

Plants-related proverbs and idioms in Kannada with critical comments and explanations

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Introduction

A proverb in Kannada says “ವೇದಸುಳ್ಳಾದರೂ ಗಾಡೆಸುಳ್ಳಾಗದು - *Veda sulladaru Gadesullagadu*’ meaning Vedas which we Indians have held in high esteem for several centuries may become untrue but certainly not the ‘Gade’ or proverbs. In other words proverbs are based on the time tested experiences of people over several centuries and represent the true situation. All languages have their own proverbs on every aspect and on every actions of day to day life of humans. These proverbs have been in usage for centuries and have stood the test of time and represent the real traditional wisdom of people of that region and percolated over several generations initially through oral folklore and now through many forms of publications. In the present article, an attempt is made to list and highlight fifty one proverbs and idioms in Kannada related to plants, vegetation, and even environment (Gangadharachar, 2012). Critical explanations along with botanical identities and hidden meanings are described. The entries in bold face are the Gadegalu or proverbs shown in Kannada alphabets as well as in Roman alphabets (English).

1. ಗಿಡವಾಗಿಬಗ್ಗದ್ದು, ಮರವಾಗಿಬಗ್ಗಿತೇ?

- *Gidavagi baggaddu maravagi baggite ?*

This proverb is true to its meaning; when the sapling cannot be bent is it possible to bend when it becomes a tree? Same way when a boy in his young age cannot be trained in right direction it is not possible to train him when he becomes an adult.

2. ಮಂತ್ರಿಸಿದರೆ ಮಾವಿನಕಾಯಿಲುದುರಿತೇ ?

- *Mantrisidare mavinakayi udurite ?*

Just by chanting mantras we cannot make the mango (*Mangifera indica*. Family Anacardiaceae) fall from the tree. This means if we have to achieve anything in life our efforts are also needed.

3. ಬಳ್ಳಿಗೆಕಾಯಿಭಾರವೇ?

- *Ballige kayi bhareve ?*

A thin climber (balli) of Cucurbitaceae for example can support the weight of big fruits; is the fruit heavy for the plant? No, certainly not. Same way for a mother her

child is not a burden even if she is extremely poor and lives under extreme difficult conditions.

4. ಜಾಲಿಯಮರವು ದುರ್ಜನರ ಸಂಘವಿದ್ದಂತೆ

- *Jaliya maravu durjanara sangha vidhante*

Jaliya mara refers to the spiny *Acacia nilotica* and it's allied other spiny acacias (family Mimosaceae). This proverb is extremely meaningful which says having friendship with wicked people is mixing with spiny acacia which only pricks and cannot even give shade to travelers in hot sun nor can provide any edible fruits to hungry nomads.

5. ಹುಣಸೇಮರ ಮುಪ್ಪಾದರೆ ಹುಳಿಮುಪ್ಪೆ?

- *Hunusemara muppadaare huli muppe ?*

The vernacular name *Hunusemara* is botanically *Tamarindus indica* (family Caesalpiaceae). The proverb says that even if the *Tamarindus indica* trees become extremely old the fruits retain the same quality of sour taste that you may find in any young trees. Often this proverb is used for some old people who still have an urge for sex in spite of their old age.

6. ಬೇವುಬೆಲ್ಲದೊಳಿಡಲೇನುಫಲ

- *Bevubelladolu ittarenu phala ?*

Bevu in kannada refers to *Azadirachta indica* (Neem – Family: Meliaceae) which is bitter in taste and is there any benefit or use of such fruits or flowers of neem? This means neem will have its own character and cannot change; same way some wicked people even if they mix among good people, their original character will not change.

7. ಹಾಗಲಕಾಯಿಗೆ ಬೇವಿನಕಾಯಿಸಾಕ್ಷಿ

- *Hagalakayige bevinakayisakshi*

Hagalakayi refers to *Momordica charantia* (Family Cucurbitaceae) fruits which are bitter; similarly the *bevinakayi*, fruits of *Azadirachta indica* (Meliaceae) are also bitter. Can one bitter plant act as witness to other bitter plant? No, not possible. In the same way one thief cannot be a witness to other thief.

8. ಹಿತ್ತಲಗಿಡ ಮದ್ದಲ್ಲ

- *Hittalagida maddalla*

Hittalagida means wild plants growing in our own home garden and often we don't consider them medicinal (*maddalla*) but if the same plants are administered by some- one else as medicines, we accept them and use them. Indirectly, the proverb says that we don't value our own talent and knowledge but give value or credit to others even if such knowledge is far inferior to ours.

9. ಈಚಲಾಗಿಡದ ಕೆಳಗೆ ಮಜ್ಜಿಗೆ ಕುಡಿದಂತೆ

- Eachala gidadakelage majjige kudidante

Eachala gida refers to *Phoenix sylvestris*, (Family Areaceae) which provides an alcoholic drink called toddy or Neera. If one person sits and drinks even butter milk below the tree, people assume that he is drinking toddy only. This proverb indicates that what we see may not be correct at times.

10. ಕತ್ತೆಗೆನುಗೊತ್ತು ಕಸ್ತೂರಿವಾಸನೆ?

- Kattegenugottu kasturivasane ?

Katte in Kannada refers to donkey and this proverb questions what the donkey knows about the nice fragrance of kasturi. Donkeys eat all sorts of dirty junk lying on the roads.

11. ಹೂವಿನಿಂದ ನಾರು ಸ್ವರ್ಗಕ್ಕೆ ಹೋದಹಾಗೆ

- Huvininda naru swargakke hodante

This is again a fine proverb which says that along with flowers even the thread used for making garlands of flowers reaches Gods or 'Swarg' in heaven. The message is that if we spend much of our time in association with good and scholarly people, we also get some knowledge and good behavior.

12. ಅಶ್ವಥಮರ ಸುತ್ತಿ ಹೊಟ್ಟೆನೋಡಿಕೊಂಡಂತೆ

- Ashwatha mara sutti hottenodikondante

Ashwatha mara refers to *Ficus religiosa* (Family Moraceae) which is considered as sacred in most places. In Karnataka the trees are planted in most temples and married ladies worship and go around the tree as part of puja to get blessed for children. This proverb conveys that going around the *Ficus religiosa* tree and then immediately check their stomachs by touching to confirm whether they have conceived or not. The moral of the proverb is that anything we do in life requires its own time to get desired results.

13. ಕುಂಬಳಕಾಯಿ ಕಳ್ಳ ಎಂದರೆ ಹೆಗಲು ಮುಟ್ಟಿನೋಡಿಕೊಂಡಂತೆ

- Kumbalakayi kalla yendare hegalumuttinodikondante

Kumbalakayi in Kannada refers to Pumpkin (*Cucurbita pepo* or *C. moschata*: Family Cucurbitaceae). The literal meaning of the proverb is that when we utter 'thief of pumpkin' in a group of people, someone touches his

shoulder to check whether there is pumpkin. If a person is not the thief of pumpkin why should he at all touch his shoulders to confirm whether there is any pumpkin. Rather, he should walk with his head raised instead.

14. ಪುರಾಣಕೇಳುವುದು ಬದನೇಕಾಯಿ ತಿನ್ನುವುದು - Purana keluvudu badanekayi tinnuvudu

In Satsanga hearing pious stories but not following in one's life. The proverb says you hear in satsanga that do not eat *badanekayi* meaning brinjal (*Solanum melongena*: Family Solanaceae) but going home and eating brinjal. The moral of the proverb is hearing or chanting something good but not following or adhering to what he chants.

15. ಹಸಿದು ಹಲಸಿನಹಣ್ಣು ತಿನ್ನು ಉಂಡುಮಾವಿನಹಣ್ಣು ತಿನ್ನು ಹಸಿದಹಲಸು ಉಂಡಮಾವು

- Hasida halasu undamavu

Halasu refers to *Artocarpus integrifolius* (Family Moraceae) and this is advised for eating before food or when you are hungry; and mavu refers to *Mangifera india* (Family Anacardiaceae), the mango, that should be eaten after food.

16. ಕೈಗೆಸಿಗದದ್ರಾಕ್ಷಿ ಹುಳಿ

- Kaige sigada drakshi huli

This proverb is also in English which says 'Grapes are sour' meaning anything that we are unable to get or achieve in life we discard that saying that was not good. When we fail to achieve certain things in life we reject that with the reasoning of not good or not worthy.

17. ಕಬ್ಬುಡೊಂಕಾದರೆ ರಸಡೊಂಕೆ?

- Kabbu donkadare rasa donke ?

Kabbu is sugar cane (*Saccharum officinarum*: Family Poaceae). If the cane sugar is bent the juice in it cannot be bent or curved, meaning one should not measure one's character by his appearance or phenotype alone.

18. ಜೋಳವನು ತಿಂದವನು ತೋಳದಂತಿರುವನು; ರಾಗಿಯಾನು ತಿಂದವನು ನೀರೋಗಿ ಆಗಿರುವನು - Jolavanu tindavanu toladantiruvanu; ragianu tindavanu nirogiagiruvanu

One who eats 'jola' regularly, botanically *Sorghum vulgare* (Family Poaceae) he will be like the Wolf, always ferocious, and highly energetic; while those who eat 'ragi' regularly (botanically *Eleusine corocana*: Family Poaceae) will be fit and healthy without any disease or ailment.

19. ಮನೆಗೊಂದು ಮರ, ಊರಿಗೊಂದು ವನ; ಕಡಿದರೆ ಮರ ಬರುವುದು ಬರ

- **Manegondu mara, urigonduvana; kadidare mara baruvudu bara**

This proverb highlights the importance of trees/forests in maintaining proper and healthy environment. This emphasizes that every house should have one tree and every village or town should have one forest (*vana*). Further, the last part of the proverb says that if you cut the trees, the region certainly gets the famine (*bara*). The summary being that we should protect forests and grow more and more trees.

20. **ಹಸಿರೇಲುಸಿರು**

- **Hassireusiru**

Hasiru meaning green or vegetation and if there is vegetation there is life; no vegetation means no life. Again, highlights the importance of forests or vegetation around human habitation.

21. **ಹೊಟ್ಟೆಗೆಹಿಟ್ಟಿಲ್ಲ ಜುಟ್ಟಿಗೆ ಮಲ್ಲಿಗೆಹೂ**

- **Hottege hittilla juttige mallige hu**

Some persons although very poor and do not have anything to eat but still give the feeling that they are rich enough and spend whatever little they have for boosting their external image only. The literal meaning of the proverb is nothing to eat but go for costly and fragrant '*malligebu*' (botanically *Jasminum* spp. (Family: Oleaceae) for decorating their hair or for tying on their bunch of hair left on their back of the head.

22. **ಆನೆಕದ್ದರುಕಳ್ಳ, ಅಡಿಕೆಕದ್ದರು ಕಳ್ಳನೆ**

- **Ane kaddarukalla, adikekaddaru kallane**

A thief is a thief whether he steals an Elephant or a small areca nut (*Areca catechu*: Family Arecaceae) meaning whether you steal a big amount or meager amount you will be a thief.

23. **ಅಡಿಕೆಗೆಹೋದ ಮಾನ ಆನೆಕೊಟ್ಟರು ಬರದು**

- **Adikege hoda maana anekottaru baradu**

Adike is Areca nut – *Areca catechu* (Family Arecaceae). This saying means if you lose self-respect for stealing just an areca nut you will not regain your respect even if you give an elephant (*Ane*) in return. Once you lose your respect for any small mistake you cannot regain the same at whatever the cost you afford later.

24. **ಆಡುಮುಟ್ಟದಸೊಪ್ಪು ಇಲ್ಲ**

- **Adumuttadasoppu illa**

Adu in Kannada is goat; this goes to say that the goats eat every plant and there is no plant that is not touched or eaten by goats.

25. **ಅಕ್ಕಿಮೇಲೆಆಸೆ, ನೆಂಟೆಪ್ಪ**

- **Akki mele ase, nentara mele preeti**

Akki refers to rice; this proverb goes to say that some people love to preserve rice and not spend (use) but at the same time love to have relatives visiting them. In

other words we want guests and relatives to visit us but not at the cost of the provisions stored in the house.

26. **ಅಕ್ಕಿ ಕರ್ಚಾಗಕೂಡದು, ಮಕ್ಕಳು ಬಡವಾಗಕೂಡದು**

- **Akki karchagakudadu makkalu badavagakudadu**

This proverb more or less conveys the same meaning; *akki* meaning rice (*Oryza sativa*: Family Poaceae) should not be spent and at the same time children (*makkalu*) in the house should not become weak and sickly.

27. **ಹನಿಹನಿಸೇರಿದರೆಹಳ್ಳ ತೆನೆತೆನೆಸೇರಿದರೆಬಳ್ಳ**

- **Hani haniseridare halla tene tene seridare balla**

This is an excellent proverb which conveys great meaning. Just like the drops of rain join together to form a small pond so also the individual cobs of paddy or sorghum when accumulated together forms the heap of grains harvested (*balla*).

28. **ರಾಮರಾಜ್ಯಬಂದರೂ**

ರಾಗಿಬೀಸೋದುತಪ್ಪಲಿಲ್ಲ

- **Ramarajya bandaru ragi beesodu tappilla**

Ramarajya meaning happy and enjoyable life without any worry, all living in harmony as it was during the regime of Lord Rama. According to this proverb even if such Ramarajya comes, some people cannot avoid the hard task of grinding the *ragi* (*Eleusine corocana*) with the help of two flat stones for making powder for their day to day use. The indirect meaning being that even if sufficient wealth comes in some ones way, they are not destined to enjoy but carry on their routine hard work for their living.

29. **ಭರಣಿಮಳೆಗೆ ಬಿತ್ತಿದರೆ ಧರಣಿಯಲ್ ದಾನ್ಯ**

- **Bharanimalege bittidare dharaniyalli dhanya**

The name of one rain during monsoon is *Bharani* and it is said that if farmers sow their crops during this rain, the entire farm (*dharani* also meaning *bhoomi*) gets filled with *dhanya* or the harvest of grains. In other words, the farmers get a good harvest.

30. **ಕೋಟಿವಿದ್ಯೆಗಿಂತ ನಾಟಿವಿದ್ಯೆಮೇಲು**

- **Kotividyeginta natividyamelu**

*Kotividy*a meaning thousands of different kinds of knowledge; and the proverb says that the *natividy*a (traditional knowledge) is much better than the *kotividy*a. In other words, whatever we learn through our formal education cannot surpass the ethnic knowledge which has really stood the test of time.

31. **ಬೇವಿನಬೀಜಬಿತ್ತಿ**

ಮಾವಿನಹಣ್ಣುಬೆಳೆಯುವುದಕ್ಕೆ ಆಗುತ್ತದೆಯೆ?

- **Bevinabeeja bitti mavina hannu beleyuvadakke aguttadeye ?**

Bevinabeeja meaning seeds of *Azadirachta indica* (Family Meliaceae); *maninahannu* meaning mango-*Mangifera indica* (Family Anacardiaceae). The meaning of the proverb is that can we expect mango from sowing the seeds of neem? No, certainly not. Whatever we sow, we have to harvest the same; similarly whatever good or bad deeds we do in life, we get the same kind of results at the end.

32. **ಬಿತ್ತಿದಂತೆಬೆಳೆ**
- Bittidantebele

This proverb also conveys more or less the same meaning. Whatever we sow, we harvest the same. Meaning whatever good or bad deeds we do in life we harvest the same.

33. **ಅಗ್ಗದಆಸೆ ಮುಗ್ಗಿದಜೋಳ**
- Aggadaase muggida jola

Sometimes we buy cheaper items and naturally, the quality of such materials is also of substandard. *Aggada* meaning cheaper and if we buy cheaper variety of *Jola* (*Sorghum vulgare*) we get spoiled and fungus attacked variety of sorghum grains (*muggida* meaning fungus attacked).

34. **ಕೋತಿಕ್ಕಿಗೆ ಒಂದುಗುಲಗುಂಜಿಸಿಕ್ಕಹಾಗೆ;
ಮಂಗನಕ್ಕಿಗೆಮಾಣಿಕ್ಕಸಿಕ್ಕಹಾಗೆ**
- Kotikyegeondu gulaganji sikkahage;
manganakyege manikya sikkahage

Koti refers to Monkey; if a Koti gets a Gulaganji meaning (*Abrus precatorius*: Family Fabaceae) what it will do or what is the use for it. Same way if a munga, again meaning Monkey gets very valuable gems what is the use for monkey?

35. **ಬಿತ್ತಿದಂತೆಬೆಳೆ**
- Bittidantebele

Whatever good or bad deeds we do in our life, we harvest the same. Whatever crop we sow we get the same result. If you sow spiny or poisonous plants, you get the same harvest; if you sow the sweet mangos you get the same sweet mangos as harvest

36. **ಕುಲಕ್ಕೆಮೃತ್ಯುಕೊಡಲಿಯಕಾವು**
- Kulakkemrutyu kodaliakavu

This is an excellent proverb. *Kodaliyakavu* refers to the wooden handle fixed to the axe for cutting the trees. This wooden handle brings about the destruction of its own race.

37. **ಗುಲಗಂಜಿಯಕಪ್ಪು ಗುಲಗಂಜಿಗೆ ಕಾಣುವುದಿಲ್ಲ**
- Gulaganjia kappu gulagangige kanuvudilla

38. **ಮುದಿಯೆಲೆನೋಡಿ ಹಸಿರೆಲೆ ನಕ್ಕಿತಂತೆ**
- Mudiyele nodi hasirelenakkitante

Gulaganji refers to seeds of *Abrus precatorius* (Family Fabaceae). The meaning of the proverb is that the blackspot of the seed of *gulaganji* is not visible to the seed. Similarly, you will not come to know your own good or bad characters you have imbibed.

38. **ಕತ್ತೆಗೆಯಾಕೆಹತ್ತಿಕಾಳು ?**
- Kattege yeke hattikalu ?

Donkey (*Katte*) eats all kinds of dirty and waste things lying on roads and for such donkeys why you feed *hattikalu* meaning the seeds of *Gossypium sp* (Family Malvaceae) which is costlier and also the donkeys may not relish. They are not habituated to eat such good things. When they can eat anything and survive why to waste money in feeding costly *Gossypium* seeds?

39. **ಚೇಳಿಗೊಂದೇಬಸಿರು; ಬಾಳೆಗೊಂದೇಗೊನೆ**
- Cheligondebasiru balegonde gone

Scorpions (in Kannada Chelu) get pregnant only once and after giving birth to its young ones, the mother scorpions die; in the same way the 'bale' meaning banana (*Musa paradisiaca*: Family Musaceae) produces only one inflorescence and dies.

40. **ರಾಗಿಗೆಒಂದೆತೆನೆ ಬಾಳೆಗೆಒಂದೆಗೊನೆ**
- Ragige onde tene balege onde gone

This proverb more or less conveys the same meaning as above. Ragi (*Eleusine corocana*) bears only one inflorescence so also the 'bale' meaning *Musa paradisiaca* produces only one inflorescence.

41. **ಜಾಲಿಯಮರಕ್ಕೆನೆರಳಿಲ್ಲ**
- Jalia marakke neralilla

Jali in kannada is referred to spiny Acacia sp and its closely allied species. These species provide no shade to travelers. Often these trees are compared to wicked people who are of no use to the society.

42. **ಬಾಳೆಗೊಂದುಗೊನೆ, ಬಾಳೆಗೊಂದುಮಾತು**
- Balegondu gone baluvavanigondu matu

Just like *Musa paradisiaca* (*Bale* in kannada) produce only one inflorescence, in the same way one advice, given once is sufficient for such good human beings who want to lead good life and live as good human beings in the society.

43. **ಹೊಂಗೆಯನೆರಳು ತಾಯಿಯಮಡಿಲು**
- Hongeyaneralu tayiamadilu

Hongey is *Pongamia pinnata* (Family Fabaceae) and the shade of this tree in summer is so cool and refreshing that it is compared to the lap of a mother for the baby.

Mudiyele is mature, yellowish leaves about to drop from the trees and the green leaves (*hasirele*) just arising on

the trees laugh at the deciduous mature leaves without knowing that they also have to pass through that condition. The moral of this proverb is that we should not make fun of a person who is ailing and in trouble.

45. ಕಡಿದರೆಮರ,ಬರುವುದುಬರ

- Kadidare mara baruvudu bara

This proverb relates to conservation of environment; says if you cut the trees certainly famine (*bara*) comes. In other words the message is that we should not cut the trees; rather grow more and more trees.

46. ವನನಾಶ ಸರ್ವಕುಲನಾಶ, ಲೋಕವಿನಾಶ

- Vana nasha sarvakula nasha, lokavinasha

This saying is also more or less conveys the same message as above. Destruction of forests or vegetation results in destruction of all life, destruction of the world.

47. ಮರಉಳಿದರೆಮಳೆ; ಮರವಿದ್ದರೆಹೊಳೆ

- Mara ulidare male; maraviddare hole

Another environment related saying. If trees are conserved, ample rains we get; if trees are there the rivers can survive.

48. ಅಪ್ಪಹಾಕಿದ ಆಲದಮರಕ್ಕೆ

ನೇಣುಹಾಕಿಕೊಳ್ಳಕಾಗುತ್ತ?

-Appa hakida alada marakke nenuhakikollakagutta?

Just because the *alada mara* (*Ficus bengalensis*: Family Moraceae) is planted by his father or grandfather can he go and hang himself in that tree? The message is that in the changing world one cannot stick to conservative and out dated ideas.

49. ಶಿವರಾತ್ರಿಗೆಸೀಳುಗಾಯಿ: ಯುಗಾದಿಗೆಹುಳಿಗಾಯಿ

- Shivaratrigeseelugayi: yugadigehuligayi

In this proverb, phenology of fruits of Mango (*Mangifera indica*) is told. During Shivarathri (February) the young fruits of Mango are without any sour taste while during Ugadi, a big festival in south India, the new year starts from this festival(April), the fruits mature and develop *huli*, meaning sour taste. But now with the change in climate and also with the introduction of new varieties, mangos appear more or less throughout the year.

50. ಹುಟ್ಟಿಸಿದದೇವರು ಹುಲ್ಲುಮೆಯಿಸನೇ ?

- Huttisida devaru hullumeyisane ?

When a person or any life is born in this world is it not the God who provides food (hullu) in any form? In other words there is food for every man or animal in this world, no matter how he manages.

51. ಹೊಳೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಹುಣಿಸೇಹಣ್ಣುತೊಳೆದಂಗೆ

- Holeyalli hunusehannu toladange

Hunasehannu in Kannada is fruits of *Tamarindus indica*: Family Caesalpiniaceae. Is there any benefit if you wash or dissolve such savory fruits in river? Similarly if you spend so much time and money on an undeserving person is there any use? Entire thing is a total waste.

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