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## **Incomplete Dreams, Incomplete Play: The Process of Transcreating Kuvempu's Magnum Opus Novel into a 9-hour Play**

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**Abstract**---An admittedly hugely popular novel among Kannada readers, "MalegalalliMadhumagalu," Kuvempu's magnum opus written in 1967 is a story revolving around the characters of the then prevailing feudal system. Novels are a Kannada dream. Nothing happens in the novel according to the reader's expectations. Novels constantly break our experiences and the incomplete dreaming process continues every time we read a novel.


**Keywords**---art, drama, literature, transcreating novel.

### **Introduction**

"MalegalalliMadhumagalu," Kuvempu's magnum opus written in 1967, is a story revolving around characters of the then-prevailing feudal system—Heggades/Gowdas (the landlords) and their serfs belonging to different castes at multiple locations with interlinking characters and their stories. The acclaimed novel is very popular among Kannada readers. It is often considered as one of the "must-reads" novels of the Kannada language. The novel, among several other stories, portrays the love between the protagonists Gutthi and Thimmi, Mukunda and Chinnamma, and Aitha and Peenchal and the risks they dare to take. The social situations prevailing in the Malenadu region around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century form the backdrop to the novel (Karakelle, 2009; Zuber, 1980). The novel also depicts the colonial changes occurring in the Malnad region through the advent of English education, conversion by Christian missionaries, and the introduction of the bicycle.

The novel is the dream of the Kannada language. After you read it, it leaves you with the feeling of being awakened in the middle of an incomplete dream. The confusion as to whether life in the novel is a dream or reality is not only ours but also that of the characters. Nothing happens in the novel according to the reader's

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expectations. As we, the readers, are dependent on the memory of the past, the novel continually breaks our experience and the process of the incomplete dream continues every time we read the novel. Over the past 40 years, this novel has become the cornerstone that sharpens Kannada sensibilities. It sharpens even our imaginations. Kannada literary criticism has viewed this novel with the tools and designs available at each stage. It has raised many doubts and questions regarding Man–Nature relationships (Roose & Vandenhaute, 2010; Link, 1980). But these opinions and also the questions have continually changed. Against this backdrop, the Rangayana theatre repertory run by the Government of Karnataka decided to adapt the novel into a 9-hour play.

Karnataka has a long tradition of all-night plays, especially the folk performances of Yakshagana, Sannaata, and Doddaata. When C Basavalingaiah (Basu), an NSD graduate and acclaimed Kannada theatre director, asked me to adapt this construct-breaking novel into a play, I was filled simultaneously with extreme fear and a great desire. The biggest challenge is to portray the one or many stories the novel narrates leisurely in the format of the play centered around incidents in the eternal present. I feared whether I would understand the inner reality of each moment and express it in the play. When I was not mentally prepared to write the play, one day, Chikkanna (director in charge of Rangayana), Basu, and I went to Prof. GH Nayak's (a veteran critic and authority on Kuvempu's works) house to discuss the possibility of the play. He responded that the adaptation of Kuvempu's work itself is a huge cultural milestone. Even if you fail in this attempt, it is still a great victory, he said. His words eased my fears and made me agree to write this play with neither beginnings nor endings (Clipper-Sethi, 1983; Knoop et al., 2016). We needed a magical reference to transform this epic novel into a play, and further, this reference needed to come from within the story and not from the outside. In my search, suddenly, I recalled Cauvery, a victim of a brutal rape, and her ring resting in the hundi of DharmasthalaManjunatha (a famous pilgrimage site) emerged as the reference and left me ecstatic.

This ring connected me to the ArjunaJogis (folk singers) who weave the story around the ring. Later, the Sudugadu Siddhas (mendicants) and Helavas (family historians) came in as the other narrators of the story. After I picturized the first scene of the play in this manner, I sat for 15 days and wrote the narrative across 70 scenes. I then showed this draft to my teacher KV Narayana (KVN), the well-known Kannada cultural thinker and scholar. He suggested that the adaptation need not be authentic to Kuvempu's work, but it should be sincere to the experience. These words of KVN solved the huge problem facing director Basu. We did not try to reduce the 750-page novel to 250 pages. Instead, we have tried to portray the novel in the form of a play (Nikitas, 2018; Lin et al., 2013). We picked only those incidents that could be portrayed theatrically. In this attempt, my discussions with several scholars helped me immensely.

KVN has observed that only Gutthi of the novel can enter the present. Although Gutthi can enter, his dog Huliya cannot. When I was writing this incomplete play, I felt that Gutthi's dog was a significant metaphor. While the village Megaravalli is portrayed as the center of anthropocentricity through the bicycle, police, education, church, and hotel, the mountain cliff HulikalluNetthi is portrayed as one of nature's power centers by Kuvempu. For Gutthi to face and escape this

omnipotent power of Nature, Huliya's support is necessary. This is why Gutthi seeks refuge in HulikalluNetthi to escape from the human world. In both these cases, the fact that he could go to Hulikallu with the help of Huliya brings to our notice the unknown basis of the relationship between man and nature. The primary substantiation to this premise is when Thimmi experiences the sunrise with new eyes when she first climbs HulikalluNetthi, and the dog loses one of its eyes at the same time (Kapoor, 2016; Junaidi, 2018). This incident symbolizes the process of how man's inner knowledge of nature is going blind. Subsequently, when Gutthi escapes the law and goes to Kanooru, Huliya is washed away in the Tungabhadra floods, and this shows how modernity is responsible for the absence of man's instinctive knowledge of nature.

The play Madhumagalu has been narrated as an act of gratitude to Kuvempu. To sustain the emotional high in the play, 44 songs have been used. Four of them were selected from Kuvempu's poems and the writing of the remaining 40 songs was an exceptional experience. Well-known music director Hamsalekha has experimented to build the dramatic world of Madhumagalu through his music. This experiment of Basu and Rangayana is an effort to understand our cultural present. The only truth is what happens to you when you face these experiences (Salgaro et al., 2021; Hernadi, 1981). Now, the world of Madhumagalu in Kuvempu's eyes is being presented to your and our eyes in another form.

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