'IGNCA, SRC' and 'We Can Together' jointly organized the rendering of folk epic – Manteswamy Kavya on 29.9.2013 at SRC premises under the guidance of Prof. S. Settar, Director (Hon.) IGNCA, SRC. Smt. Usha Kattemani inaugurated the show. Mr. Rajendrakumar delivered welcome speech and introduced the epic. Mr. Radha Krishna of We Can Together conducted the programme. More than hundred witnessed the show. Kebbpura Siddaraju (who is the 3rd generation descendant in the Neelagaara family) rendered along with Kamsale Mahadevaiah, Siddaiah and Rachaiah, all from Gundlupet of Chamarajanagara Dist.

Manteswamy Kavya is one of the most celebrated oral epics of Karnataka. Neelgaras, the professional singers of South Karnataka, have kept the epic alive for centuries in the districts of Mandya, Mysore, Ramanagara, Chamarajanagara and Rural Bangalore.

Manteswamy was a folk hero who lived in about the fifteenth century. Legends are built around his life and temples are created defying him at Chikkelluru, Boppagoudanapura and Kappadi. Manteswamy is a living tradition in and around these centers. ‘Manteswamy Kavya’ treats him on par with Allamaprabhu, a Virasiava saint of the Twelfth century. However this contention is contested.

The epic begins with the arrival of Manteswamy in the city of Kalyana. He makes a dramatic appearance on a dung heap at the entrance to the city, with the dead body of a calf and a gourd full of ‘Kaḷḷu’. Basavanna’s wife takes him to the palace where a confrontation between the sharanas and Manteswamy takes place. He heralds the victory of the lowly over deceitful insincere devotees.

After that, Manteswamy begins his return journey to South Karnataka, till he finds his permanent abode in Boppagoudanapura. This journey is punctuated by his efforts to acquire disciples. He picks up infants and each child symbolizes the entry of a community, Rachappaji, Doddamma of the Grove, Channajamma, MadivalaMachayya, Phalaradayya and Siddappaji become his chief followers. How he brings them into his fold, through ritual, craft and magic, makes up the saga. Baachi Basavayya who wants to become his disciple is reborn as Baala Kempanna and acquires the name Siddappaji.

The confrontation of Siddappaaji with the Panchalas (Blacksmiths) of Halaguuru is fraught with symbolic qualities. This represents a stage in civilization when technology had to be liberated from its hereditary practitioners. This incident is narrated dramatically. Finally Manteswamy acquires many followers belonging to a several communities and settles down at Boppagoudanapura. His ‘Samaadhi’ is now found in
this place. Two of his important disciples have their shrines at Chikkelluru and Kappadi.

‘Manteswamy Kavya’ and its cognate epics have many distinctive features. They have selected a language which is a dialect, both geographically and socially. This choice is remarkable in the context of literary texts. Secondly, the narrative style is a combination of the poetic, the dramatic and a simple prose. This adds to the impact of the epic. Thirdly, it is episodic and each episode may be recited independent of its broader context. This work delineates the life of unlettered communities. Such epics have theories regarding the origin of the universe and their community is usually found in the nucleus of the story. This gives a sense of identity and pride to the communities. Actually they depict different stages in the history of civilization. (Kannada University Hampi Published the Manteswamy Kavya- Information Courtesy Hi. Chi. Boralingaiah and other sources).