

The Spirits (Bhūtas) and their Narrative Songs

(A Background paper on the Tuluva spirit worship to be presented in a workshop to be held on 20 – 2 – 2008 in Udupi)

I

The purpose of this paper is two-fold:

- 1 To prepare the background to understand the Tulu culture;
- 2 And to clarify some of the terminological difficulties in describing it.

This paper is not supposed to be a scholarly academic exercise; rather it is an attempt by an untutored layman who tries to make sense of his immediate life situation. I was born as a Tuluva; has some knowledge of the Tulu culture. This gives me some space to write about this culture.

II

The Tulu Language

Tulunadu comprises the present day Udupi and the Dakshina Kannada districts of Karnataka and the Kasargod district of Kerala. The main language of this region is Tulu, though the official language is Kannada in Karnataka and Malayalam, in Kerala.

Tulu does not have its own script and it is generally written in the Kannada (Kanarese) characters. It was Rev. A. Manner of the Basel Mission, Mangalore who first published a collection of Tulu narrative songs -- pāddanas – using the Kannada characters. Therefore, his book, *Pāddanolu* published in 1886 has become an indispensable source book for those who wish to study the spirit worship (bhūtārādhane) and the Tulu narrative poems. I shall have something more to say about Manner at a later stage.

Attempt to write Tulu in the Kannada letters goes back much before the publication of Manner's collection. According to R. C. Temple,

‘Bishop Caldwell, with some hesitation, classes Tulu among the cultivated Dravidian languages, on the ground that, though unwritten, until Basel Mission began to teach people after 1834 how to write it in Kannada and Malayalam characters, and print it in the former, it had been very carefully cultivated by the reciters of poetry and prose...’ (Temple: Preface to *The Devil Worship of the Tuluvas*. The Indian Antiquary. 1894: 5)

A lot of work has been done and is being done on Tulu folklore, Tulu lexicon and the Tulu culture.

III

The Spirit Worship (Bhūtārādhane)

The spirit worship or the spirit possession is one of the distinctive cultural elements of Tulu Nadu -- the land of the Tuluvas. In Tulu, there are two terms to describe spirits: ‘bhūta’ and ‘daiva’. Bannanje Babu Amin and Mohan Kotian (1990), and Vaman Nandavar (2001) have tried to distinguish bhūtas from daivas.

Regarding bhūtas, Amin and Kotian write, ‘In the matter of spirit worship in Tulu Nadu, generally the punishing spirits -- śikṣaka daivas -- are called bhūtas. Among the punishing spirits that people worship with devotion, we can mention – Panjurli, Kalkuḍa, Kallurṭi, Uḷḷaḷṭi, Uḷḷāklu, Malarāya, Koḍamaṇittāya, Panjaṇittāya... The superhuman powers / the spirits possessing noble divinity -- śiṣṭa daivatva -- and who protect the faithful are regarded as daivas. In this category we can include the divinities like Baider (Koti Chennaya), Siri, Kāntabāre Budābāre, Rājan Daiva, Tannimāniga, Muggerlu, Māyandāl (Amin and Kotian, 1990: 94 – 95 translated from Kannada)

Nandavar, while discussing whether Koti Chennaya are bhūtas or daivas, writes, ‘In the annual festivals of Koti Chennaya, the Koti Chennaya impersonators do not wear *aṇi* (a kind of ornamental halo-like structures worn behind their backs); there is no practice of tying long frills (skirts) made from the tender coconut fronds around their waists (siri) or the custom of initial dance by wearing the sacred anklets (gaggaradecci); there is no shouting and screaming that we find in the bhūta impersonators during the bhūta possession; there is

no animal sacrifice ...' (Nandavar 2001: 58, translated from Kannada)

At the common parlance, bhūtas are also called daivas; the distinction between the punishing spirits and the protecting spirits is not always exclusive either. The punishing spirits can be benevolent at times; and the protecting spirits can be quite punitive.

In Burnell's, *The Devil Worship of the Tuluvas*, there is a list of 133 spirits or bhūtās. On the number of Bhūtās, Dr. Amritha Someshwar, writes. 'We find the lists of spirits in different books. (In A. C. Burnell's, *The Devil Worship of the Tuluvas*; in Dr. Vivek Rai's, *Tulu Janapada Sahitya* and in Dr. Chinnappa Gowda's, *Bhūtāradhane*.) There are bhūtās that do not figure in these lists. At least we can obtain the names of 400 bhūtās.' (Amritha Someshwar, *Tulu Pāḍana Samputa*, Prastāvane (Preface) 1997: 8, translated from Kannada)

There are different classifications of spirits. (See, Peter Claus:1987, Amin and Kotian:1990, Amrita Someshwar: 1997, Nandavar : 2001)

An internet website gives the following classification of the spirits worshipped in Tulunadu.

In the Tulu speaking coastal Karnataka the spirits can be classified as follows:

- a) The spirits of totemistic origin; Panjurli (tiger), Nadigōne(bull) etc.
- b) Mother goddesses : Jumādi, Lakkesiri, Ullālti, Māriamma etc
- c) Attendant gaṇas of God Shiva : Virabhadra, Guliga
- d) Certain incarnations of puranic gods : Visnumūrti, Ermeru, Jatādhari etc.
- e) Spirits of cultural heroes who met with tragic death : Kōti-Chennaya, Kalkuda-Kallurti, Siri, Kōddabbu, Koraga-Taniya
- f) The serpent spirits : Nāga (Internet, HTML)

There are different names to describe the offerings made to the spirits – kōla (annual festival of a spirit), bandi (procession of a spirit in a cart / chariot) nēma (annual offering offered to Kōṭi Chennaya), agelu (offering of a feast to spirits), tambila (an annual offering of food to spirits and serpent gods), jātre (annual festivals at the places of

worship), āyana (a temple festival), maimē (worship ceremony of Jaṭadhāri Bhūta), dompada bali (ritual worship of a bhūta under a specially constructed pandal), kenda sēve (a ritual of walking on fire or live cinders), jālaṭa (a bhūta festival in which offerings are made for different bhūtas continuously for three days) and arsāya (a domestic worship and offering to God Venkatesvara of Tirupati). (Furtado: 1950: 21, Nandavar: 2001: 58))

The names of the places of worship of the Bhūtas are – ālade (a complex of five or more bhūta shrines), garaḍi or garaḍi (shrines of Kōṭi Chennaya), māḍa (a shrine of a bhūta), koṭya (a shrine of a spirit), sāna or stāna (a place of worship of a deity or bhūta), kaḷa (a humble shrine of a bhūta), kaṭṭe (a raised platform where an annual offering to a bhūta may be offered [an alter]), manja (the place of worship of certain scheduled communities). The Bermer – related spirits are worshipped in ālade, brahma sthāna, garaḍi and kaḷa.

Bhūtas are worshipped in all the villages and village households throughout Tulunadu (excluding perhaps the Christian and the Muslim households). Bhūtas are treated like the members of the family. They are invoked – in happiness and sorrow; in good times as well as bad times. They are supposed to protect the family against diseases and illness of the members of the family and the cattle. Their blessings are sought in marriage, for prosperity in business, to provide protection while on travel, for good crop and success in legal matters etc. Bhūtas are supposed to punish those who defy them or those who forget to redeem their pledges that they had promised.

Psychoanalytically, therefore, these spirits have a cathartic function – they become the listing posts for the faithful. The spirits are purported to be listening to the ecstasy and agonies of their believers, suggesting solutions; and providing remedies to their woes. Thus, the believers unburden their emotional loads in front of the spirit impersonators during the bhūta festivals. Those who have faith in the efficacy of the spirit intervention, release their pent of energy when they interact with the spirits through the spirit mediums. This may perhaps provide some relief to their woes, so it seems.

In the spirit worship, we find a non – Vedic form of worship. The spirit worship constitutes, what is called as the 'Little Tradition' or an inner

wheel within the broad Hindu culture. The Hindu scriptures – Vedas, Upanishads, the epics - Ramayana and Mahabharata -- and the Puranas dominate the mainstream Indian culture; whereas, spirit worship dominates the Little Tradition. Though, traditionally, these two forms of worship have co-existed, they have, more or less, maintained separate identities.

IV

Singing of the Tulu folk narrative poems is the distinguishing feature of the spirit worship or spirit possession and these narrative songs are called pāḍḍana or pārdana. There appears to be some controversy regarding the terms to be used to describe these narrative poems: Should they be called pārdana or paḍḍana? Dr. Peter Claus strongly believes that the word, 'paḍḍana' is the correct terminology to describe these poems. The same view is held by Govind Pai, Dr. B. A. Saletore and Dr. Vivek Rai. Damodar Kalmady prefers to use the term, pārdana, in the book *Kōṭi Chennaya Pārdana Sampuṭa* which he has edited.

Manner uses the term 'paḍḍana' as is evident from the title of his book -- *Pāḍḍanoḷu*. However, Burnell seems to have used the term 'pārdano'. In the Preface to Burnell's book, R. C Temple gives a list of 28 Tulu incantations (folk narrative poems) as found in Burnell's manuscripts. Against some of these incantations, the word 'pārdano' has been suffixed, for example, incantation I. Jumādi pārdano. 3. Dēyi Baidedi pārdano. 4. Kōṭi Chennaya pārdano and 24. Magrandāya pārdano. The word 'sandi' is used against the incantations: No. 5 to 10

Therefore, in all probability, both these terms -- pāḍḍana and pārdana -- have been in use from antiquity. These are basically Tulu words; we cannot find these words in the Kannada dictionaries although the words, 'pāḍu' and 'pāḍ' (which mean, 'to sing') are found in the Kannada dictionaries, However, the words, paḍḍana or pārdana are not the same as pāḍu or pāḍ. Why these folk narratives are called paḍḍana or pārdana, we do not know yet.

Further, the paḍḍanas were originally composed and sung in the ritual context. Even now they have a kind of sanctity only in the context of the annual festivals of bhūtas and daivas. A paḍḍana is virtually an autobiography of a spirit – the accounts of his or hers birth, adventure, travels and finally the attainment bhūta – hood. Therefore, these narrative songs must have originated in the course of spirit worship. Who composed them and when they were composed, we do not know for sure. Once composed, they were preserved and handed over to the next generations by the professional, hereditary spirit or the bhūta performers – Paravas, Pambadas and Nalkes. If these beautiful narrative songs are still available, they are largely because of these bhūta artists.

Of course, paḍḍanas are sung on other contexts as well. While uprooting paddy saplings and transplanting them; while extracting juice from the palm trees or as a leisure time activity, these folk narratives are sung. However, such renderings are at best the extensions of paḍḍanas to the profane – away from the sacred. The people who constantly hear a paḍḍana, memorize it and sing it in the secular contexts like in the paddy fields or at home or while tapping toddy. Even the people who sing in the ritual context may, by extension, render it in the paddy fields or elsewhere as a source of entertainment to reduce monotony and fatigue. But the *raison d'être* for the existence of these Tulu narrative songs is the ritual context alone.

V

The earliest written materials available on Tulu folk narrative songs are the Burnell's manuscripts and the Manner's collection. Burnell died in 1882, according to Major R. C. Temple. Burnell was his friend and correspondent. During his life time, Burnell did not publish the materials in his possession. After his death, Temple took possession of his manuscripts in 1883 and published them in a series under the title, *The Devil Worship of the Tuluvas* in the *Journal of Oriental Research -- The Indian Antiquary*, between 1894 – 1897

As stated above (IV), Temple gives a list of 28 Tulu folk narrative songs, culled out from the Burnell's MSS. Manner published his work, *Pāḍḍanoḷu*, in 1886, in which he listed 20 such songs.

When we compare Burnell's serialized book vis –à – vis Manner's work, we can observe:

A

With respect to the following Tulu folk narrative songs, there is perfect tally (agreement) between the English translations of the Tulu folk narrative songs --pāḍḍanas -- as given by Burnell in his book, and the Tulu texts included by Manner in his collection.

1. The original folk narrative songs in the Kanarese characters -- Dēyibaidedi (Burnell 1894 : 22 --24); Koṭi Channaya (Burnell 1894 : 29 – 49 & 85- 91); and Panjurli II (Burnell 1894 : 20 – 21) -- had been collected and written down by Dr. Mögling (as stated by Temple), but these were not included in the published work of Burnell; only the translations of these texts were given. (The expression used by Temple is, 'translation according to Burnell' MS'. Who translated them, is not clear). However, these are the exact translations of the texts of the songs with the same names included in Manner's collection. (Manner 33 – 34; 34 – 52; 7 : 1886)

2. The original texts of the following folk narratives in the Kanarese characters -- Sarala Jumādi (Burnell 1894 : 183 – 186); Mudader (Kala Bhairava) (Burnell 1894 :186 – 190); and Attāvara Deyyonguḷu (Burnell 1894 : 190 - 193; 1895 : 113 – 114) -- were probably collected and documented by Burnell; but not included in Burnell's book. Only their translations were given. These translated versions and the texts appearing in Manner's collection in the same names are exactly similar. (Manner 8 -10; 27 – 30; 56 – 69:1886)

B

In the following cases, the Romanized Burnell's Tulu texts and Manner's texts in the Kanarese characters are identical:

1 Kalkuḍa: Original in the Kanarese characters; transliteration by Manner. (Burnell 1896 : 61 – 63). Manner published the same text. (Manner 13 – 18:1886)

2 Magrandāye: Burnell procured this from Pombada, Kānta at Mangalore, in February, 1874. (Burnell 1896 : 68 – 72). Manner published the same text. (Manner 11- 12:1886)

3. Kallurti: Original in the Kanarese characters; transliteration by Manner, translation from Burnell’s MSS, checked by Manner (Burnell 1896 : 216 – 227). Manner published the same text. (Manner 1886 : 13)

4. Bobbarya: Original in the Kanarese characters; transliteration by Manner, translation from Burnell’s MSS, checked by Manner. (Burnell 1896: 237 – 242. Manner published the same text. (1886 : 1 – 3)

Rev. A. Manner published his collection in 1886. There is one page Preface to this book; but it does not contain any information about the source or sources of these narrative songs. The Preface begins with the statement, ‘The following collection* of stories, belonging to the demon – worshippers of the Tulu country are those recited at their annual festivals...’

There is an asterisk mark and under this mark, at the end of the page, there is a sentence, ‘There are many stories of this kind, but we have selected only those few which we thought to be suitable for our purpose.’ (Manner, Preface : 1886)

Manner’s publication was not meant for public circulation. In the same Preface, he states, ‘...not with any intent to give wider publication to these stories that we have had them printed and have in hand a small number of copies for sale at cost-price to Missionaries and Mission workers only, strictly prohibiting the loan or sale of such under any circumstances whatever, to the heathen.’

From the above discussion, it is apparent that Manner had access to Dr. Mögling’s and Dr. A. C. Burnell’s works; he did transliterate some of the folk narrative songs collected by them. Since these works had remained as manuscripts and were not published then (1886), some of these narratives, along with his own collection, Manner published them to meet the needs of the Missionaries. Subsequently, Temple also published the same narratives – some in translations alone; and some, in the originals, with Manner’s transliterations.

I have spent some time to discuss the Mögling, Burnell, Temple and the Manner's legacy because this legacy stimulated further study on Tulu narratives; they laid the foundation for future studies in Tulu folklore.

VI

Translations entail problems. We need to realize that translating something to another language is not just substituting one set of words by another set.

A language is not just words and rules; it is the vehicle of culture. This is how anthropologists view language. A translator should have fair knowledge of the cultural roots in which a text is anchored; and he should have understanding of the sense and sensibilities that lie underneath the verbal expressions. Otherwise the translated version would be just flesh and bones, without any life. Or the translation may unintentionally distort the original text.

In the Dēyi Baidedi Pārdan included in Manner's collection, there is a statement (Manner : 33): 'yē! vorsodaga pātero batt'nd.'. This statement refers to Dēyi Baidedi when she was residing with her adopted uncle, Sāyana and his wife, Tāmi Baidedi (Tāmi Baidedi is also known as Sonne Sōmu). The meaning of the statement is: When she of a young age, a proposal came. The same sentence, however, was translated in Burnell's MSS, as stated by Temple, as: 'The women began to quarrel with each other.' (Burnell: 1894 : 22) Why this confusion has arisen? The Tulu word, pātero means 'speech' and battnd, means 'came'; therefore, the translator thought that it referred to fighting between women – Deyi and Tāmi Baidedi. The translator split a Tulu idiomatic expression into two separate words. Pātero battnd is an idiom which means 'a proposal came'; this expression is still used.

The same idiom is given a different interpretation at a slightly later stage in the same page. Dēyi was given in marriage to Payya Baidya. In her first pregnancy, she gave birth to a girl (Kinnidāru) and when this girl was of a young age, there was a proposal for her. The pārdana describes this as follows:

kaḍīr poṇṇu bāllen peddiyaḷ / pedd tāṅkd yēḷ varsodaga pātatero battṇḍ (Manner: 1886 : 33)

Translation in Burnell's MSS, as published by Temple, is: ...After the marriage she became pregnant, and brought forth for the first time a female child. In its seventh month, the child learnt to speak...'
(Burnell : 1894: 22) The sentence 'yēḷ varsodaga pātatero battṇḍ' the translator thought that it meant the development of speech in the girl!

The correct translation ought to be: 'In her first pregnancy, she gave birth to a baby girl / when they were taking her care, when she was of young age (or at the age of seven years, because the word yēḷ can be interpreted as seven or young age), a proposal came...'

I shall give one more example to illustrate how risky translation could be if you are not acquainted with the fine nuances of the language of the text.

After Dēyi treats the Ballāl of his ailment, he presents her gifts. In this context, he says:

'apaga paṇḍer nik yeṇṇē ōle, yasala buguḍi. muḷḷuda koppu, kuttina ravake, pacce kallda mūguti nikk āṇḍ.' (Manner 1886 : 34)

Translation in Burnell's book is as follows: To you I shall give oil, all kinds of ear ornaments, a silk gown, and a nose ornament set with emeralds. (Burnell 1884 : 24)

The actual translation should have been: I shall give you -- plain ear ornaments (yeṇṇē ōle = ear ornaments without much art work), ear ornaments resembling a flower, ear ornaments with petals to be worn on the top lobes of the ears, a silk blouse and a nose ornament set with emeralds.

The expression 'yeṇṇē ōle' is one term; the translator splits the term into two separate words -- yeṇṇē and ōle. In Tulu yeṇṇē or eṇṇē means oil and ōle means an ear ornament or a palm leaf letter; but 'yeṇṇē ōle' does not refer to oil.

Further, he interprets 'kuttina ravake' as silk gown. In Tulu, ravake is blouse; and kuttina is 'of silk'. The concept of 'gown' was alien to the rural population of Tulunadu in 1880's.

There are many such inaccuracies in Burnell's book, though quite unintentional. I hope to do a fresh translation of least the Koti Chennaya pāḍḍana from the Manner's collection, sometimes later.

VII

I have made a small contribution to the study of Tulu folklore by translating into English one of the Tulu epic narratives - Koti Chennaya Pāḍḍana. The title of the book is: 'Epic of the Warriors' and it has been published by the National Folklore Support Centre, Chennai.

In this work, I have Romanized the original Koti Chennaya Pāḍḍana text and reproduced it. I have given meanings of the words and translated the original text into free English verse. My work, perhaps, is the first of this kind.

Of course I had faced many hurdles. I did not know how to Romanize the Kannada characters. Prof. Peter Claus and Mr. S. A. Krishnaiah did the spade work.

As you realize, the Tulu folklores are not composed strictly in terms of in the subject – verb – predicate format. There are no punctuation marks; therefore, it is difficult at times, to find out when a sentence begins and when does it end.

There are dialogues; there are no inverted commas; therefore, it is often not clear as to who speaks to whom.

There are many Tulu expressions for which there are no exact English equivalences.

On the whole it has been a learning experience for me -- away from students, teaching, examinations, results and more importantly, free from staff room politics and rivalry.

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