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Revealing Knowledge through Language: Philosophical Vision of Mahamati Prannath

Gourav Dwivedi

*School of Studies in Philosophy and Research Centre
Maharaja Chhatrasal Bundelkhand University, Chhatarpur (M.P.)
Email- Gouravdwivedi776@gmail.com, Mobile-9993303073*

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Abstract

*Mahamati Prannath's philosophy deeply interweaves spiritual insights, linguistic diversity, and epistemological approaches within the Indian Knowledge Tradition. This article explores how Prannath's multilingual use of Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Hindi, and regional dialects served not only as a means of spiritual communication but also as a strategy for accessing and preserving advanced knowledge. Notable texts such as the *Kuljam Swaroop* demonstrate how Mahamati Prannath conveyed complex metaphysical ideas, including self-realisation, non-dualism, and divine unity, making them accessible to audiences from different sects and linguistic backgrounds (Sharma 1993).*

*In this context, translation extends beyond language, serving a philosophical purpose by connecting inner truth (*nij tattva*) with external discourse. The paper critically analyses how his language acted as a decolonising force, dismantling narrow doctrinal barriers and European epistemic frameworks by reestablishing Indian metaphysical authority. Furthermore, his teachings serve as an early example of inclusive pedagogy aligned with the National Education Policy's aims for multilingualism and cultural unity.*

This research examines particular verses and their philosophical significance, indicating that Mahamati Prannath intentionally employed language to convey knowledge. His view, focused on unity and self-awareness, illustrates how translation can help preserve and renew Indian philosophical traditions in a diverse global context.

Keywords: Mahamati Prannath, Translation, Epistemology, Indian Knowledge Tradition, Multilingualism.

Introduction

Indian Knowledge Tradition encompasses a rich heritage of philosophical ideas, spiritual practices, and scientific insights. However, its transmission has frequently been hindered by language barriers, sectarian divisions, and formalist restrictions (Shakya 2001). In this setting, Mahamati Prannath (1618–1694), originating from Jamnagar, emerges as a pivotal figure who sought to revive and reinterpret fundamental Indian traditions through translation, acting as a bridge for epistemological understanding.

Inspired by Shri Devchandra Ji's teachings, Mahamati Prannath aimed to develop a unifying spiritual philosophy that connected Vedic and Katebi (Qur'anic) traditions. His influence extended beyond synthesising doctrines; he was committed to making advanced knowledge accessible to a diverse, multilingual, and multi-faith audience. His writings—mainly in the *Kuljam Swaroop*, a collection of over 18,000 verses—exhibit a unique philosophical engagement with languages such as Hindi, Gujarati, Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit (Bajpai 2008).

For Mahamati Prannath, language was more than just a means of communication; it was a sacred link that allowed him to express, contextualise, and internalise eternal truths. His use of multiple languages was intentional, serving as a profound epistemological strategy to challenge exclusive notions of divine knowledge and to make it accessible and relevant for seekers.

This paper examines how Mahamati Prannath's teachings present translation as a philosophical act, acting as a means to preserve, reinterpret, and disseminate the Indian Knowledge Tradition through accessible vernacular language. His legacy encourages modern thinkers to view translation not just as language transfer but as a way to safeguard culture and knowledge.

In Mahamati Prannath's philosophical perspective, knowledge (*jñāna*) transcends conventional academic or sectarian limits. His teachings advocate for a universal, integrative understanding rooted in lived experience, divine insight, and linguistic diversity (Mishra 2001). While

drawing from Indian spiritual traditions, his vision emphasises the fundamental unity of truth that surpasses religious and linguistic differences. He acted as both a reformer and a metaphysical mediator, developing a doctrine linking Vedic and Semitic revelations, Sanskrit orthodoxy, and Persian religious traditions. For him, language is a sacred conduit—*vāk*—through which truth is spoken and realised.

A key aspect of Mahamati Prannath's approach is his deliberate use of multiple languages to facilitate knowledge exchange. He skillfully combined Hindi, Gujarati, Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit, forming a versatile collection of scriptures that appealed to seekers from diverse religious, cultural, and social backgrounds (Saha 2017). This method allowed him to maintain the essence of Indian knowledge traditions while broadening their accessibility. As he states,

“सबदा कहे प्रगट प्रवान।

सबदा सतगुरु सों करावे पेहेचान।।

सद्गुरु सोई जो अलख लखावे।

अलख लखे बिन आग न जावै।।”

“Sabda kahe pragat pramaan,

Sabda Satguru son karāve pehchān.

Satguru soī jo alakh lakhāve,

Alakh lakhe bin āg na jāve.”

(Kirantan 4.3)

The Word acts as tangible proof, guiding the seeker to the Satguru, who alone can reveal the invisible (*alakh*) truth. Until that unseen reality is unveiled, the soul remains restless and yearning. In this context, Mahamati also regards Hindustani as the ideal language for transmitting spiritual teachings, stating:

“बिना हिसाबें बोलियाँ, मिने सकल जहान।

सबसे सुगम जानि के, कहुँगी हिन्दुस्तान।।

बड़ी भाषा ये ही भली, जो सब में जाहेर।

करने पाक सबन को, अंतर माहें बाहेर।।”

“Binā hisābe boliyāñ, mine sakal jahān.

Sabse sugam jāni ke, kahūñgī Hindustān.

Baṛī bhāṣā ye hī bhālī, jo sab meñ jāher.

Karne pāk saban ko, antar māheñ bāher.”

(Sanandh 1.13–1.16)

Although many languages are spoken around the world, he finds Hindustani the most accessible and universally purifying, both internally and externally, which is why he prefers it for divine teachings.

This approach also served as a decolonial act in knowledge terms, with Mahamati Prannath challenging the exclusive authority of Sanskrit rituals and strict religious dogma. His emphasis on *śabda-sādhanā* was not only a spiritual practice but also an important epistemological and decolonial act that crossed religious and social boundaries. His teachings break down hierarchical divides—such as caste, creed, scripture, and language—by prioritising experiential wisdom through *śabda*. He aimed to reveal the unseen

(*alakh*) through the living experience of the Satguru and to unify teachings from diverse traditions by emphasising the shared core of their sacred texts. As he states:

“जो कुछ कहा वेद ने, सोई कहा कतेब।

दोऊ बंदे एक साहेब के, पर लड़त, बिना पाए भेद।।”

“Jo kuch kahyā Ved ne, soī kahā Kateb.

Doū bande ek sāheb ke, par laṛat, binā pāe bhed.”

(Khulāsa12.42)

Prannath asserts that the Vedas and the Kabbalah, including the Qur'an, Torah, and Bible, disclose the same fundamental truth. However, conflicts arise because many fail to recognise this unity. This is not just syncretism; it is a conscious acknowledgement of shared knowledge—rejecting the colonial-modern idea that different theologies cannot coexist. He enhances this understanding by revealing the concealed core present in all scriptures.

“वेदांत गीता भागवत, दैयां इसारतां सब खोल।

मगज माइने जाहेर किए, माहें गुझ हते जो बोल।।”

“Vedānt Gītā Bhāgavat, daiyāñ isāratāñ sab khol.

Magaj māine jāher kiye, māheñ gujh hate jo bol.”

(Khulāsa13.66)

Through deep hermeneutic analysis, Prannath reveals concealed metaphysical meanings within both Indic and Semitic scriptures. In this approach, language is a tool for acquiring knowledge, and translation functions as a sacred device for inner enlightenment. For him, scriptures serve as evidence, but genuine realisation happens through the Guru's direct experience. Hence, the Satguru's teachings transcend sectarian divisions and institutional views. As he explains:

“शास्त्र ले चले सतगुरु सोई।

बानी सकल को एक अर्थ होई।।

सब सयानों की एक मत पाई।

पर अजान देखे रे जुदाई।।”

“Śāstra le chale Satguru soī,

Bānī sakal ko ek arth hoī.

Sab sayāñōñ kī ek mat pāī,

Par ajāñ dekhe re judāī.”

(Kirantan4.4)

Here, the Satguru acts as a living conduit, integrating all scriptural voices into a single, unified meaning that is understood only by the wise. The ignorant, however, perceive division. This perspective fundamentally challenges colonial epistemologies that treat religious and social categories as fixed and separate. His critique extends beyond doctrine, involving social deconstruction that opposes casteism and emphasises inner purity rather than ritual status.

“विप्र वेष बाहिर दृष्टि, षट कर्म पाले वेद।

स्याम खिन सुपने नहीं, जाने नहीं ब्रह्म भेद।।

चांडाल हिरदय निरमल, खेले संग भगवान।

(Kirantan 23.24)

दिखलावे नहीं काहू को, गोप राखे नाम।।

अब कहो काके छुए, अंग लागे छोट।

अधमतम विप्र अंगे, चांडाल अंग उदोत।।”

“Vipra veṣ bāhir dṛṣṭi, ṣaṭ karma pāle Ved.

Syām khin supne nahīn, jāne nahīn Brahm bhed.

Chāṇḍāl hirdaya nirmal, khe-le saṅg Bhagvān.

Dikhlāve nahīn kāhū ko, gop rākhē nām.

Ab kaho kāke chuē, aṅg lāge chot.

Adhamtam vipra aṅge, chāṇḍāl aṅg udot.”

(Kalash Hindustānī 16.15–6.17)

Prannath challenges brahminical orthodoxy by questioning whether someone is genuinely untouchable through external rituals or made sacred through inner purity. He values a sincere chandala more than a ritualistic priest, emphasising internal divine unity over strict adherence to scriptural rules. This perspective goes beyond social critique, representing a form of spiritual decolonisation.

In summary, Mahamati Prannath’s śabda goes beyond simple poetry; it functions as a potent epistemological and decolonial instrument that breaks down imposed binaries, reasserts inner knowledge as more significant than textual authority, and places language and consciousness at the core of liberation.

According to Mahamati Prannath, the word (śabda) is more than just a linguistic device; it is the primary means for reaching ontological and epistemological understanding. His teachings challenge rigid doctrinal divisions and linguistic exclusivity, promoting a metaphysics of unity where all distinctions dissolve in the experience of the formless Absolute (Akhsharātīt). This view critiques the proliferation of sectarian language and superficial doctrinal talk, as he states:

“पारब्रह्म तो पूरन एक है, ए तो अनेक परमेस्वर कहावैं।

अनेक पंथ सबद सब जुदे जुदे, सब कोई सास्त्र बोलावैं।।”

“Pārbrahm to pūran ek hai, e to anek parmeswar kahāven.

Anek panth sabad sab jude-jude, sab koī sāstra bolāven.”

(Kirantan 7.7)

Prannath criticises the division of the divine into numerous ‘gods’ and paths, each backed by different scriptures and terminology. His decolonial stance opposes favouring any particular scriptural language or sectarian view, emphasising the recognition of the Akhsharātīt through inner transformation and śabda-realisation instead. In a world where “everyone utters vast words, but no real meaning arises” (“बोहोत सबद को अरथ न उपजे” – Kirtan 23.24), he cautions against becoming entangled in linguistic diversity without achieving inner understanding.

“अपनी मत ले ले साधु बोले, सबद भए अपार।

बोहोत सबद को अरथ न उपजे, या बल सुपन धुतार।।”

“Apnī mat le le sādhu bole, sabad bhae apār.

Bohot sabad ko arath na upje, yā bal supan dhutār.”

True śabda-knowledge leads to the dissolution of ego and duality. Prannath considers this process to begin with the satguru, who transforms the unseen (alakh) into the seen (lakh) through the power of enlightened speech.

“सबदा कहे प्रगट प्रवान। सबदा सतगुरु सों करावे पेहेचान।।

सद्गुर सोई जो अलख लखावे। अलख लखे बिन आग न जावै।।”

“Sabadā kahe pragat pravān, sabadā satguru son karāve pehechān.

Sadguru soī jo alakh lakhāve, alakh lakhe bin āg na jāvai.”

(Kirantan 4.3)

The epistemological importance of śabda lies in its capacity to evoke recognition (pehchān) of the real, not through dialectical reasoning but by inspiring an inner resonance. Prannath’s perspective on language surpasses religious orthodoxy and linguistic hierarchies, serving as a unifying force. He praises Hindustani for its accessibility and its ability to purify both internal and external facets.

“बिना हिसाबें बोलियाँ, मिने सकल जहान।

सबसे सुगम जानि के, कहूँगी हिन्दुस्तान।।

बड़ी भाषा ये ही भली, जो सब में जाहेर।

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Karne pāk saban ko, antar māherm bāher.”

(Sanandh 1.13–1.16)

This endorsement of Prakash Hindustani is not driven by linguistic chauvinism but represents a bold decolonial act—Prannath supports a common language that surpasses elite scripts and sectarian dialects. The spiritual aim is to achieve unity, both metaphysically and socially, with the śabda functioning as the conduit through which the finite connects with the infinite.

Therefore, Mahamati’s śabda-centred metaphysics confronts colonial views and presents an epistemology where realisation (lakṣya) is attained not through ritual or linguistic power, but through genuine acknowledgement. This acknowledgement clarifies all distinctions before the One.

In the current context—especially given NEP 2020’s emphasis on multilingualism, cultural integration, and the revival of the Indian Knowledge Tradition—Mahamati Prannath’s work remains highly pertinent. His writings embody key principles championed by contemporary educational reformers: promoting accessibility, fostering cultural rootedness, encouraging interfaith dialogue, and utilising translation as a pathway to wisdom. As he states,

“सबदा कहे प्रगट प्रवान। सबदा सतगुरु सों करावे पेहेचान।।

सद्गुर सोई जो अलख लखावे। अलख लखे बिन आग न जावै।।”

“Sabadā kahe pragat pravān, sabadā satguru son karāve pehechān.

Sadguru soī jo alakh lakhāve, alakh lakhe bin āg na jāvai.”

(Kirantan 4.3)

In this context, śabda serves as both a source of knowledge and a metaphysical guide. It is not merely that the satguru communicates the truth; instead, the truth itself—alakh, the unseen—is revealed through the śabda originating from the awakened consciousness of the satguru. Mahamati thus advocates a metaphysics of unity in which language dissolves the divide between the visible and the invisible, as well as between name and form. From a decolonial standpoint, he challenges hierarchical and sectarian language by claiming that meaning is not derived from rigid dogma but is awakened through śabda-realisation. Consequently, śabda functions as both the method and medium of liberation—a knowledge bridge linking the finite self to the infinite truth.

Through these teachings, Mahamati Prannath preserved and revitalised core Indian philosophical principles by translating, synthesising, and promoting spiritual democratisation. His work emphasises translation as an epistemological bridge—helping to maintain knowledge while making it lively, relevant, and transformative.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Mahamati Prannath’s philosophical perspective offers a meaningful framework for viewing translation as more than mere language transfer; it is a sacred epistemological act that connects traditions, languages, and spiritual paradigms (Saha 2001). His deliberate use of multilingual scriptures not only broadens accessibility but also challenges exclusivist structures, reclaiming the unity of knowledge that colonial and sectarian narratives have long hidden. By utilising multiple languages—Hindi, Gujarati, Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit—in one text, he boldly affirms India’s rich intellectual diversity. His work demonstrates that translation can be a tool of decolonisation, extending the reach of original ideas across various epistemic communities instead of erasing them. With ongoing concerns about protecting Indigenous knowledge systems, Mahamati Prannath’s legacy remains highly pertinent (Sharma 1993). He envisioned a world where truth transcends the limits of script and sound, making the divine word accessible to all seekers, regardless of background or language. His writings do more than preserve the Bhartiya Jnana Parampara; they revitalise it, offering a timeless path to unity through linguistic openness, spiritual insight, and philosophical depth.

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