when he came across two
Viraśaiva puranas Prabhulinga Leele and Ganabhashya Rathnamaale in Veerabhadrappa Halabhavi’s (well-known judge of Dharwad magistrate court during that period) house in 1905. Halakatti was impressed by some 'beautiful' (Halakatti, 1982:8) vacanas in Gubbi Mallararya's Ganabhashya Rathnamaale. He wondered why the Viraśaivas ignored such precious wealth of literature. Since then Halakatti began collecting 'only' those vacanas which he considered important and relevant. He was not happy with the existing narratives of Viraśaivism as elucidated in Viraśaiva hagiographies like Basava Purana, Prabhulinga Leele or Singiraja Purana. He found nothing significant about Viraśaivism in Basava Purana and Chennabasava Purana. They were full of miracles, exaggerations and fanciful episodes without any realistic aspect. And they were opaque and inadequate to explain the real history and worth of the Viraśaiva icons (Halakatti, 1982:12). He doubted if they could command respect for the Viraśaiva religion and community. Till the discovery of vacanas, the most popular texts available and revered by the Viraśaivas were Nilakanthabhashya (Commentary on Nilakanta), Shiva Geete (Song of Shiva), etc. The Viraśaivas worshipped and devoted themselves to the Advaita philosophy of Nijaguna Shivayogi (probably of sixteenth century) as propounded in Kaivalya Vallari. But, according to Halakatti, none of these texts propagated the value and relevance of Shatstalas, the philosophy of Linga and egalitarianism of vacanakaras. Therefore, he developed a deep interest in the unexplored world of vacanas, which contained the philosophy of Shatstalas, istalinga, etc. For him, an investigation into the world of vacanas simultaneously meant re-writing the history of the twelfth century movement in particular and Viraśaivism in general. He always advocated that the vacanas were the real religious and philosophical wealth of Viraśaivas. His emphasis on the relevance of
vacanas was to obliterate some of the misconceptions about the Shiva Sharanas who composed the vacanas. In a preface to the first edition of *Vacana Shastra Saara* (1923, 1983), he expressed his regrets over the contemporary indifference to the existence of vacanas and attributed such indifference to the existing misconceptions. He wrote:

> In recent times there have been some derogatory remarks made against the Lingayath sect and its followers on the basis of a few Jain and Lingayath Puranas. But I believe that vacanas will obliterate such false perceptions (ibid: 14-16)

Two points are noteworthy in the above remarks: a) vacanas contained all elements to obliterate misconceptions and b) misrepresentations of Virasaivsim by the western scholars and the Brahmins. In Halakatti’s opinion, the existing scholarship on Viraśaivism was inadequate and represented wrong interpretation of vacanas. He remembered how he felt humiliated during his school days, when his schoolteacher told the students that the Viraśaiva community did not have a history of its own and they did not boast of brave warriors or kings like the Marathas or Rajputs. Since then Halakatti set an aim in life to restore the reputation of the Viraśaivas. He sought to reinterpret the 'misrepresented' history (ibid, 1982:13) and religious doctrines of Virasaivism with the help of vacanas. But the journey for Halakatti was not smooth. He had to face several problems and obstacles. His autobiography (1982) will help us to understand the circumstances in which he began exploration of vacanas. In the autobiography, he reminisces,

> It was very difficult to carry out research on Viraśaivism during those days. It was like travelling in a rudderless ship without any control over it. I felt that the Viraśaiva intellectuals and religious heads were dragging society in various directions aimlessly. There was no co-ordination among them.

> Many eminent Viraśaiva leaders and intellectuals together established Sanskrit schools in various places like the Brahmins. The Viraśaiva society spent a lot of money on these institutions. *Vyakarana* [grammar], *Kavya* [poetry], and *Nyaya* [law] were taught in these institutes. (Halakatti, 1983:18-19).

He found the atmosphere congenial to any kind of scholarly study on Viraśaiva works. He thought that the attitude of the Viraśaivas to their scriptural heritage was Brahminical.

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7 We have already discussed some of these misconceptions about vacanakaras in the previous chapter. See Chap. 3, pp. 152-156.
Since, the Shaiva works in Sanskrit were already accepted and gained legitimacy as 'the' authentic source of the Viraśaivas, he felt a strong urge to change the prevailing perceptions of Viraśaivism. The excessive importance accorded to Sanskrit education by Viraśaiva scholars and religious heads was not agreeable to Halakatti. He felt that the Kannada heritage of the Viraśaivas was ignored. Amnesia about the Kannada heritage went along with caste conflicts of the Viraśaivas in the modern period. He points out that the caste conflicts among the Viraśaivas was over social supremacy and status. He mentions some Viraśaiva castes like Kurushettis, Banajigas, Saadarus, Nekaarars, Ganigars, Panchamasaalis who indulged in such conflicts. He points out that the Viraśaivas practiced chaturvarna and identified with Sanskrit heritage proudly. He wrote,

They [the Viraśaivas] held that everybody should wear the sacred thread. Those who advocated the Brahmin ritual of sacred thread in the Viraśaiva community, later on, came to be known as Panchacharyas. In opposition to them, Virakthaashramis practiced their own beliefs (ibid: 21).

He resented conflicts over petty issues and meaningless rituals of different sects of Viraśaivas. He pointed out that each caste in the Viraśaiva community struggled to prove its worth on the basis of their respective Shasthras. (ibid, 1983:21). There was reluctance on the part of the conventional scholarship to accept vacanas as the sacred scriptures of the Viraśaivas. If the Gurustala tradition defended Siddhanla Shikhamani (Sanskrit) as the sacred text, the other group (a few Viraktha believers and reformists) believed that the vacanas in Kannada were the beginning source for understanding Viraśaivism. For the reformists, any emphasis on Sanskrit heritage of the community seemed conservative and orthodox. The Gurustala and some sections of the Viraktha traditions, which gave importance to rituals and priesthood, were thus perceived as conservative. In all these debates and controversies, Halakatti regretted that no body took the Shiva Sharanas and their ideals seriously (ibid: 22). He was certainly not happy with the hair splitting arguments about the Sanskrit origins of the community. He was sad for his contemporary scholars were ignorant of their rich vacana tradition.

The significant part of Halakatti’s autobiographical accounts is his location as an internal critic, but deliberately positioning himself outside the tensions of the Viraśaivas in the name of caste, rituals and religion. Dissatisfied with the affairs of the community,
he tried to project himself as a non-participant in the affairs. It is this non-participation, which signifies the journey of a modern Viraśaiva identity. Halakatti's biographical sketches in the subsequent years, mentions before, tell us the journey of "the secular (read: upper-caste) self, its origin, its conflict with tradition, its desire to be modern" (Vivek Dhareshwar, 1994: 115). Being modern also meant, in principle, dissociation from caste affiliations because caste markings indicated pre-modern/primitive tendencies. Halakatti and Hardekar Manjappa, active participants in the national movement, always dissociated themselves from the non-Brahmin Backward Class Movement. This dissociation from caste/community-based movements was one way of engaging with the Brahmin secularists who had already occupied the secular space and had proved to be hegemonic. That is why, Halakatti never addressed the Viraśaivas as a caste. The Viraśaivas, though constituted of several castes, always formed a unified community and religion in his imagination. He found the discourses of nationalism and Kannada unification movement very useful to transcend sectarianism.

However, the Viraśaiva nationalists had to face a paradox: paradox of occupying secular space as well as religious reform. While the secular image of the Viraśaivas was grounded on universal values, religious reform exhibited concerns for the community characterised by othering the Brahmins and non-Viraśaiva communities. Thus, the secular Viraśaivas were oscillating between the sacred and the secular spaces. Halakatti too treaded on this paradoxical path. As many nationalist scholars, Halakatti was also a

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8 There were many conceptions of caste system in India. The westerners looked on 'the natives' as pagans, primitive and backward peoples. According to Michael Roberts, who has worked on the caste system of the Karava community in Sri Lanka, "The perplexing system of caste was equated with ...backwardness and was regarded with abhorrence" (Roberts, 1982: 141). The native intellectuals, in the late colonial period, were very much under the influence of such oriental constructions. There were many who considered modern caste system as the most primitive nature of the Indians and they thought that the caste system hindered growth and progress of the Indians. However, oriental construction of caste system was not at all pervasive and universal. There were many nationalist models which upheld Varnashramadharma as an alternative to modern caste system. The most influential among them were Gandhian and Arya Samaj model. The Varna system, during the later colonial period, went contrary to the sentiments of the non-Brahmins, especially Viraśaiva nationalists. Varnashramadharma was seen as another strategy of the Brahmins to hegemonies the rest of India. For instance, Hardekar Manjappa had differences of opinion with Gandhi because Gandhi upheld the Varna system (Shivananda Shettar, 1989:218). Manjappa believed that the Varna system was the foundation of Indian caste system and he opposed any kind of caste hierarchy among the Hindus. He fought against the Arya Samaj is in Bidar, Gulbarga and Rayachur who were converting the Viraśaivas into Arya Samaj in the name of the Varna hierarchy (Linganagowda Patil, 1989:173-175).
product of two civilisations, two cultures, and two very different ways of perceiving the world. Modern education shaped his subjectivity to appreciate the values of liberal humanism. In the same time he was proud of searching and consolidating the tradition inherited by him as a Viraśaiva. However he did it by using the scientific methodologies introduced by the Western scholars. Like many others he too tried to blend the best of the west and the east. His attempts to demonstrate the universal significance of vacanas represent precisely this dilemma. Being a Kannada activist, Halakatti regretted his community's obsession with Sanskrit heritage; as a Viraśaiva, he regretted his community's inability to come out of religious and social problems and as a nationalist, he hoped that the community would mark itself as a nationalist/sectarian by moving beyond caste/community sentiments. His unhappiness over conservatism of the Viraśaivas was not the outcome of his aversion to traditional knowledge or system. His attempt to develop alternative ways of perceiving 'tradition' by retrieving vacanas of the twelfth century was, paradoxically, determined by his sense of modernity. Now, let us see how Halakatti’s secular self is inextricably linked to the progressivist and nationalist discourses and the infinite contradiction/paradox within which he was caught.

**Imagining Secular Community around Vacanas**

Halakatti was the first to involve in an intense collation, classification, edition, translation and publication of vacanas of the twelfth century Sharanas. In order to prove their relevance and importance for the Viraśaivas and other Kannadigas, he worked hard to give a rational and intellectual clarity to the vacanas. The earlier publication of Basava's vacanas, *Basavannanavara Vacanagalu* (1889), according to him, did not lead to any systematic scholarship and it was unknown. Moreover, the publication considered vacanas as mere doctrines of religion and devotion. The acknowledgments on the cover page of the book contain aspects of Nigamas, Agamas, Upanishads, Smritis, Shivapuranas, Shastras and mysteries of Viramaaheshwara, etc. Interestingly both Basava and Renukacharya are given due reverence in the front page of the book. Since the book was published with the aim of creating an awareness of Viraśaiva religion, there was no systematic attempt to produce scholarship of vacanas.
By 1920, Halakatti had collected at least one thousand and more palm-leaf manuscripts containing the vacanas of Basava, Allama, Siddharameshwara, Akkamahadevi, etc. Initially, he found it a difficult task to refine them and give a formal look because "ideas expressed in the vacanas were novel and could not be found in any other Hindu ideas" (Halakatti, 1982:8). He had to take much trouble to copy them for further examination. Later on, he carried on this task with the help of two assistants. In 1923, Halakatti published his first compilation of vacanas namely ‘Vacana Shastra Saara’. As the title of the book indicates, vacanas were considered as classical texts of the Viraśaivas. This anthology contained vacanas of various Vacanakaras. These vacanas were classified into Shatstalas, the six planes meant for the attainment of ultimate salvation. He considered Shatstalas as pillars of Viraśaivism.

The modern sensibility of Halakatti did not discard the traditional means of propagating the values of vacanas. He intervened in all the modern as well as traditional spaces for popularising the vacanas. He always explored various possibilities of popularising vacanas. He used every means available at hand in almost every field to achieve his mission. Such intervention was imminent since the Viraśaivas had begun to occupy slowly wide variety of spaces such as music, education, law, administration, agriculture, politics, language, religion, region, etc and their identity as Viraśaiva community was inextricably tied to these multiple spaces. He appointed a music teacher, P.V. Patil, to convert vacanas into songs so that the common people would also enjoy and realize the significance of vacanas for the growth of music (Langoti, 1980:36).

Whenever, the clients as well as the young legal practitioners approached him for legal advice, he would show great eagerness to collect information about vacanas from them, if they are available in their regions, and also apprise them of the importance of vacanas for the overall growth of Viraśaivas.

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9 In the first edition of the compilation, Halakatti recorded his gratitude to those who provided manuscripts of vacanas to him. For Basava's vacanas, he owed gratitude to a person called Chennabasappa Patil Kuchabala. He found Allama Prabhu's vacanas in palm-leaf scripts obtained from Shivalingappa Manchaali of Dharawad. However, it was Basava who occupied a special place in the vacana anthology published by Halakatti in 1923. Nineteen vacanas of different vacanakaras praised the greatness of Basava and they were given special place in Vacana Shastra Saara

10 The six planes were: a) Bhakthi (devotion), b) Mahesha (Divine Power), c) Prasada (Grace) d) Pranalinga (The Linga in the life), e) Sharana (self-surrender) and f) Aikya (Oneness with Lord Shiva).
He selected only "pure, important and vital" vacanas. We do not have any clue to the vacanas excluded by him as unimportant and impure. The manuscripts of vacanas procured by him did not "originally" belong to the twelfth century. They belonged to different periods and were composed by different vacanakaras. They were not found only in Mysore or Dharwad. There were many vacanas and vacanakaras from the erstwhile Nizam States of Bidar and Gulbarga. But Halakatti brought all vacanakaras of these disparate regions and periods under one collection thus unconsciously erasing the differences among them. Even though Halakatti accepted the fact that they were produced in different times and for different purposes, he did not want to deviate from the main task of producing a unified vacana text for modern use.

However, uniqueness of Halakatti's work lies in attributing didactic and moralistic elements to Shatstalas. It was a first ever attempt of its kind. The identification of vacanas as moralistic and didactic contained the features of Universalism. Like Esope's Tales or the tales of Panchatantra, Halakatti tried to construct the values of vacanas as transcendent and unique. The moralistic elements of the vacanas do not contain reference to any sect or community. They can be applied to anybody and for any context in order to inculcate virtues in one's life. Similarly any discussion of the moralistic elements need not entail any discussion of Viraśaivism in its religious form. It was these moral values through which Halakatti attempted to transcend the fears of being sectarian and project vacanas as containing universal values. One or two examples from vacanas

*While he did not find the manuscripts of these vacanakaras in any other region, he could discover several copies of vacanas of Basava, Allama Prabhu, Akkamahadevi, etc. in many other places. Halakatti interpreted this as enough proof of their popularity all over Karnataka. The vacanakaras of the Nizam region such as Anathiyalinga, Kanakada Naachilinga, Kumara Sanga, Niranjanalinga, etc. were less familiar to the people of Mysore and Dharwad regions.*

12He described the following moral principles under Bhakthi category: Seek liberation from worldliness, destroy egoism, seek protection of God, be virtuous, speak the truth, be merciful, be not angry, be chaste, be charitable, be gentle, be humble, keep good company, be pure in mind, have faith in god, worship with pure heart and meditate upon the Linga. Under the category of Mahesha stala: Be firm, face difficulties, be fearless, there is one god, god is universal, do not believe in expiatory ceremonies, do not sacrifice, do not believe in astrology, devils and omens, do not believe in caste, and do not believe in Veda, Shastras and puranas. Under the category of Prasada stala: Work without desiring anything in return, submit yourself to God and do not mortify the body. Under the Pranalinga stala category: The nature, behaviour and the realisation of the God through Prana linga. Under the category of Sharana stala: Knowledge of God, the state of Sharana, the environment of the servant as holy. Last one is the A iky a stala with one sub-category i.e. the state of final absorption.
translated by Halakatti will explain this process of universalising vacanas on par with other religions. Under the category of *Bhakthistala*, 'mercy' is lifted to the highest degree of human virtue. A vacana of Basava preaching mercy goes like this,

What is that religion wherein there is no mercy? It is mercy that is wanted for all creatures. It is mercy that is the root of religion. Kudalasangama Deva wants not that which is not merciful. (Halakatti, 1922:10)

*Maheshastala* contains a vacana, which speaks about the universal God. An example for this is as below,

Ah, wherever I look, there Thou art, O God! Thou Thyself art one with a universal eye. Thou Thyself art one with a universal mouth. Thou Thyself art one with universal arms. Thou Thyself art one with universal feet. O Kudalasangama Deva. (ibid: 38).

Halakatti’s concerns were directed towards elevating the community above the micro/sectarian interests. He achieved it by popularising vacanas at pan Karnataka level. He translated the vacanas into English as part of elevating the universal values of vacanas to the world. He considered the twelfth century Virashaiva movement as a ‘religious’ movement. According to him, out of this ‘religious’ movement emerged a unique social revolution emerged. He highlighted the vacanakaras' ideals to fight against untouchability, communalism and national disintegration. According to him, the anti-Jain and the anti-Brahmin elements of the *Virashaiva puranas* gave a wrong perception about the community. These elements, Halakatti held, went contrary to what he wanted to project through the vacanas. Therefore, he emphasized the importance of vacanas by means of comparing and contrasting them with other religious beliefs of both India and other countries. Thus, his justification of vacanas and vacanakaras (mainly Basava) was not just aimed against rational theology of Christian religion or the ideal of Christ as constructed by rationalist Christian discourses of the nineteenth century. He examined many other Hindu faiths and found limitations in them. He considered various streams of thought like Arya Samaj, Brahma Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, etc. as background for re-

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13 For the translations see *Indian Antiquary* (1922).
14 We have already discussed in the previous chapter some of the rationalist Christian discourses about *Virasaivism* while discussing Wurth.
writing vacanas. But none of them were convincing because Brahmo Samaj and Prarthana Samaj adopted Christian doctrines to address Indian religious and social issues (Halakatti, 1982:29). In Arya Samaj, Halakatti found only repudiations of other societies and no significant moral elements. Therefore, he evolved his own theory of religion informed by Shatstalas. He demonstrated that the greatest of all religious thoughts were available in the vacanas. The main reason for evolving his own theory of religion could be because vacanas were specific to the region of Karnataka and they were distinct due to the Shatstala doctrines. However, there is contradiction in such comparative study of Halakatti. This contradiction is found in his dilemma to dismiss or ignore other religions completely. The contradiction is obvious in his comparative study of vacanas and the Christian religion. He tried to convince the public that vacanas were no less significant and they were as important and valuable as the world religions.

He demonstrated that certain convictions and values found in the vacanas were similar to those in Christianity (especially theosophical society) and they were produced much before the Protestant movement of the sixteenth century. We may recall here that Brown made such comparison in 1840. Enthoven and Rangachary’s ethnographic work on the Viraśaiva community in 1909 unambiguously accepted such comparisons. But if we go into the history of ethnographic works on Viraśaivism, it was not vacanas on whose grounds the twelfth century Viraśaiva movement was compared to the Protestant Movement. It was Basava Purana on which the western scholars drew the ‘radical’ and ‘revolutionary’ picture of Basava. Brown did not mention the existence of vacanas anywhere in his essay. Halakatti’s reference to the Protestant movement accorded a progressive dimension to the Viraśaiva history and literature. Like the Protestant movement, the vacanakaras opposed the monopoly of scriptural tradition; they abandoned priesthood and adopted the concept of Jangama and istalinga and they rejected puritan and ritual traditions. Several other scholars followed Halakatti in comparative study of Basava and his social movement. Such comparisons were across time, language, religion and region. One of the aims of such comparisons was to let the outsiders know the significance of the Viraśaiva religion. For example, Vyakarana Thirtha Chandrashekar Shastri of Hubli wrote in Mysore Star,
Vacanas should be studied from comparative perspectives. In order to show the value and significance of vacanas to the outside world, they should be compared to Kabirdas, Bible, Kanakadasa, Kuran, Madhwa, Ramanuja and Puranas so as to find out if there are any similarities between them (Shastri, 1931:5).

Chandrashekar Shastri laid special stress on the vacanas of Basava. He appealed to the Viraśaivas to donate money generously so that the literary scholars could accomplish the task of popularising the vacanas outside India.

For Halakatti vacanas embodied values of tolerance and non-violence besides with religious instruction. He noted,

In vacanas there are no conflicts on the basis of Dwaita or Adwaita. They [Vacanakaras] did not show interest in such conflicts. But they gave importance to Man’s religious and subjective reformation (Halakatti, 1982:14).

According to him, such sublime and secular attitude was possible for vacanakaras because they were "rational" and "self-retrospective" (Halakatti, 1982:16).

Halakatti revealed Bhakti as another important aspect of vacanas. True devotion as opposed to ritual practices was one of the features of vacanas. In his next compilation of vacanas, ‘Naitika mattu Bhaktiya Vacanagalu’ (Moral and Devotional Vacanas) in 1927, Halakatti highlighted the value and importance of devotion as delineated in vacanas.

During the late colonial period, the concept of Bhakti was given a new currency in India. The resurgence of the concept of Bhakti in the scholarly works owes much to the retrieval of the Bhakti movement (13th–16th century) of medieval India in the colonial period. The retrieval of Bhakti movement served the purpose of showing the world that India, especially Hindu religion, was the place of many faiths. The medieval Bhakti movement was understood as a protest movement within Hindu religion. It was given a prominent position in the modern literary and cultural life of India because of its enriching contribution to spiritual, literary and religious traditions. Several Bhakti saints like Meera Bai (Rajastan), Sant Tukaram (Maharashtra), Kabirdas (UP), Tulasidas (UP), Chaitanya (Bengal), Purandaradasa, Kanakadasa (both Karnataka) and Sufi saints from
many parts of India were associated with Bhakti movement. These saints belonged to several professional communities who rarely had a direct relationship with the Brahmin community. The colonial Indian intellectuals were attracted to the philosophy and doctrines of Bhakti. The retrieval of this movement by the colonial intellectuals:

a) To show the glorious and radical Indian past,
b) To demonstrate to the colonial masters the co-existence of the diverse traditions in India,
c) To achieve national integration.

Reference to Bhakti movement was not without contradiction. If we closely examine the colonial discourses of the Bhakti movement, emphasis on the anti-Vedic, anti-priest and anti-Brahmin factors strikes our attention. The retrieval of the Bhakti movement also served the purpose of criticising the contemporary Brahmin hegemony and glorifies the contribution of the non-Brahmin Bhakti saints to spiritual, mystical and religious growth. A distinguishing feature of this retrieval was the identification of Bhakti saints with particular communities as well as the demonstration of their ability to transcend sectarian feelings through the powers of Bhakti. That is, universal concerns of the saints were highlighted in a romantic mode to demonstrate that though the Bhakti saints lived in specific regions, belonged to specific community and were influenced by their specific professions, their doctrines of Bhakti were interpreted as universal and radical. For instance, in Karnataka the Kuruba community showed a lot of interest in retrieving Kanakadasa and his *keertanes*. He was constructed as a radical saint because he was able to show the Brahmin priests that Bhakti was greater than priestly rituals, caste discriminations, class divisions, and orthodox rituals. The retrieval of the Bhakti movement was part of the larger nationalist imagination. Being part of such nationalist imagination, Halakatti also included Basava and other Shiva Sharanas in the medieval Bhakti movement even though the Virasaiva movement happened much before the

\[15\] Recent work by David Lorenzen (1987) has challenged the conventional interpretations of the Bhakthi movement (as liberatory, radical and subversive). He argues that the contemporary followers of Kabir use Kabir’s teachings—whatever their original intent or function—in order to reject the marginality assigned to them in the hierarchical caste order.
medieval period. Another reason for interpolating moral value with devotion was to clear
the misconception that the vacanakaras violated their own preaching by immoral
practices. One such gap between the words and deeds of the vacanakaras was anti-
Brahmin elements in the vacanas. Halakatti always tried to clear such contradictions,
because on the one hand he argued that vacanakaras were not sectarian and they fought
for equality of all, on other the other hand he had to respond to anti-Brahmin elements in
the vacanas, which were contrary to Universalism as claimed by Halakatti. A vacana
containing anti-Brahmin elements exemplifies the debates around universal versus
particular,

Your destiny does not allow you to look forward. You are like an ox that turns
ceaselessly round and round the block of wood in the oil mill. 
O mortals, be not ruined in vain, but worship the Linga ceaselessly.
Our Kudalasangama Deva is not pleased with those thread-bearers that repeat the
‘mantra’ of cutting the necks of other creatures (Halakatti, 1922: 39).

This vacana, translated by Halakatti, criticises the meaningless rituals of the Brahmins
and denounces them because they recited the mantra and at the same time committed
violence. The thread-bearers (referring to Brahmins) are caricatured as blind oxen whose
action is meaningless. In a footnote Halakatti gives the meaning of ‘cutting the necks of
other creatures’ as “those Brahman priests who wear the sacred thread and repeat the
liturgy which accompanies animal sacrifice” (1922:39). The vacanas as cited above,
acquired significance for the Virasaivas because its target was the orthodox Brahmins
who lived in the modern period and practiced caste discrimination. When such anti-
Brahmin vacanas were criticised, he showed that the vacanakaras did not criticise all
Brahmins. He always contended that that Basava did not preach anything against the
Brahmins but he revolted against those Brahmins who practiced caste discrimination in
the name of rituals and scriptures. Halakatti was sure that Basava and other Shiva
Sharanas were protestant, liberal and radical social reformers who fought for the sake of
the liberation of the downtrodden and women. For this noble cause, they did not hesitate
to criticize conservatism. He was of the opinion that vacanas contained many elements of
Veda-Upanishads but vacanakaras never hesitated to criticize the social evils in society

16 For more details on the accusations hurled against the vacanakaras see an article Vacnagala Vivechaneyu
(Thinking about Vacanas) written by Orva Yatharthavadi Mysore Star (March, 1932)
be it Hindu or Jaina. What is interesting to note in ‘Naitika mattu Bhaktiya Vacanagalu’ (1927) is that Halakatti did not mention the Shatstalas, they carried the name of Viraśaiva religion. Once again the main concern of Halakatti was to free the vacanas from communal markers. Thus, Halakatti, through out his intellectual career, carried out this dilemma of including and excluding the doctrines of Shatstalas¹¹ and highlighting only selected vacanakaras as radical and revolutionary.

Another aspect of Halaktti’s contradiction was his persistent identification with the Hindu identity. He was very certain that the Viraśaivas belonged to the Hindu religion and the Viraśaiva religion was an integral part of Hindu religion. This emphasis on the Hindu identity was directed against the Muslim identity. The articulation of Hindu identity could have been due to the religious circumstances existing then and the majoritarian Hindu norms and visibility of Hindu nationalist discourses in India. Halakatti even went to the extent of saying that Viraśaivas were another "stream within the Hindu religion" (Rahamat Tariqere, 2000:54). He was proud that "Vacanakaras were rationalists in the Hindu religion" (Halakatti, 1982: 16). Therefore, he had a task of promoting Viraśaivism as an integral part of Hindu religion but as a secular voice within that religion. Besides this, there was a ‘danger’ of religious conversions and temple entry movements of the Dalits all over India at that time along with simultaneous social reformation of other caste/communities. The Viraśaiva elite was quick enough to respond to the dangers of conversion, especially conversion of Viraśaivas into Islam or Christianity---. However, with regards to their Hindu identity, the Viraśaivas differed from their Tamil counterparts who led the Dravidian self-respect movement in Tamilnadu. Unlike Periyar Ramaswamy, the leader of the self-respect movement, Halakatti, Hardekar

¹⁷ The second edition of Vacana Shatra Saara (1932) contained Shatstalas.
¹⁸ ‘Deendar Anjuman Episode’ in 1926 is revealed the anxiety of the Viraśaivas about the ‘dangers’ of religious conversions and their desire to identify themselves as Hindus. This episode awakened religious feelings among the Viraśaivas. Their feelings were directed against the Muslim community. Deendar Anjuman, a Muslim who proclaimed himself as the incarnation of Chennabasaveshwara, collected contributions, donations from Viraśaivas and converted some of them into Islam. His conversion activities were seen as ‘threat’ to the community. Therefore, the community leaders found it necessary to safeguard their interests from outside influences. Mysore Star carried many letters and appeals to the Viraśaivas to be careful about Deendar and warned not to succumb to his tactics and fake miracles (Mysore Star, 1926:4 and Yogindar Sikand, 2002).
Manjappa and other Vīraśaiva reformists did not pose a serious challenge to Hindu nationalism. They thought that it was not necessary to the Vīraśaiva community to sever its relationship with the Hindu religion. This was also a reaction to the efforts of quite a few members of the community to form a minority religion and asserting a separate identity of Vīraśaivism. Halakatti never entertained any such of creating an alternative to Hinduism. The upper castes within the community were not ready to give up their privileged position in the Hindu religion and the social status they were enjoying.

Vacanas and History

It is a well-established fact by now that most of the nationalist scholars were working with in the framework of the positivistic, objective, impartial, scientific rationality. Hence, authenticity of the past was accepted only if it was verifiable by empirical details. The dichotomy of history and fiction had already been accepted as two opposed discursive practices. Scientifically verifiable details of the past formed history, while mythical world constituted fiction. Religious moorings in the myths were, thus, seen as metaphorical. In place of myths, historically verified 'past' was recognized by the historiographers. Historicizing a community's past acquired utmost significance for the local communities because it gave a scientific and rational explanation of the experiences of the past. The Vīraśaivas had already realized the importance of their history and had made several attempts to construct their history. In the previous chapter we discussed such endeavours in detail in the context of Vīraśaiva-Brahmin conflicts over the question of Brahminhood. However, during the 1920s, the nationalists considered the history of the community constructed by their predecessors, as unscientific and irrational. Vacanas, Halakatti believed, would give a 'true' picture of the community, its history and religion. The consciousness of history in Halakatti was marked by his constant efforts to distinguish twelfth century history or itihasa from other narratives of the past, i.e. myths and folklore. Thus, he was engaged in two tasks at a time i.e. displacing the community's past as narrativised in the Vīraśaiva puranas and consolidating it through vacanas. Ablur and Managoli stone inscriptions were really boons to him because they were already recognized as empirical evidences to show Basava's life history, though many expressed doubts about their accuracy and adequacy. Establishing Basava as a historical figure
automatically involved establishing him as the *author* of vacanas. But the recovery of the life history of Basava was not in the usual mode of mythical or fictive character, but literally as a subject of history. Subsequent researches on the twelfth century Karnataka convinced Halakatti that vacanas were the authentic sources to understand the twelfth century *Viraśaivism* and the life history of Basava. According to him,

> We can trace the true history of Basaweshwara in his vacanas. His broadmindedness and virtues are very clear in every vacana composed by him (Halakatti, 1942:6).

Thus, the construction of the life history of Basava did not accord much importance to *Basava Purana*. He was seen as embodying humane qualities. In the post-colonial period also, as we have already noted in the first chapter, the three plays also highlighted the 'human qualities' of Basava rather than deifying him.

For Halakatti, there was a 'break' in the continuity of vacana tradition. He believed that during the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Viraśaivas forgot the vacanas and ignored the Sharana revolution. This glorious past was one of radicalism and fight for equality and brotherhood. The 'historical break' was not caused by colonialism alone but was also the result of "importance accorded to Brahmin rituals and beliefs" (Halakatti, 1982:38). Halakatti held that the Muslim and Marathi accounts of the local Viraśaiva chieftains and their kingdoms in the northern and the middle Karnataka did not give adequate and correct information (Halakatti, 1982: 75-76). Therefore, his constant attempts to prove the truth and historicity of the Shiva Sharanas paved way for researches on the history of Viraśaiva kings, queens, kingdoms, saints and poets. Halakatti demonstrated the 'true' essence of Karnataka in the glories of Viraśaiva kings and queens (Keladi rulers) who fought for protecting the "Hindutwa" (Halakatti, 1926:2). Kings of Keladi, Swadhi and the queen of Kittur, thus, became the cultural icons of not only Viraśaivas but also Karnataka. Halakatti believed that these icons stood for bravery and patriotism and the modern Viraśaivas should emulate them.
IV
Vacana Tradition, Kannada and Nationalism

Early decades of the twentieth century were also a moment of producing history: a history of/for nation and of/for Karnataka. Halakatti and others fostered a sense of Kannada nationalism. The Kannada nationalism intended to unite the Kannadigas scattered in four different regions for the unification of Karnataka. But it was not antagonistic to Indian nationalism. Invocation of Kannada nationalism required invention of a historical past. Mere invention of a historical past was not enough. It was to be recognized by others as 'true' and representative. Halakatti did this by employing the vacanas. Employing vacanas served two purposes. One was to convince the Viraśaivas the importance of Kannada and Karnataka and another was to demonstrate that the Viraśaivas were not confined to only caste feelings. He tried to prove the worth of Viraśaivas by highlighting the contribution of vacanakaras in enriching the 'Kannada culture' with Hindu orientations. Thus, the relationship between vacanas and Kannada made it possible for Halakatti and others to imagine a secular space that cut across religious and community feelings.

Halakatti did not find it necessary to standardize or modernize Kannada language like his contemporaries such as B.M.Shrikantaiah nor felt a need to incorporate folk elements in Kannada poetry like Bendre. Therefore, he did not bother to highlight the artistic or aesthetic qualities of vacans. Instead he projected the vacana movement as the most radical and progressive movement that happened in the history of Karnataka. By upholding the vacanas as expressions of the radicalism, he projected the distinct place of the Viraśaivas in Karnataka’s history. He was very proud that vacanakaras composed vacanas in simple Kannada and according to him the vacanakaras were very popular among the masses. He was impressed by the vacanakaras' attempt to create love for one's

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19 For Halakatti’s views on the unification Karnataka see Halakiti Nudi Purusha (1982) edited by Shantarasa. Shantarasa has edited Halakatti’s speech on Kannada unification. Halakatti gave the speech in the eleventh annual meeting of the ABVM (1933).

20 B.M. Shrikantaiah and Da.Ra. Bendre are highly regarded as the pioneers of the Navodaya movement. While the former is known as the moderniser of Kannada poetry, Bendre is famously known for bringing folk elements in his poetry.
region and language, eight hundred years before the modern nationalist feelings emerged in India. He imagined the existence of a united Karnataka in twelfth century. He admired the vacanakaras for spreading the Viraśaiva religion and Kannada culture. In fact, Halakatti was inspired by them work for mobilising the Viraśaivas for the cause of freedom of India and unification of Karnataka. In his presidential speech in the annual gathering of the ABVM (1933), Halakatti asked the Viraśaivas to emulate the vacanakaras, their values and actively participate in the overall growth of Karnataka and Kannada.

There were many who felt like Halakatti. For example, R. B. Alabala's article in Shivanubhava (1927) compares the vacanas to Wordsworth's poetry, which is well known for its 'simple' and 'uncomplicated' diction. Alabala is proud that Sharanas used a simple Kannada to reach to the common people six hundred years before Wordsworth thought about simple diction (Alabala, 1927:13). This emphasis on language was to prove that the Shiva Sharanas lived, thought and composed vacanas in day-to-day language in order to reach to the ordinary people. Since the old Kannada was associated with Viraśaiva puranas that were generally inaccessible to the average readers, vaeanas in "simple" Kannada were considered as appropriate alternatives to understand the doctrines of Viraśaivism. Halakatti always held that vacanakaras simplified Vedas, Agamas and Upanishads and they were easily understandable through the vaeanas.

Halakatti was not alone in the task of popularising the vaeanas. There were many Brahmin secular scholars who were attracted to vaeanas. For instance, B. M. Shrikantaiyah's idea of 'standard' Kannada accorded a prominent place for vaeanas and vacanakaras. T.S.Venkannayya, A.N.Krishrao, Kapataral Krishnarao were other Brahmin scholars who were instrumental in establishing and institutionalising vaeanas and the Viraśaiva puranas as an integral part of Kannada literature. Halakatti’s other contemporaries like M. R. Shrinivasamurthy, Masti Venkatesha Iyengar and R.R.Diwakar were prominent Brahmin scholars who made valuable contribution to the growth of Viraśaiva studies, especially vaeanas. R. R. Diwakar's Vacana Shastra Rahasya (1936) was a notable contribution to the philosophy of vaeanas. Shrinivasa
Murthy’s *Vacana Dharma Saara* (1944) is considered to be a veritable interpretation of vacanas. He also wrote *Bhakti Bandari Basavannanavaru* (Basavanna, the Wealth of Devotion) in 1944. He used vacanas as analytical categories to pass wrote excellent commentaries on *Basava Purana* and *Singiraja Purana*. He was invited by the Viraśaiva mutts to give discourses on the Viraśaiva puranas and vacanas. Masti translated Basava’s vacanas into English (1935) under the title *Sayings of Basava*. All these scholars recognized Viraśaiva literature, especially vacanas, as a valuable contribution to Hindu religion and society. This wide circle of scholars and their common interest in the Viraśaiva literature paved way for the acceptance of vacanas by the general public and the gradual decline in importance of Shaiva works in Sanskrit. By 1930s, vacanas emerged as grand narratives of Viraśaiva religion, history and literature. For instance, Hardekar Manjappa wrote *Basava Charitre* (history of Basava) in 1924 on the basis of vacanas.

The preceding details pose a peculiar situation. As communities, the Brahmins and the Viraśaivas were somewhat hostile to each other. But while claiming the glorious past of Karnataka, even Brahmin scholars were eager to project vacanas as part of the history of Karnataka. Then, how do we account for our own outlining in the previous chapter of the hostile relations that shaped the Brahmin and non-Brahmin discourses of the time? A close look at the affairs of the time would tell us this is no big contradiction. The Brahmin scholars were not only interested in giving an objective history of Karnataka but also eager to prove that they no longer represent the orthodoxy of the community. Moreover, as the hegemonic group they had the cultural power to provide leadership to all communities of Karnataka. As for as the Viraśaivas were concerned, they were happy to see their texts in the cultural map of Karnataka for they also desired to show that they too were secular and not at all sectarian. This peculiar but unsustainable logic brought the several intellectuals together in the larger project of national freedom and linguistic identity of cultural nationalism. But it was proved to be a fragile coalition and collaboration because at times these scholars were at loggerheads, which need to be understood in the background of their community beliefs and practices. Masti Venkatesh Iyengar's translations of vacanas are a representative of the difference existing between
the Viraśaivas and the Brahmins regarding what should constitute the cultural imagination of India, Hindu religion and Karnataka. In the next part we will discuss the differences existing in the nationalist discourses of Halakatti and Mastī.

**The Politics of Representation**

In 1930s, the Viraśaiva community had made very significant interventions in political and social spheres predominated by the Brahmins. People like Halakatti were moderate in their views about the Brahmin dominance. He always believed in the politics of consensus. His relationship with the Kannada writers of the time was premised on the idea of Karnataka. Therefore, he did not articulate caste differences with the Brahmins but visualised a unified Viraśaiva community, Hindu religion and Karnataka. This point has already been explained in the preceding discussions. Like Halakatti there were many Brahmin scholars who avoided the language of caste and developed a vision of unified nation-state. However, as said earlier, they differed regarding what should go into the making of nation-state. Mastī’s views about vacanas are the best example to notice the differences.

In the first edition (1935), Mastī’s idea of nationalism accommodated the ideals of vacanas. He believed that nationalist feelings were very much part of the Indians in the twelfth century. He noted,

> Its history indicates that the national soul was awake at the time and was struggling to be freed of much evil that ruled society in the name of religion. The mind of the nation thus struggling to be free is well reflected in the life and thoughts of the leader of the social movement—in his noble character and earnest faith and in his sincere devotion to truth (Mastī, 1935:64).

In the above remarks, Mastī constructed Basava as a national figure and his vacanas carried what he stood for in his life. In the later version (1983) he gave a different set of

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21 Born into a Tamil Iyengar family, Mastī is well known as the ‘father of short stories’ in Kannada. Also he wrote novels, plays, and poetry. His novels and research publications connected with Viraśaiva religion and community were controversial and the Viraśaiva community considered him as anti-Viraśaiva writer.

22 He has given a long review of the twelfth century Viraśaiva movement in the introduction to the translations of Basava’s vacanas. The translation were published twice in 1935 and 1983.
reasons for translation. He wrote that since vacanas preached goodness of heart, monotheism and compassion for the poor, he found it necessary to translate and popularise them. He also highlighted the moral and didactic features of the vacanas and he was impressed by their universal values. Unlike the Viraśaivas, he did not consider the doctrines of Shatstalas as something to be proud of. He did not have doubts about the fact that the Viraśaivas were part and parcel of the Hindu religion and the Viraśaiva movement attempted an internal reform of it. For him Sanatana Dharma of the ancient period signified Hindu religion. Masti considered Basava a Brahmin, who later on renounced his Brahminhood. According to Masti, the name Basaveshwara with Ishwara as the suffix was, "merely the sanskritised form of Basavanna" (Masti, 1983:1). He held that the vacanas of Basava were relevant in modern times for they do not preach atheism. He considered them as India's answer to the West whose excessive rationality and modern style of life encouraged atheism. He was sure that the vacanas of Basava could retrieve one's faith in God. He was angry with Communism of his day, which, according to him, was responsible for the loss of faith in God. According to him communism need not necessarily deny the existence of God because Marx's ideas about God was relevant during his days but not 'now'. In India we always had ideas of an egalitarian society, which was well articulated in vacanas, much before Marx conceived them.

The most important point that he makes in the introduction was the way he dealt with the vexing issue of caste system. He detested the modern caste system. But he feels, "the caste system had no doubt taken shape originally with a good purpose" (ibid: 4). According to him, in the past, the system of caste held the people together with its own way of life and practices. By practices, he meant indirectly referring to the Varna system "different professions assigned to communities in the past" (ibid) But he resented the contemporary politics based on caste. He noted, "Each man has a vote and his vote is claimed by his leaders on grounds of caste" (ibid: 5). He wished that the earlier system of caste (that existed prior to Basava,) would prevail in India and called for present leaders

23 There were many Brahmin intellectuals who argued for Sanatana Dharma because they identified themselves with it. In this regard, Peter van der Veer notices "In the nineteenth century the term Sanathana Dharma came to stand for "orthodox Brahminic Hinduism", a specific "ideological" formation intended to protect "traditionalist" values from attacks by reform movement, such as the Arya Samaj" (der Veer, 1996: 294).
to strive for the retrieval of this past. He complained against great teachers like Basava, Guru Nanak, Buddha and Raja Ram Mohan Roy for adding a separate sect to the already existing sects and castes. However, he had faith in personalities like Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Vivekananda whose ideas did not lead to separate sects. He strongly believed that vacanas could lead to a casteless society. He hated any misuse of vacanas for casteist purposes. In the second edition Masti seemed to be positive about the future of Hinduism. He called for safeguarding Hinduism and for that purpose, he found vacanas very relevant. He wanted to safeguard Hinduism because he felt that there was a challenge to the "true spirit of Hinduism and past caste system" (Masti, 1983: 3).

A brief comparison between Halakatti and Masti will clearly reveal the differences that we are trying to understand. Kannada and Karnataka helped Halakatti and others to mask the caste hierarchy prevailing among the Viraśaivas. As said earlier, Halakatti never considered Viraśaivas forming different castes but visualised a united Viraśaiva community. He viewed such community in positive terms and imagined something that belonged to the past. That is why, he always spoke against internal caste conflicts of the Viraśaivas in the modern period and called for developing a strong unity for the ulterior motive of serving the nation. This sense of strong unity did not address the issue of caste practices and castiesm of the Viraśaivas against the lower classes/castes and they were always excluded from the public debate. We do not have any evidence to show that either Halakatti or Manjappa endorsed the caste movement of Ambedkar. It seems they were more bothered to secure a legitimate space for the 'united Viraśaiva community' in the national scene rather than addressing the others.

Masti did not translate any vacana that criticised the Brahmins. Like Halakatti he also avoided any reference to caste politics and caste discrimination as social institution. Masti avoided reference to modern caste system by means of "disavowing it publicly and politically" (Pandyan, 2002:1137). His disavowing and conspicuous silence on the political assertions of the non-Brahmin backward class movement and the non-recognition of caste politics "proscribes and stigmatises the language of caste in the public sphere"(ibid:1738). Masti's insistence on safeguarding Hinduism and retrieve
Sanatana Dharma incarcerates caste into "past system with good purposes" (Masti, 1983:4) and consequently, caste politics of his days is mystified. He understood caste practices or problems of the contemporary period as a social institution that had undergone changes for the worse and hence something needed to be done to retrieve the originality of the caste system but never as something that persisted in terms of consolidating itself vis-à-vis colonial imperialism and other caste/communities. His translation may be understood as pragmatic exercise to subsume, in the first instance, the anti-Brahmin sentiments of the Virasaivas into the larger national movement and later on into the Hindu religion. In the second instance, he sought to retrieve the ancient Hindu religion based on the past caste system with hierarchical social and professional structures as its base.

The instance of Masti signifies the modern Brahmin's ability to represent the other i.e. the Viraśaivas and at the same time subsume them in his narratives. Even though Halkatti had appreciated his translation (1931:156:158), Masti was not always received well by the Viraśaivas with enthusiasm. On many occasion, they were enraged by his writings. For instance, Masti’s novel Chennabasavanayaka (1956) landed up in a controversy in 1958. The Viraśaiva community carried out protests against the novel when the Central Sahitya Akademi decided to translate the novel into fourteen languages of India. The main objection to the novel was that it ridiculed the Virasaiva queen Veerammaji of the eighteenth century Bidanur. It was accused that the novel depicted the Viraśaivas of Bidanur and the Virasaiva queen as cowards and held them responsible for the establishment of the British rule in the region.

V

Challenges to the Paradigm Shifts

The new ways of interpreting vacanas and Virasaivism pioneered by people like Halakatti had their critics within the community. Such critics were unhappy with Halakatti mainly because they obviously thought that the divinity attached to the sacred Shaiva texts and the Varna system would fade away due to the new conception of history and Virasaivism. Secondly, it might land Virasaiva narratives in the midst of masses
opening the floodgates of interpretation. Thirdly, they were uncomfortable with mapping
the historical lineage of the modern Virāsaivas to Vacanakaras. We can notice one or two
such attempts, which challenged and questioned the reliability and authenticity of
Halkatti’s research on history.

An anonymous letter in the *Mysore Star* by *Orva Mathabhimaani* (Feb. 1932)
criticised Halkatti’s obsession for vacanas. He warned against giving too much
importance to vacanas ignoring the Viraśaiva puranas. He opined that due to vacanas
many contradictions have arisen in the Viraśaiva community. According to him, vacanas
went against the ethos of puranas and therefore, prioritising vacanas would affect divine
status of the puranas. He suspected if the Shiva Sharanas composed the vacanas at all!
This suspicion arose because the writer thought that there was not a single commonality
that could be found between Basava Purana and the vacanas of Basava. The writer drew
comparison between these two texts because both were revered by the Viraśaivas.
However, the recent emphasis on vacanas was not in good taste, according to the writer.
He noticed several contradictory views about Viraśaivism, if vacanas were given priority.
For instance, if Basava’s vacanas condemned adultery, violence and evil Basava Purana
was full of hostility and animosity. Puranas depicted violence around Bijjala’s death,
while vacanas preached non-violence. Similarly, Allama Prabhu’s vacanas could not be
compared to ‘Prabhulinga Leele’. He advised not to publish vacanas which would spoil
the Kannada society and literature. He praised the contribution of Viraśaiva scholars
such as Nandimath, Veerasangappa and Vaaraḍa Mallappa who had done extensive work
on Viraśaiva works in Sanskrit and thus popularised the religious tenets of Viraśaivism.
He wanted Halakatti and others to follow their path because they had a very clear vision
for the welfare of the community. A note by the editor of *Mysore Star* invited responses
from the readers to the letter.

Yet another anonymous article titled *Vacanagala Vivechaneyu* (Reasoning
Vacanas) in the *Mysore Star* by *Orva Yatharthavadi* (a realist.) rejected the vacanas out
rightly. The article stated that,
they [vacanas] are responsible for the division of the Lingayath community. In every village one can see conflicts among the Lingayaths. Vacanas justified sinful rituals of devoting ones own wife to Jangama. They contain abusive and uncivilized words for many lower caste devotees also composed them. The inferior culture of these lower caste Sharanas has spoiled the beauty of Kannada language (Yatharthavadi, 1932:3).

A small write up by Shri Siddharama Shivacharya (1938) of Shankara Sanskrit College, Yadagiri, severely denounced the attempts to change the Viraśaiva community into a casteless society on the basis of vacanas. He warned Halakatti and other reformists against spoiling and misleading the innocent people with false knowledge of Viraśaivism, social reform, equality and anti-Vedic sentiments (Shivacharya, 1938:11). Interestingly, for Yatharthavaadi as well as for Shivacharya, the caste pollution, conflicts and the impurity of language caused by Vacanas is disturbing. The letter signals towards the tensions among the different sects of Viraśaivism in those days due to such literature. Another interesting point that we notice here is the relationship between language and caste. Both the writers opine that 'bad' and 'unrefined' language used by the lower caste Sharanas spoilt the Kannada language and the Viraśaiva social system. Such views went contrary to B.M.Shrikantaiah's appreciation for vacanas and his idea of standard Kannada.

Halakatti probably was wary of these comments. We do not have any record of Halakatti's responses to the issues raised by the above-cited critics. It is also important to note here that these criticisms were from Mysore while Halakatti was active in the northern part of Karnataka. However he who had once demonstrated that many vacanakaras new Sanskrit as a response to those who denounced that they were ignorant of Sanskrit language, now found himself in an awkward position to defend vacanas composed in 'simple' and 'understandable' Kannada. He did not deny the criticisms and the allegations but justified them by attributing a noble cause to the Vacanakaras. In a preface to Hosa Paddhatiya Basaweshwarana Vacanagalu (New Version of Basava's Vacanas), Halakatti wrote that Basava was always immersed in the welfare activities. Basava showed to us the world of fishermen, washer men, hunters, warriors and cultivators. He enunciated sublime philosophy in his vacanas by using their language.

24 15th, March, 1932.
What Halakatti wanted to prove was that the metaphors of dog, rabbit, fox, crow and chameleon in Basava's vacanas symbolized the good and the bad aspects of human life. According to him, Basava excelled in using such common words for the noble cause of exhibiting love and compassion for the poor. A close look at these debates reveal the upper caste bias regarding Kannada Literature, its tastes, and notions of tradition and purity of linguistic forms etc. Even Halakatti could talk about the egalitarian caste less society and defend high culture taste in the same breath and depict Basava as a patron of lower caste Sharanas. One can see a patron-client relationship operating in Halakatti’s concept of low/high culture.

Manufacturing Consensus

The discourses of Kannada were ways of securing hegemonic influence. But this hegemony was possible for Halakatti due to his moderate approach. This moderate approach implied manufacturing consensus among different sections of the society in Karnataka. As Mark J. Smith points out, "It [hegemony] is an attempt by different classes, alliances and social forces to achieve 'political, intellectual and moral leadership in order to win the active consent' (Smith, 2002:68). In order to win the active consent from different sections of the society, Halakatti could not discard Virasaiva puranas; could not dissociate from the religious leaders and could not fail to take other sections of the society into confidence for popularising vacanas and obtaining their acceptance to his endeavours. He appreciated and endorsed the contributions made by non-Virasaiva scholars like Alur Venkatrao, Kapatral Krishnarao, M.R.Shrinivasamurthy (Halakatti, 1982:76) and Masti Venkatesh Iyengar (Halakatti, 1931:156).

Though he was not happy with internal conflicts of Virasaiva mutts, he could not oppose them for he needed their patronage for his mission. He was in constant touch with the religious heads in his effort to gain legitimacy for vacanas and popularise them. In his autobiography, he has given several accounts of his visits and conversations with several religious leaders apprising them of the value of vacanas. Once when the prominent leaders of the community visited him at his home, he got an opportunity to appraise the importance of vacanas to Hanagal Kumaraswamy, Jangina Murigayya, Ve.Mu.Buddayya
Swamy Puranikmatha and Revanasiddashastri. These Viraśaiva seers admired the valuable knowledge hidden in the vacanas and encouraged Halakatti to go ahead with his endeavour. Gradually, many Viraśaiva mutts gave importance to vacanas and religious discourses on vacanas for the purpose of developing Bhakti among their followers. Since Viraśaiva mutts were the centres of learning and scholarship, Halakatti could not prevent deification of Basava. For the Viraśaiva religious heads, vacanas justified worshiping Basava in the form of Dwithiya Shambu (second incarnation of Lord Shiva).

Eventually, vacanas became part of 'commonsense' of the public sphere in Karnataka. They were no more treated as the exclusive treasure of Viraśaivism but as the wealth that any Kannadiga should be proud of. Who will not be? That too when much before many societies desired to be called as 'civilised' the Kannada community witnessed a social revolution for a just society in Karnataka? Hence, vacanas were included in the school syllabus as well, the ultimate gesture of legitimacy given by Government institution. Inclusion of vacanas in the school syllabus was a milestone in popularising of vacanas. By the time Halakatti passed away in 1964, Karnataka University had already taken up the task of popularising and encouraging studies on vacanas and Virasaiva literature.

VI

Vacanas as Kannada Lyrics

Converting vacanas into poetry is a significant part of the modern history of vacana tradition. Kannada poetry was another discursive space in which the Viraśaiva scholars made a very significant and deliberate intervention. The history of this intervention is relevant for us to show the disagreements in the late colonial period over the 'literary sensibilities' of vacanakaras, especially Basava, and the efforts made to overcome the disagreements. The credit for initiating the debates on the literary value of vacanas in the Kannada literary circles must go to S. S. Basavanal, an important Viraśaiva scholar and a Kannada professor. He was instrumental in interpreting vacanas from literary and linguistic points of view. As a Kannada scholar, he sought to edit vacanas along the lines of modern poetic style. He divided vacanas and re-structured
them on the lines of formal features of modern poetry in English. He paid attention to rhythm, alliterations and meter.

Basavanal did not ignore the efforts of his predecessors in popularising the vacanas. He used Halakatti's new anthology ‘Hosa Paddhathiya Basaveshwarana Vachanagalu’ for this literary task. He thought that the literary and linguistic aspects of vacanas could obliterate the popular notions of vacanas as divine texts. He took up the task of freeing vacanas from communal clutches. In the preface to Basavannanavara Shatstalagalu (1952), he consciously avoided any reference to the contentious debates around Viraśaivism. This was an attempt to overlook the religious controversies during that time. Once again Basava's vacanas were chosen for the task.

Basavanal was aware of the criticism against vacanas that they (especially vacanas of lower caste Sharanas with 'indecent' words in them) had spoilt the 'beauty' of Kannada language. There were many doubts raised about the original authors of vacanas. Therefore, his first task was to firmly establish the authorship of vacanas and to purify the language of the vacanas. While doing so, he did not discuss any contentious issue around the question of authorship. He ignored them and reiterated that Basava was the original composer of the vacanas. He drew inspiration from the modernized Bible of the 'original' Hebrew language and several adapted versions of Shakespeare. He found many similarities between vacanas and Confucious's Analects and Tomas A. Kempis's 'Imitation of Christ'. These two works were not considered as part of literature for a long time. But in the modern period, they were considered as poetry. Such comparisons were necessary for Basavanal to prove that vacanas could also become popular and famous like the writings of Confucius and Kempis. A comparison between other mystic poets of India and vacanakaras was also drawn by Basavanal to show the significance of vacanakaras in the history and culture of Karnataka. Mystic poets of the medieval period like Tukaram, Kabir, Mira Bai and Sufists like Baba Kuhi and Jilji were compared to vacanakaras who, according to Basavanal, lived and popularised Bhakti and mysticism much before the mystic poets (Basavanal and Shrinivas Iyengar, 1940:21-26).
Since rhyme was seen as the core of poetry during his period, Basavanal laid special stress on the rhythmic qualities of vacanas. In accordance with the English rhyme scheme, he restructured vacanas by dividing them into many small lines so as to minimize its prosaic structure. Metrical and grammatical variations in vacanas were highlighted. He added punctuations such as comma, exclamation mark, colon, and quotation marks to make them more meaningful. His main intention was to make vacanas "melodious and meaningful" (Basavanal, 1998:85). An example of a vacana rewritten by him is as follows:

Alas, my Lord,
Why made you me—
this thing of nought,
a vain travailer here,
beret of grace?
Have you no pity, Lord?
Alas, you have none!
Listen, then, and say,
Were it not better done
a tree, a plant to create
than wretched me,

Despite these efforts, we find some kind of hesitation in him to consider vacanas as poetry in true sense of the term. He was aware that he needed more accurate and factual data before comparing the twelfth century 'poets' with the modern poets. He was moderate in his claims and admitted that the vacanas could be read from multiple perspectives. He was aware that one could restructure them according to one's own understanding (Basavanal, 1998:85). Even Kuvempu, the first Jnanapeeth awardee in Kannada, was not ready to accept Basava as a poet. He held that "though literary elements are found in vacanas we need to give attention to the great life of Basavanna" (Kuvempu, 1983:39).

According to him, Basava was not a poet in the sense we define a poet today and he did not intend to write literature. But Basava, Kuvempu appreciated, definitely rejuvenated Kannada literature in the twentieth century and he is a Karmayogi (saint of action).

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25 Kuvempu wrote "Vacanakara Basavannavaru" in 1949 for a Kannada journal Prabhudda Karnataka. This article was included in an anthology 'Vibhuti Puje' (1953).
Basavanal was not alone in the task of converting vacanas into lyrics. There were many others who felt strongly that vacanas should be included in school curriculum as part of 'moral education'. Such inclusion was intended to dispel,

- ...the clouds of communalism among our pupils, developing in them the divine spark of the universal religion (Hunsanal 1942:40).26

A major success was achieved in changing the perception that vacanas were mere moral doctrines when they were included in school and college curriculum for now they were seen as part of Kannada poetry. Vacanas were no longer considered as ‘religious’ but were appreciated for their literary and linguistic beauty. This does not mean that literary and linguistic dimensions of vacanas completely replaced the religious overtones of vacanas. But surely, this literary approach was a way-out for the reformists to 'rescue' the vacanas from religious moorings of Viraśaivism.27 By 1970s, at the height of the Navya literary movement, vacanas had been established firmly as an integral part of Kannada poetry. When read closely, Basvanal was not merely engaged in the task of poeticising’ vacanas. His demonstration of poetic features in vacanas included criticism of the blind rituals and beliefs of the Brahminic order (Basavanal, 1998:83). He upheld the greatness of Lord Shiva and istalinga as revealed in the vacanas (Basavanal, 1998:89).

The 1940s did not witness the sort of high pitched and heated debates that the previous decades had witnessed over religious status of the vacanas. The nationalists had

26 Hunsanal gives many suggestions to include vacanas in educating the public (1942). He suggests: The instruction of vacanas should be both direct and indirect. They should be properly grouped and graded in accordance with various forms. They can be grouped into 1) The Narrative vacanas that have direct bearing upon the life of vacanakaras, 2) the vacanas of morality, and 3) the reflective vacanas. Further they can be divided into the Poetry section and the Prose section. The narrative or the descriptive vacanas should be taught to the lower classes. The students should be able to understand easily the lives of vacanakaras. The moral elements of vacanas should be studied by the middle school students. That is, the ethical maxims of Viraśaivism should be explained indirectly through the lives of the great vacanakaras.

27 Parallel to such literary phenomenon in Karnataka can be found in Tamilnadu too especially in the debates between the non-Brahmin Shaivites and the progressive intellectuals. A.R.Venkatatalapathy's article on the relationship between the Dravidian movement and the Shaivites points out how, during the 1940s, the classical texts of the Tamilians were defended by S.S.Bharati and Sethu Pillai on literary and aesthetic grounds rather than on religious or Shaivite terms (1995:767). According to him, it was the conflicts between the Shaivite Vellalars and the progressive non-Brahmins over the ancient texts of Tamilnadu that resulted in the shift of Tamil texts from classical and religious status to literary texts.
more or less made their position clear vis-à-vis the conservatives. Gradually the critique of conservative Shaivism in the community lost much of its sting and the versions of the secular, literary and scholarly intellectuals came to stay. But it cannot be forgotten that it was not achieved through either negotiation or by consensus. It represents a nexus between power and knowledge. The efforts of scholars such as Halakatti were not exceptions to this fact. Their high rhetoric of nationalism was always already contaminated by the methodologies provided by west, which they did not bother or were unconscious of it. But it should be noted that in their ignorance scholars like Basavanl and Halakatti were unable to understand the objections and resentments raised by conservatives. That leaves a space for ambiguity, a space of non-resolution. In our considered opinion, such gaps lead to literary controversies in Karnataka in recent times. Though Halakatti and Basavanl had different approaches to the Virasaiva history, literature and vacana literature, we have to notice a common concern in both. Both tried to clear off the contradictions inherent in the community, its history and literature re-writing the vacanas vigorously. However, their nationalism, evolved through their critical engagement with the Brahmin tradition, paradoxically developed a discourse of 'patron-client' when it was a case of accommodating subaltern vacanakaras. As shown in the preceding discussion, it was always Basava who stood at the top of all the vacanakaras. He was represented as the leader of all the vacanakaras and consequently there was not much scope for the lesser-known vacanakaras. If there are any references to lesser-known vacanakaras, the highlight will not be on their contribution and their perception of the overall Virasaivism. They are quoted and discussed to demonstrate the democratic nature of the movement led by Basava. The enthusiasm of Halakatti and Basavanl to show the mysticism of the vacanakaras in comparison with the Bhakti poets of the medieval period overlooked the criss-crossing and overlapping feature of several religious faiths. One such comparison, as shown in the above discussion, was between the vacanakaras and the Sufi saints. This comparison implied that the vacana tradition and the Sufi tradition were two totally different schools of thought. The antagonism between the Virasaivas and the Muslims, aggravated by the Deendar Siddiq episode in 1926, resulted in compartmentalizing the Virasaiva and the Islamic traditions into two independent traditions even though we come across several overlapping features of both traditions.
Historical, social and economic factors determining the interaction between the two traditions were reduced to romantic notion of communal co-existence. Rahamat Tarikere has noticed such reductionist narratives in the history of Karnataka (Rahamat, 1998:66). He has demonstrated the relationship between Allama and Sufi tradition in medieval Karnataka. He shows that there were interactions between the vacana tradition and Sufi traditions in the medieval period. According to him, both traditions influenced each other in more than one way. For instance, many 'temples' of Allama Prabhu in Kodekal, Maadyala, Jeerolli, Hebballi and Ashturu were constructed on the models of Muslim dargas (Muslim religious place). Many mystics who were influenced by Sufism carried the names like Fakiresha, Bhadruddin (Bhadreshwara) Khadaralinga, etc. However, any reference to such interaction with Islam, while examining the vacanas of Allama, was completely marginalized by the Virasaiva scholars. The Shubhodaya controversy and the Deendar Siddiq episodes are the classic examples of reluctance of the Viraśaivas to accept the living traditions associated with Allama Prabhu and Sufism.

The literary controversies, discussed in the second chapter, centre on some of the issues that we examined in the last two chapters. The communitarians, who belong to the upper caste/elite sections of the community, share some of the convictions of the nationalists regarding iconising Basava and other Shiva Sharanas. The secularists also echo some of the essentialist ideas of the nationalists regarding the radical dimension of the vacanakaras. These two forces who constantly spill over into the Viraśaiva past, however, seem to serve several practical purposes which are briefly discussed in the second chapter while explaining the secular and communitarian interpretations of the twelfth century movement. Variety and conflicting interpretations, which went out of control of Halakatti and Basavanal, however, did open up several possibilities of dominance and contestation.

It is very clear that there is no unanimity about the perception of the past. This lack of unanimity is also found in the perception of the present and its conditions. The contemporary conditions in the socio-political spheres of Karnataka have resulted in the 'crisis of Viraśaivism and the Viraśaivas'. The nature of this crisis and the causes will
form part of the next chapter. But what is conspicuous here is that the crisis is viewed in accordance with ideologies of the observers and they project their understanding of the present onto the past. It is this lack of unanimity about the past and the present that triggers off the controversies. What is more, certain group identities are presented as the only possible 'Virašaiva' identity and considerations of personal/party interests and power are rationalised as a concern for the whole community, literary or religious. If the secularists construct a homogenous Virašaiva community to expose the "fundamentalism", the communitarians imagine a monolithic community identity to put pressure on the author in question and the state. Therefore, it is important to shake ourselves out of discarding the communitarians as 'communal/primitive' forces and thereby fail to understand the active role they are playing in the contemporary socio-political life with the historical imaginations constructed in the colonial period.

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