

# Vachanas

by [Ankur Betageri](#) (July 2018)



#159, Herb Kornfeld

Vachana is a 12th century poetic form which originated in the Kannada language. Vachana literally means 'saying', 'thing said' or 'promise'. With the birth of Vachana, Kannada poetry was freed of the metrical and courtly conventions of traditional courtly poetry and its free-verse format made poetry the voice of the working man—the fisherman, the ferryman, the cobbler, the weaver etc.,—as well as that of the minister, the mystic and the rebel. Vachana poetry was revolutionary in that it rejected the Vedic religion, its ritualism, social customs and the caste system.

This is my attempt to write vachanas as an atheist.

1.

What's revealed

by blaring mantras on loudspeakers?

What rebirth is achieved

by wearing the decaying thread?

I'mBrahmanI'mBrahman

I'mBrahmanI'mBrahman

you mutter until you drown

in delusions of grandeur.

R.W. and W.W., W.B. and T.S.,

what's with the Aryan bombast and thunder  
what's with the consecration of fertility cults?  
You gave psilocybin  
to these megalomaniacs  
now, who will save them from superlatives  
from orgasming on the ineffable?  
Look, how they sit in a saintly posture  
and think evil of everyone else  
O Karlnatha!

2.

You called woman *mayé*  
because woman-as-phantasm  
is adsorbed—not absorbed,  
she can be squeezed out of you  
like water from a sponge.  
Be like a sponge! is your dictum  
or better, like thermocol in a tank  
or like waterdrop on a lotus-leaf.

3.

Like Krishna, Kudalasangamadeva  
is Transcendental Signified.  
And Bhakti, the affect of capture.  
So the nomad says,  
'I am the cat who walks by himself  
and all places are alike to me'  
O Karlnatha.

4.

There was a time  
when you longed for her  
then there was a time  
you longed for her to disappear  
the friction between beings  
that produces celestial sparks  
also turns them into rocks  
O Karlnatha.

5.

I am not this form of flesh

I am not my memories or name

I am not the congeries of ideas, yours or mine

I am not anything crystallized or framed—

I am the unformed and form  
-ing lightning

between the world and the brain

just the thinking and affecting

and the thought and affected

O Gillenatha.

6.

If the voice of your conscience

tells you I am a villain

know that your conscience

is internalized social norms.

Priestly talk has parasitized

your brain

disinfect it with dhamma

O Assalaayana.

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Ankur Betageri is a poet, short fiction writer and visual artist based in New Delhi. He is the author of *The Bliss and Madness of Being Human* (poetry, 2013) and *Bhog and Other Stories* (short fiction, 2010). He teaches English at Bharati College, University of Delhi. His poetry has appeared in *New English Review*, *Mascara Literary Review* and *London Review of Books*.

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