



INDIAN JOURNAL OF MULTILINGUAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT



Folk Legend Malai Mahadeshwara – A Cultural Study

T. M. Geethanjali ^{a,*}

^a Department of Studies and Research in Kannada, Karnataka State Open University, Muktha Gangothry, Mysore-570006, Karnataka, India

*Corresponding author Email: tm.geethanjali@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34256/ijmrd2122>

Received: 15-06-2021; Revised: 20-06-2021; Accepted: 20-06-2021; Published: 21-06-2021



Abstract: Malai Mahadeshwara is south Karnataka's most loved folk legend. It was during the Veerashaiva revolution of 12th century-which sought to establish 'truth' 'dharma' 'equality' in the society, created the circumstances to make a legend like Mahadeshwara who took his rightful place as the people's leader. He rose to the mantle through his own will and hard work. The critical events of his life have been documented as the folk epic "Malai Mahadeshwara" passed on as folklore to every generation. This article is also derived from this folk epic. My aim is to educate the modern public about how casteism has propagated and affected our society throughout time and how this has led to revolutions creating many heroes whom to this day are worshiped. People still tell their stories, songs and follow customs, ideals of that era of heroes who broke the shackles of oppression and paved a way for liberation. This enabled people to live a life of dignity, equality in our society, equal opportunities to everyone. Because of the work of these legends, we are able to live today in peace, where everyone has an opportunity to rise up, where people have their own individual identity and are treated with respect. Today any person regardless of caste/religion/gender can rise to the highest rank in society or in organization, can set their own standards for life and make independent decisions. Through this article I want to highlight the contribution of one- Mahadeshwara who became a messiah of common people.

Keywords: Malai Mahadeshwara, Kannada, Cultural study

Subject Specialization: Kannada

About the Author



Dr. T. M. Geethanjali Ph.D have 26 years of experience in Open & Distance Learning Educational Institution, Karnataka State Open University. Have Passed professional Examinations of KSET and UGC (Eligibility of Lectureship) with PhD. Have attended 14 Workshops, 18 National and International Seminars and presented more than 25 paper. Guided 3 Ph.D and presently guiding 4 Ph.D. research scholars. Have published 7 research articles and 4 books in specialization area. Acting as a UGC nominated Expert in the discipline of Kannada Committee of Experts for Post Doctoral Fellowship for Women at UGC, New Delhi. Acted as a Convener for Special National Convention of "ALL INDIA POETESS CONFERENCE" held on 21-22 May 2016 jointly organized by Karnataka State Open University and All India Poetess Conference. Received "Women Scientist Award" entitled "Kannada Nadina Hakkiglu" in 11th Kannada Science congress, held on 13th to 15th September 2015 in Raychur.



Introduction

The "Veerashaiva movement" or "Vachana movement" conducted under Basavanna's leadership in 12th century was a significant milestone in Karnataka. This was an important period in Kannada's cultural history. Where the people's wishes/thinking were swayed towards new direction due to the impact of revolution that began under the commandment of Allamaprabhu, Basavanna, Akkamahadevi, Channabhasavanna, Siddharameshwara. They sparked new sense of life among the deprived section of the society and they ushered in new age of realization. They broke their monotonous life and stared at the new horizon of life. The agitation\movement that ensued after the pandemonium that emerged from the Anubhava-Mantapa, most of the upper caste people banded together to create a superior community called Veerashaiva's who turned the rulers in their favor and usurped power. This form of Casteism forced the lower strata of society i.e., 'Sharana's' back in to deprivation. Just when the lower caste people were becoming aware and transitioning towards liberation from the pro-people movement of the "Sharana's", these unfortunate set of events caused immense frustration and hopelessness as this was a huge setback which eventually led to them seeking their own path to liberation of life.

Due to the occurrence of such events in Karnataka's History it led to the rise of Folk Icons like Mahadeshwara (Madhiga Community), Manteswamy (Holeya Community), 'Siddappaji', 'Junjappa' (Cattle Herder) and 'Mylara'. It can be observed from the Folk Epics that these after mentioned Icons originated from Northern part of Karnataka (North Karnataka).

Karnataka's major folk epics

From the Southern region of Karnataka communities like Selig's, kurubha's, Beda's, Uppara's, Pharivara's and Adhi Karnataka's. Adhi Dravidas like Madhiga, Holiya sections are related to the Folk Epics of (1) Manteswamy and (2) Male Mahadeshwara. The Kadu Gollaru section in the mid Karnataka region are related to the (3) Epic of Junjappa and the people who followed the Epics "Kumara Rama" and (4) Krishna Golla are from the Ballari district (North Karnataka) region and they represent Bandaga Jangala or Veshagararu. And the section who followed the (5) "Epic Siri" are from the southern region of Karnataka and represent "Meraru". Other than these five folk epics, in Karnataka there are other important folk tales -(6) North Karnataka's Gond's, (7) Halakki Vokkaliga's, (8) Yerava's from Coorg, the (9) nomad tribes of "Kumara Gogi" and (10) devotees of Mylaralinga.

The deity who sleeps on Anemale (Elephant Hill)

He who drapes Jenu Male (Hill of Bees)

He who has intertwined all seventy seven hills and condensed them into a pillow

Let's all hail our beloved father "Moodalu Madeva's"

Let's all hail our beloved father's feet. (Rajashekar, 1973, p.26)

-"Maleya Madeshwara"

The tribal communities in and around Mysore, Mandya, Bangalore, Selam, Coimbatore regions were devoted towards Mahadeshwara's personality and this led to the rise of folk legends. The attraction in the hearts of his devotees was unwavering. Mahadeshwara is present in many forms- to his followers he is Lord Eshwara, to Scholars he is an eminent historical legend and to most people he is their guiding light.

Mahadeshwara's resting place can be found on the hill range of Western Ghats, 50 km from Mysore, Chamaraja Nagara District, Kollegal Taluk. If we travel 9km towards Kowdhally, we get Mahadeshwara Hills.

The Hill ranges of Male Mahadeshwara contains 77 Hills. They are: Anu Male, Jenu Male, Gunji Male, Gurugunji Male, Kanu Male, Kambhatti Male, Kadhukshi Male, Padhuma Male, Pacche Male, Puje Male, Ponnachi Male, Kongu Male, Konachi Male, Sanku Male, Rudrakshi Male, Bhadrakshi Male, Manju Male, Ibhuthi Male, Bhusumanga Male, Gali Male, Gowli Male, Nadhu Male, Naga Male. Mahadeshwara travelled among all of these hills and they are still identified today by the places where he spent time. He was a messiah to the common folk and people around him would seek his guidance or blessing.



From the time he departed Kunturu Matt, till the time he found his place is seven hills, this journey was properly documented and carried over through folklore as dramas, bhajans, songs which carried over into daily life of the common people there. From Kunturu Math till the 'Valu Male' in the hill ranges of Male Mahadeshwara all historic events of importance find expression as moments in the folklore of that region.

They are expressed as follows: They are primarily propagated through folk literature but are also present in the form of 'Mardi Gudda' which is kneeling towards Mahadeshwara 'Kunturu Swamy", while going through Kollegal foothills region. Different events of his life have been materialized into the hill range, for example -The place where Basava tried to catch him is called "Soothgatte". The place where they tried to stop him and got bashed by him is called "Hanumanthrayana Valley". When he was pricked by a thorn, the place he trekked to is called "Kuntanapurada Halla", when he was overjoyed and ecstatic he left off of a cliff, this place is "Sundara Valley". The luscious grass which are like soft balls of cotton and his favourite resting place is called "Elephant cushion pit", the place where he rolled on the grass is named "Uldhuru halla". When Mahadeshwara left the devotees and started his journey to the forest, 2 disciples Sheshanna and Basava followed him this is called "Sarpa path" and "Basava Path". There are plenty of examples of places where people have personified and immortalized Mahadeshwara's experiences in that region.

Kamsale (A Folk Dance)



Figure 1 Kamsale performance by 'Devara Guddaru'

Many groups and professions stunned from interpretation of religious tests of these "Kamsale" people were the most crucial for the survival of folklore (Figure 1). They are scattered around southern Mysore, Tamil Nadu, Bangalore and Mandya. They are Male Mahadeshwara's prime devotees. They are also referred to as "Mahadeshwara's Guddaru", "Devara Guddaru" and "Siriya Devara Gudda" Gudda means Male Mahadeshwara's adopted son or disciple.

Brief history of Karnataka's folk epics

Karnataka's history witnessed many folk epics, but the most famous are the twin Epics:

- (1) Male Mahadeshwara Folk Epic
- (2) Manteswamy Folk Epic

These are the only epics in the range/scope of the districts Mandya, Mysore, Bangalore which home thrived. Although they are regionally popular, they have strong base as a local folk epics and are very relevant. It



is a mere coincidence that the two epics have the same size of literature content. We also note "Basava Purana" and "Hagalavadi Junjappa" and other minor epics of the region.

The Male Mahadeshwara and Kalewala (Netherlands folk epic) are of the same size. Each division in between poems and paragraphs are termed "Saalu" means Chapter, with each chapter describing a particular scenario or moment regarding Male Mahadeshwara. Since these divisions describe a particular event, they are also termed as ballads. The 'Male Mahadeshwara' folk epic is a congregation of 12 ballads, it is as beautiful as that of a Pearl Necklace. The well known scholar Ra. Gow. has called this a "Ballad Epic" (Giri Gouda, 1933, p. xiii).

Folk literature says that Mahadeshwara and Manteswamy are people who migrated from North and settled near South Karnataka, Manteswamy's time period was during the 14th and 15th century and it's been determined by experts that Lord Mahadeshwara was merely a boy during his time, although Manteswamy is revered as a great man of the land. According to Devachandra's "Rajavali" in 1838, Manteswamy belonged to the leftist part of Scheduled Caste group while Mahadeshwara belonged to the right, this can be inferred through the folk literature of that time.

Folk Epic Male Mahadeshwara

Male Mahadeshwara Epic has 12 Ballads. Each Ballad is an elaborate sequence of dramatic events in the duration of 12 nights. Central character in plot is Mahadeshwara rest of the characters revolving around him even though he is seen as a historical figure, he is central figure who bears a significant impression on many communities.

"Single persons (minstrels) took the place of the dancing multitude and chanted in a sort of "recitative", some song full of myth and legend, but centered in the person of the tribal God. Now what is such a song? It is a Epic" (Francis B Gummer, 1965, p.298).

The Epic started off with description of the ultimate (source of creation)

Did the tree come first or its seed

Who knows? Oh Mahadeva

Does Man, God, Devil Know?

There is only one who knows, he is Mahadeva (Rajashekar, 1973, p.15)

- Male Mahadeshwara

Mahadeva was an auspicious symbol and held as a divine presence of Shiva by the people around him. In the first section "Mangala maiyama Mahadeva", the deity as an aesthetic being is instilled to people's mind. Here is a brief description of the above mentioned poem.

It looked as if twelve thousand Jasmine flowers were decorated along the stones

on the peak with the rising sun in the background ,

Portrayed a magnificent view with the fresh fragrance of the blooming jasmine spread all over,

such was his aesthetic splendor (Rajashekar, 1973, p.08)

- Male Mahadeshwara

The first chapter named "Adishakti Kavatu" explores the 'creation of universe' in mythological perspective. When the Adishakti (the first creation in the known brahmada) came of age she gave birth to 3 children: Brahma, Vishnu, Maheshwara. She then propositions her 3 children to claim her innocence and free her. Brahma and Vishnu decline to which she destroys them, but Shiva cleverly deceives her and banishes (destroy) her.

Further the Epic describes the birth of Lord Mahadeshwara in mythological terms. His father hails from north Karnataka's Uttamapura, he partnered with Basavanna and was involved in the 'Aatma Linga' ritual. His mother's name is Uthrajamma.



From a very young age he was capable of conducting many miracles, feats of magic and would help people around him. He starts venturing towards Basava Kalayana in search of a Guru. When he arrives, he starts out by doing a miracle where he feeds two lakh people in that town. He later visits a teacher and decides to test him. After observing him he figures out that he is an undeserving charlatan and advises other students to discontinue their fellowship. He later establishes himself by conducting a shocking miracle where he brings back a dead corpse to life.

Following his intent to prove himself and become a holy figure he ventures south of Basava Kalyana. His aim is to find the right "Guru Math" and to acquire land, labor, food to sustain him and his followers. He goes searching for a place where he could get inducted into the "Guru math" and gain the trust and fellowship of devotees all under the service of god. He crosses over many places like Arsikere, Arakalagudu, Basavapatna, Mirle, Saligrama and reaches the banks of river Cauvery. As he was crossing over the many villages along river Cauvery, he would conduct miracles, and everyone who witnessed him were mesmerized, he would help the villagers and gain their trust. These scenarios are depicted in the eighth section.

Mahadeshwara temporarily resides in Kuntur Matt. Although he created a significant impact in that area he was dissatisfied so he leaves for Kollegal. Mahadeva encounters legendary hunter Bedara Kannaiyya and inducts him as his disciple by exhibiting his hunting prowess in a duel between them. Then he hears of a villain named Shravana dhore (king) and Mahadeva along with his new team plans to end his tyranny. They cleverly trap Shravana king and burns him along with his Palace, thereby freeing 300 gods he had imprisoned.

Mahadeshwara along with Malanna and Ranganatha travels to Mudukthore and arrives at Ikery Dasamma's house. Mesmerized by the gold on the three of them she plans to kill them and snatch the gold. Deceit filled Dasamma poisons their food and serves it to them. Mahadeshwara being wise senses her murderous intent and cleverly hides the poisoned food in his sack. After excusing themselves they begin to leave, Mahadeshwara coaxes Dasamma's sister to serve the poisoned food to Dasamma's 12 children. Saddened by the death of all her 12 children she seeks punishment for the three accused from the local panchayat. But intelligent Mahadeva devises a plan to scare away Dasamma from her own house and later acquires from her own house and later acquires seven pots of treasure from her.

He then goes back to the seven hills and distributes the treasure for building temple (Figure 2) and doing charity work. By this time he had established himself in the hill range and he spent his time developing his special talents and abilities. He gained many followers through his divine acts and those who witnessed him would turn into his disciple, this is how Mahadeshwara is described. He is instilled in everyone's daily life and people still look up to him for inspiration, strength, meaning and have immense faith in him.

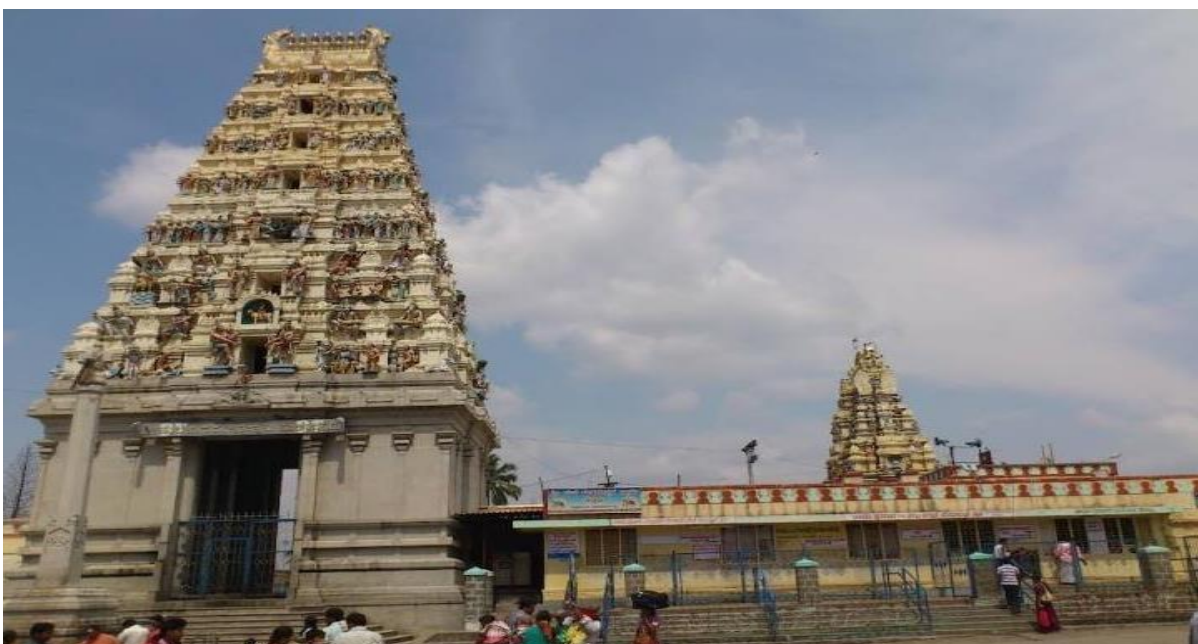


Figure 2 Temple of Malai Mahadheswara in 77 Hills.

References

- Francis B Gummer: "A Folklore Reader", Edited by Kenneth and Merry Clarke (1965) Page:298
- Giri Gouda (Ed), "Two Folk Epics" Pub: Institute of Kannada Studies, Manasa Gangothri, Mysore-560006, First Edition: 1933, Page: xiii
- Rajashekar P.K., (Ed) "Janapada Maha Kavya "Maleya Madeshwara" (Volume-1) Pub: Institute of Kannada Studies, Manasa Gangothri, Mysore-560006, First Edition: 1973.

Funding

No funding was received for conducting this study.

Does this article screened for similarity?

Yes

Conflict of interest

The Author has no conflicts of interest to declare that they are relevant to the content of this article.

About the License

© The author 2021. The text of this article is open access and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

Cite this Article

T. M. Geethanjali, Folk Legend Malai Mahadheshwara – A Cultural Study, Indian Journal of Multilingual Research and Development, Vol 2, Iss 2 (2021) 5-10. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34256/ijmrd2122>

