

KANNADA DRAMA AND THE BUDDHIST CONCEPT OF IMPERMANENCE

Mr.Arunkumar A.Y.<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. Shivakumara D C <sup>2</sup>, Mr. Ramachandra N.U<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1&2</sup> CRTA (Kannada), JAIN (Deemed-to-be- University), Bengaluru

<sup>1\*</sup> Assistant Professor, Dept. of Kannada, Bengaluru North University, Bangalore

<sup>3</sup> Assistant Professor Dept. of Languages – Sanskrit Area, JAIN (Deemed-to-be- University), Bengaluru

**Abstract:**

Kannada drama can be significantly connected to the philosophy of Buddhism. Indirect influences of Buddhist philosophy can be traced in many ways in Kannada literature - drama. This research investigates how the literary representation of the Buddhist idea of impermanence is realized in Kannada drama and how this is woven into plots by playwrights. Impermanence is a crucial, all-pervading, and central Buddhist doctrine; what it suggests, however, is that worldly phenomena, be it human existence, relationships, or experiences of any kind, are transitory. Kannada plays have, therefore, for the most part, portrayed ephemerality in love, the impermanence of gains and losses, both personally and socially, and also the calls for justice and injustice, along with personal evolution.

Impermanence in Kannada drama is generally well illustrated through character portrayal, events dramatized, and symbolisms placed in the course of the drama that brings out the brevity of human relationships and experiences. This is a theme playwrights use to convey their comments on the passing social and political scenario of the impermanence of power and wealth, human achievements. By striving to look into the multiplicity of impermanence in Kannada drama, this research attempts to underscore the influence of Buddhist philosophy in the themes and motifs shaping the art form.

The research also aims to further that at the end of the day; impermanence is a concept used to encourage the need for audiences to make the most life and to feel detached. This therefore research shall substantiate how some of these popular Kannada plays adopted this concept by Buddhist philosophy and explain the relevance of the concept of impermanence is even to the modern society.

**KEY WORDS:** Kannada drama, Buddhist philosophy, impermanence, anitya, transient nature, human existence, relationships, social justice, personal growth

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is in the strong roots that Kannada drama derives from the cultural-religious tradition of Karnataka, that it has served through the ages as a medium for examination of values within society and debating various philosophical concepts. The variety in Kannada theater that manifests itself in its classical, folk, and modern forms ensures enhancement of each other in contributing to a unique style of narration reflecting the changing ethos in the region. From the mythological tales enacted in traditional forms like Yakshagana and Bayalata to contemporary concerns presented in the modern Kannada theater, this art form has certainly taken up some serious philosophical questions at every step and made it an important cultural expression.

The Buddha concept of impermanence finds its repeated expression as one of the paramount themes in Kannada drama, showing the transitory nature of everything. This concept has been interwoven into various narratives, showing how change is inevitable and attachment to the world fruitless. The infusion of Buddhist philosophy into Kannada drama throws light not only on the influence of Buddhism in Karnataka but also makes it a reflective lens for grappling with questions about existence in front of audiences. The Kannada drama, with its characters, happenings, and dilemmas, itself often inscribes the impermanence of things; hence, it becomes a deep medium for exploring the deeper truths of human existence.

## 2. Influence of Buddhist Philosophy

The influence of Buddhist philosophy has been so deep that it percolates completely into Kannada literature, of which reflections are radically noticed through some of the works of its prominent writers. One such reflection stems from the works of Kuvempu, the metaphoric journey of a river in exploring impermanence, a sort of key idea borne out by Buddhism. As such, in this poem, the author demonstrates the transient nature of human existence, along with the teaching of "anitya," or impermanence, in Buddhism. Similarly, central to G.P. Rajarathnam's works such as Dharmadāni Buddha presents the monk who moves with the Compassion, Wisdom, and Mindfulness .

The influence of Buddhist philosophy is also clear in the works of Chandrashekhar Kambar, whose play "Buddha" dramatizes the life and teaching of the Buddha. His play unfolds the cycle of suffering, rebirth, and liberation, which resonates with the Buddhist concept of "samsara". Lakshminarayan Bhatta's works draw from Buddhist symbolism, where the lotus is used to represent spiritual growth and enlightenment. These works demonstrate how huge the impact of Buddhist philosophy on Kannada literature really is in terms of shaping themes, characters, and devices for those deepest insights into the human condition.

## 3. Buddhist Concept of Impermanence:

### 3.1 Anitya, or Impermanence in Buddhism:

Anitya, or impermanence, is the central doctrine of Buddhism, representing the perception that everything, be it material or nonmaterial, is in a continuous state of change. It is the main doctrine in Buddhist thought because it teaches nothing within the universe is fixed or permanent. This concept is very powerful in relation to human life because it shows just how transitory being really is. This is the underlying theme in Kannada literature, whereby this fundamental concept of impermanence has been incorporated into narratives of the transience of joy, sorrow, wealth, and even life itself. For example, in Kuvempu's poetry and modern Kannada playwrights, the reality of transience is reflected upon, putting across a demand from the readers and audience to ponder over this changing nature of the world.

### 3.2 Impermanence a Phenomena

This is one of the important insights in Buddhist philosophy: everything in the world undergoes transformation at every moment. It is brought out in Kannada drama through characters and plots showing a never-stopping flow of time and the inevitability of change. In plays like "Hayavadana" by Girish Karnad, it is shown that identity or reality is very mutable in nature. Nothing is permanent, and such impermanence challenges the perception of characters and drives the plot toward a deeper understanding regarding self and existence.

### 3.3 Impermanence and Human Existence:

In Buddhism, impermanence relates not only to the external world but also to human existence and human relationships and experiences. It often finds expression in Kannada literature, where stories and plays dwell on the fleeting nature of human life, relational changes, and circumstantial changes. For example, the works of P. Lankesh very frequently speaks of the transience of social arrangements, personal relationships, as a metaphor to probe the norms of society and human emotions. This focus on the fleeting nature of life in Kannada literature provokes the feeling of embracing change and accepting impermanence in everything.

### 3.4 Encouragement of Mindfulness and Detachment:

Mindfulness, the practice of being fully present in the moment, is central to Buddhist philosophy, it encourages individuals to observe their thoughts and actions without introspection or engagement. Kannada literature forms have embraced these ideas, and often depict people who put mindfulness into their actions and decisions, and can guide herself through self-control, reflecting the Buddhist concept of they will live in the present moment. For example, the works of Kuvempu, one of the most popular writers in Kannada, often exhibit intellectual insight through characters facing their inner struggles with a calm and introspective mind, and ultimately they find peace by knowing themselves.

Impermanence is a Buddhist teaching of cultivating mindfulness and detachment. Recognizing the transitory nature of everything in life, one is encouraged towards non-attachment to be peacefully settled and balanced. Kannada literature manifests this idea with the help of characters who experience that it is all futile to stick to worldly desires. The works of Jnanapith awardee D. For example, R. Bendre time and again revisits the theme of detachment and declares a life

wherein one lives, knows, and accepts impermanence. The literature reflects Buddhist philosophy in a manner that enables them to enlighten the reader on the path of mindfulness and the resultant emancipation from attachment. Buddhist principles of mindfulness and detachment both were two powerful tools that helped a writer or a poet sketch the human condition and opportunity for spiritual growth in Kannada literature. Therefore, the same may be said, rather strongly, of the close integration of these concepts, central to the Buddhist praxis, which are so much part of the texture of Kannada literary works, reflecting the degree to which Buddhist philosophy has left its impression on the cultural and intellectual landscape of Karnataka.

#### **4. Influence on Kannada Drama:**

##### **4.1 Impermanence: Themes in Kannada Plays**

Kannada drama itself has inherited that culture of using philosophical ideas as adornments to its narratives, and impermanence happens to be a rich strand that strikes a chord deep within this cultural tradition. The themes by Masti Venkatesha Iyengar and T.P. Kailasam concern the fleeting nature of life and experiences. In the works such as Yashodhara, Purandaradaasa etc. of Iyengar the devotion and faith are tested by transience in the world around. Reflections on the inevitability of change, especially in regard to characters' relations with the gods and ruminations of their own mortal lives, have been retained. Similarly, the works of Kailasam demonstrates through the life of dramatic personae who struggle with the impermanence of riches, love, and power. Socially, it is criticism of the fruitlessness of a material life in search of happiness, which corresponds with the Buddhist understanding that everything is subject to perishability and change.

##### **4.2 Characters Struggle with Transience of Life, Power, and Relationships:**

In Kannada drama, characters represent the struggle with the impermanence of life, its power, and its relationships and the inside and outside battles that naturally go with such a struggle. The journeys of characters are emblematic of the greater Buddhist philosophy of anitya, by which recognition of impermanence is itself a path to spiritual enlightenment. Thus, their struggles were not only personal but also reflective of a larger human condition, hence making these plays relevant across time and culture.

This asserts the fact that one of the major Kannada playwrights and poets, T.P. Kailasam, was influenced by Buddhism in his works, as he unearthed different themes such as impermanence, suffering, and enlightenment. The works of T.P. Kailasam, an important Kannada playwright and poet, shall have in them the revelations of Ambedkarite Buddhism in revealing the strands of impermanence, suffering, and enlightenment. In his play he is strongly critical of the entire social and political order that perpetuates suffering, very much in the line of what Buddhist "dukkha" would be. Most of his series of collections have included many such poems reflecting Buddhist ideals, including the transience and importance of mindfulness regarding life. Kailasam in his works shows how Buddhist philosophy can inform and at the same time enrich literary expression.

##### **4.3 From the works of Kuvempu**

Kuvempu, a well-known Kannada poet and playwright, was influenced by Buddhism, which he worked a lot on with themes of impermanence, compassion, and enlightenment. In this epic poem "Ramayana Darshanam" (1949), the author tried to reinterpret Ramayana in the Buddhist light, emphasizing the need for mindfulness and the momentariness of being required for a fruitful life. The theme of transitory nature has also been treated in the play by Kuvempu, but with a metaphor of a river's journey as in Jalagara, pondering over the evanescence of human existence. Works like 'Shudra Tapaswi' prove the deeply pervasive influence of the philosophy of Buddhism upon the literary vision and creative expression of Kuvempu.

##### **4.3.1 Malegalalli Madumagalu**

In Kuvempu's literary universe, relationships have often been visualized as subject to the same impermanent forces ruling over all of existence. His novel "Malegalalli Madumagalu" ("The Bride in the Mountains") has taken an intense portrayal of human relationships set against the rural backdrop but facing continuous tests of love, marriage, and family bonds through harsh realities in life. The characters of this novel laugh and cry in their relationships, only to end up finding that everything is temporary.

The novel is shot through and through with the expression of anitya, the Buddhist corner, where relationships are as fleeting as everything else in life. Attachment to relationships brings in the age-old Buddhist lesson of suffering, according to Kuvempu, who delineates the anguish of the central characters tussling with love and loss. Through their experiences, Kuvempu subtly puts across the need for detachment and acceptance of the impermanence of all human bonds.

##### **4.4 Experiences and the Cycle of Samsara**

This is due to the fact that the cycle of rebirth called Samsara, in particular, and experiences in general, are common concepts in epic narratives and philosophical treatises in classical Kannada literature. For example, in the 10th century, the poet Pampa in his Adipurana, though basically a Jain text, reflects earlier Buddhist conceptions pertaining to the nature of existence and the cycle of rebirth. This describes Pampa's characters' lives over several rebirths, proof in point being in best demonstration of the Buddhist idea that actions in one life account for experiences in a later incarnation. Similarly, in his vachanas, the 12th-century philosopher-poet, founder of the Lingayat tradition Basavanna, found the need to break away from the samsara with plenty of references to the worldly experiences being illusive. Though not

strictly Buddhist in nature, Basavanna's works show the influence of Buddhist thought that permeated Kannada literary and philosophical traditions.

Now, in modern Kannada literature, this engagement with Buddhist ideas of samsara and experience becomes clearly articulated. This comes out in many of the works of the very famous novelist S.L. Bhyrappa, known for his philosophical depth. In "Tantu," Bhyrappa deals with how experiences are interlinked to form a web that perpetuates the rounds of suffering and rebirth. Yes, considering all the relationships the main character goes through and the events of his life, one should a priori find an allegory for the Buddhist notion of how experiences in our life determine our karma and spread samsara. In his controversial novel "Aavarana," the concept of circular time, together with the repetition of patterns in human behavior, has been used to consider the nature of historical experiences influencing the present, the way in which their memory continues to haunt the present, therefore mirroring Buddhist ideas on the cyclical nature of existence.

Contemporary Kannada poetry has also been rich soil for the exploration of Buddhist ideas of experience and samsara. A poet of the stature of K.S. Nissar Ahmed, in verses from his collection "Nityotsava," returns again and again to the impermanence of experiences and the struggle of human beings to find meaning in a cycle of birth and death. His poetry has time and again used imagery bearing out the Buddhist concept of the wheel of samsara, how our experiences link us or free us from taking part in this enactment. Another key voice in this regard is that of H.S. Shivaprakash, whose poetry is engaged with existential questions through an informed Buddhist philosophy. Through works like the play "Maleye Mantapa" (The Pavilion of Rain), Shivaprakash cogitates on the manner in which our perceptions and experiences build our reality.

In the domain of Kannada short fiction, authors like Vaidehi and Boluwaru Mohammad Kunhi have taken recourse to certain stories that subtly echo Buddhist ideas concerning experience and the perpetual cycle of existence. In many of her stories, Vaidehi often writes upon those characters caught in cycles of behaviour or circumstance which copy-cat samsara in the Buddhist concept but on a personal scale. In a subtle way, she brought out how past actions determinate present acts and their consequent future results, which is very close to the Buddhist concept of karma and rebirth. Quite frequently, Kunhi goes back in his stories to themes of impermanence and the illusion that is integral to the worldly experience, not very different from the Buddhist urgency for seeing through maya, or illusion, that perpetuates the samsara.

## 5. Vairagya

Vairagya or asceticism is another important Buddhist concept expressed in Kannada literature. This teaching advocates freedom from worldly attachments and desires, enabling the individual to attain an inner state of peace. Characters in Kannada mythology often realize how impermanent life, relationships and material wealth are, ultimately futile to cling to ephemeral beings. Kuvempu's works explore this theme extensively, featuring heroes who through personal trials come to accept detachment as a means to spiritual and emotional liberation. That true satisfaction and liberation are achieved not through accumulation but through attachment if they are consciously removed, leading to a more profound understanding.

## 6. Maxims of Buddhism and Kannada Literature

The principal maxims of Buddhism are right perception, right judgment, right speech, morality, right livelihood, right endeavor, right mind, and right concentration. This code of morality has been put to demanding applications in the present era in Kannada literature, thus reflecting the lasting impact of Buddhist ideas upon the contemporary writing subjects and adapting them in order to address personal struggles and challenges of modern life in Karnataka and beyond.

A very fine example of this influence could be found in the case of Kuvempu, the doyen of the leading Kannada writers of this century. For instance, he has used the tenets of the eightfold path to explain the ancient epic while writing "Ramayana Darsanam". In his novels, one comes across broad emphasis on rational decision-making and morality in his portrayal of the Rama Yatra: it is depicted vividly how these principles guide moral dilemmas and personal challenges, as do the contours of good living and righteous endeavor in the socio-economic context of a changing rural Karnataka. Explores a tradition that shows how the Buddhist ethics can be utilized in light of the contemporary problems of development.

The influence of the eighth form is also evident in the works of modern Kannada poets such as K.S. Narasimha Swamy, known for love poems. He used to include some psychological and moral topics in collections like "Maysuru Mallige" (Mysore Jasmine). His poems often talked about the importance of good language and right action in personal relationships, reflecting the Buddhist emphasis on mindfulness.

## Conclusion

Kannada literature presents ancient wisdom within contemporary narrative forms. His profound probes into the existential conditions of man, their bonds, and experiences are firmly rooted in Buddhist tenets—pre-eminently impermanence and samsara. His storytelling is typical of Kuvempu in thought-provoking and reflective emotions that set readers on a self-reflection path through life's complexities. He has deftly interwoven Buddhist tenets into his stories to let humanity know that humans are mortal and their existence is transitory, and he wants people to reflect on these great realities.

This feature has been carried on by modern Kannadiga dramatists, who continue to explore the theme of impermanence in more original avatars. For example, most of the techniques employed by K.Y. Narayanaswamy in his experimental

plays are imported from absurdist theatre to underscore the impermanence and evanescence of meaning and identity, in keeping with the fluid, non-essential architecture of the Buddhist self. Minimalist sets, rapid scene changes, and characters bearing changing identities in these productions create a very felt sense of conveyance on the part of the Buddhists anicca. Through such efforts, Kannada drama not only represents an important means for the preservation and propagation of varied aspects of Buddhist philosophy but also creates a unique atmosphere wherein the constituents can personally feel those profound aspects. The stage is a metaphor for the impermanent world: each performance, unique and unrepeatable, is in itself the quintessence of the Buddhist understanding of existence as a continuous flow of phenomena in a state of constant change.

Kannada drama is closely associated with the Buddhist concept of impermanence. Themes of impermanence, suffering and enlightenment are woven throughout Kannada plays, reflecting Buddhist teachings on the transient nature of life and the importance of mindfulness. Through playwrights like Kuvempu, T.P. Kailasam, Chandrasekhar Kambar and we see the Buddhist concept of impermanence reflected in the characters, plot structure and symbolism used in Kannada drama. This expression of Buddhist philosophy in Kannada literature is a powerful reminder of the universal truth that underlies human existence.

The study of impermanence in Kannada drama also reveals the close relationship between art and philosophy. Kannada playwrights steeped in Buddhist thought have produced works that not only reflect the human condition but also give us an insight into the nature of reality as we proceed through the complexities of life and themes and teachings in Kannada dramatically is a poignant reminder of the importance of embracing the impermanent and focusing on the modern times. We also gain a deeper understanding of its profound impact.

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