

## **Legend of Koragajja: A Discourse on the Deconstruction of Spirit Worship of Tulunadu**

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The Social stratification in a community is often complex and ambiguous in nature. Upon the rise of each nation states and civilization, there were several parameters, which determined the social stratification. In ancient Greece, the word used to denote the divisions are *genos*. The ancient Greek society was divided into citizens, metics and slaves. In ancient Rome, the social stratification was identified with mainly two groups, Patricians and Plebeians. The chief resource for the social stratification parameters are economical in nature. Other factors such as tradition and beliefs are often can be said to have rooted in the wider economic subject. The term class is often associated with economics. There are usually hegemonial and subdued elements in social stratifications. In ancient Greece, the hegemonial element is found associated with the citizens, who are free and members of the assembly whereas slaves were the subdued element who were brought into slavery. In ancient Rome, the hegemonial element were the patricians whereas the plebeians were the subdued. These ideas can often be observed with Class struggle and historical materialism. The division of history into stages based on the relation of the classes is an important aspect of Historical materialism. In India, the main social stratification parameter is the caste. it could be claimed as ceremonial as well as economic in nature. BR Ambedkar observes Endogamy as a product of ceremonial caste. He also observes that caste is in fact an enclosed caste where there is no intervention of the outside world.

The pattern of caste system is diverse across India. The concept of hierarchy in the caste is different in every nook and corner of the country. These caste systems is often related to customs and rituals. Traditionally every caste is assigned with a caste profession that

are exclusive to them. The Dalit or the untouchable are often seen outside the caste system of India. The lower strata of the society was reserved for them. In Tulu nadu, the traditional Tulu speaking country in the south west coast of India is not an exception for this general rule. The Tulu nadu or the Tulu country are the geographical entity where the Tuluva People reside. Tulu is one of the Pancha Dravida Languages or the prominent five Dravidian Languages along with Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam. Tulu is spoken by 1.8 Million Tuluvas or Tuluver across Historical Tulunadu region. This Tulunadu region falls under the modern day Dakshina Kannada, Udupi Districts of Karnataka as well as Kasaragod District of Kerala. The historical expansion of Tulunadu was from the Kalyanapura River in the north to the Payaswini River in the south. Bordered by the Western Ghats and Arabian Sea, the region of Tulunadu was mentioned in the Sangam Tamil literature and in *Keralolpathi*. The region was long ruled by the Alupa Dynasty independently and later in subordination under the Kadamba dynasty of Banavasi, Rashtrakutas of Manyakheta, Chalukyas of Badami, Chalukyas of Kalyani, and Hoysalas of Dwarasamudra, This continued even after the conquest by the Vijayanagara Empire. Tuluva Dynasty of Vijayanagara Empire was rooted in Tulunadu. As the Alupa dynasty perished, native subordinate rulers became strong including Savantas of Mulki, Chowtas of Ullal, Chowtas of Moodabidri, Kings of Kumble, and Kings of vittla. After the decline of Vijayanagara Empire, the Nayaks of ikkeri started to control most parts of Tulunadu. Hyder Ali conquered Tulunadu during the Mysorean invasion. After the defeat of Tippu Sultan, the Tulu speaking region came under British rule. It eventually became a part of the Madras Province.

The Tuluva culture and language is very vibrant and diverse. It encompasses several traditions and lore that are unique and curious. The customs and tradition of the traditional Tulu country is rooted in the folk culture that may predate the civilization. The several traditions like *Daivaradhane*, *Kambala*, *Nagaradhane*, *Yakshagana* and *Aliyakattu* that marks the existence of the Tuluva folk culture. According to the veteran

Tulu Historian Dr. Gururaj Bhat, these five elements distinguish the Tulu people and its folk culture from the other populations. *Kambala* is the annual buffalo race conducted in the harvested field, *Nagaradhane* is a peculiar serpent worship including complex rituals and dances, *Yakshagana* is a dance drama that enacts the stories from Hindu mythology, *Aliyakattu* is the traditional matrilineal succession that can be associated with the Tuluva heritage. Among them, the important factor of the Tuluva folk culture is *Daivaradhane*. It is also known as Bootha Kola, Bootharadhane etc. These are the veneration of certain demi gods or deities with distinctive customs. These customs are often seen as complex and a survived essence of the folk culture in the modern world. The etymology of these deities are complex. The word *Daiva* should not be confused with the Sanskrit term *Deva* as both conveys an entirely different concept. During the reign of Kannada Dynasties over Tulunad, they tend to call these demi gods as *Bhootha*, which literally translates as demon. The worship of *Bootha* later became *Bhootharadhane*. During the British rule, the missionaries used to call these deities as Devil worship. AC Burnell records the events of *Daivaradhane* in journal named *The Devil dance of the Tuluvas*. These deities have a variety of origin. The custom of *Daivaradhane* itself is an amalgamation of various folk cultural elements. It consist elements of Ancestor worship, Shaivism, Hero worship, Vaishnavism, Shaktivism, Folk lore, Animal worship etc.

The *Daivas* of Tulunadu had different sources as they developed from different communities. Although the source may vary, the veneration of such deities does not confined into that community, but it exceeds the boundaries of caste norms. Tulunadu is an ethno linguistically diverse region. Although, Tulu and Tuluvas are considered as the native population, various ethno linguistic communities had formed through the course of time due to variety of causes like trade, invasions, fleeing etc. As the caste was attributed at birth, various communities in Tulunadu remained endogamous with a few exceptional cases may found in popular culture and history. The Caste system practiced

in Tulunadu was similar to Northern Kerala. In certain cases, there are mutually identifiable communities based on their profession. The Tulu speaking population are mainly divided among as Shivalli Brahmin, Jains, Bunts, Nadava, Billava, Mogyer, Pambada, Nalkdaye etc. These communities belongs to either one of the traditional Varna system or out of the Varna system. The other communities are from different ethno linguistic and religious backgrounds. Historian Dr P Guru Raj Bhat distinguish the Tuluva community into three strata. The Brahmins and Jains, the Nayar and Nadava, and the Billavas and Mogyers. Dr Bhat observes that these communities had exclusive roles in the Social and cultural activities of the region. The other communities were not neglected out. The Tulu speaking Brahmins were known as Shivalli Brahmins. They held the highest seat of the social order as the priestly class practicing strict endogamy. The Brahmins of Tulunadu does not confined to Shivalli Brahmins, but various other communities of Brahmins as well. The Marathi speaking Karada Brahmins, Konkani Speaking Gowda Saraswat Brahmins and Kannada Speaking Havyaka Brahmins also forms the highest strata of the society. These Foreign Brahmins had settled in Tulu Lands and flourished. The Jains are among the wealthiest communities of Tulunadu, who prospered through trade and commerce. Tulunadu was also under the rule of certain Jain Monarchs and Chieftains like Rani Abbakka of Ullal. Along with Brahmins, The Jains have enjoyed the high position in the social ladder of Tulunadu. The Nayars and Nadavas are the aristocrats of Tulunadu. They are also known as Bunts. The names for the community were recorded different in various periods. A section of Bunts also follows Jainism. Dr Bhat observes that Bunts, Nayars and Nadavas are various tags of the same community founded in Tulunadu as well as in Kerala. They were prominent and powerful throughout Tulunadu. The Guttu or the household of Bunts were the smallest unit of the political administration. They are a martial class as well as agriculturalist, who owned most of the land. The Bunt Landlord will lease these lands out to the other communities. The Mogyer and Billava are the largest among Tuluva Castes. The main occupation of Billavas was Distillation, just like

the Thiyyas of Malabar and Ezhavas of Travancore. Dr Bhat observes that Billava to be a generic term meaning hunters and they represents the hunting stage of the civilization. The Billava are also known by the names of Poojary or Baidya. Because, Billava are the oracles and priests to the Bhuta Deities. Mogyers are mainly tenant labourers and Fisherman and are considered as an Untouchable caste. Apart from these three strata, the other communities generally belongs to the lowest strata of the Tuluva society. These communities are mainly consist of castes like Pambada, Nalkedaye, and Koraga etc. These are the untouchable castes. They have a cultural significance in Tuluva society and culture as the Bhuta Impersonators. During the ritual of Bhuta Kola, the untouchable underwent through a Temporary social upgradation from a mortal to divine. They are the exclusive rights of the untouchables. The Konkani speaking communities are mainly Migrants from Konkani coast. They mainly consist of Communities like Gowda Saraswat Brahmins, Kudumbi, and Konkani Catholics etc. The Indigenous Muslim community of Tulunadu is known as Bearys. They are culturally, social and linguistically linked to the Mappila Community of Malabar. The Nawayaths or Konkani Muslims, Deccanics etc. are the other prominent Muslim communities of Tulunadu. The Bovi or Moya are the Fishermen who live along the coastal lines. They also occupied other positions such as Palanquin bearers of the local chieftains. Moya speak Moya Malayala, a variant of Malayalam spoken in Kasaragod region. The Belchada, also known as Malayali Billava are recognized with the same status as of the Billava community, Their Primary Occupation is Toddy Tapping. The social stratification of Tulunadu was developed and accustomed with the social, political and cultural landscape of the region. The Daivas like *Bobbariya* is from Muslim background and such Daivas are widely known as Beary Daivas. *Bobbariya* is worshipped by the fishermen community along the coast. *Kotti- Chennayya* are the twin warrior Daivas from Billava Community. Similarly *Kalkudan – Kallurutti*, the brother-sister Daivas were mainly venerated by the Smiths of Tulu country.

Koragas are a tribal group founded in Dakshina Kannada, Udupi districts of Karnataka and Kasaragod District of Kerala. They were considered as a primitive tribe. Although they are open to the civilization and outsiders, their status and standard of living is same for the past hundreds of years. Among the Tulu caste structure, Koragas are the most marginalized community. The othering of Koragas are not only confined to social structure, but in all the aspects of Tuluva life. One instances that can indicate is the *Agilu* Practice. During the Annual *Kambala* Buffalo race in Kadri, Mangalore. Koragas used to run through the *Kambala* fields like Buffaloes. It was customary. They were later treated with *Agilu*, Food mixed with hair and nails. The Devotional sphere of Tulunadu treat Koragas from a different perspective in where they worshipping a Koraga figure. *Koragajja* or *Koragathaniya* is a popular *Daiva* throughout the Tulu speaking lands. The Veneration of *Koragajja* is peculiar when compared to many other *Daivas* with equivalent importance. The *Paddanas* or Tulu oral tales binds the past of the Tulu land with the present. They are the customary folk songs sung during the *Kola* ritual of the *Daiva*. *Kola* is the ritualistic impersonation of the *Daivas*.it is not necessary that all *Daivas* to have a *Kola* which is impersonated by one of the Dalit communities. There are different ritual in Tulunadu regarding *Daivaradhane* like *Nema*, *Bandi Nema*, *jatre*, *maima*, *othekola*, *pandalbali*, *mechi*, *jalatta* etc. These are the different varieties of traditions and customs found in Tulu folk heritage. The *Paddanas* describes the origin of the *Daiva*, their life, instances, and their demise. The Tulu folk culture was survived through these *Paddanas*. The cultural history of the land was recorded and passed on to generations. During these pass down, the core story developed several variations. This resulted in the not one story of a *Daiva*, but several versions of the stories about the *Daiva*.

*Koragajja* occupies a special status in the Tulu folklore as the celebration of the marginalized. The *Kola* of *Koragajja* itself is symbolising its origin and status as a representation of the subdued sections of the Tulu society. Different from the *Kolas* of other *Daivas*, they *Kola* of *Koragajja* is unique in several aspects. These aspects indicates

that how Tulu Folk tradition had successful in distinguishing the social stratification elements. The Other *Kolas* uses bright colours like red and orange for face and body adoration with other accessories during the makeup. For example, the Daivas like *Vishnumoorthy*, *Jumadi* etc. have an elaborate costume with vibrant colours and Divine Paraphernalia. The *Kola* of *Koragajja* is simple with a Black colour for face and body adoration. There is no much further divine paraphernalia associated with *Koragajja Kola* except the dress made up of tender coconut palm leaves and jasmine garlands. The Colour back do indicate the social stature of Koraga in the Tulu Society. The Setup of the *Kola* also indicate this factor. There should not be any light during the *Kola* ritual. Moon light was seen as apt for the ritual to take place. The *Paddanas* of *Koragajja* had survived through the centuries. There are different versions of *Paddanas* about *Koragajja* and his origin. These versions are different in several aspects regarding the origin element and other minor life instances. Scholar C Raghavan analyses and present a vague structure and story line of these different versions. He observes that although there are several elements that differ in all these versions, there are big chunks of core ideas or common contexts in all these versions. He was born to *Korapalasanियaru* and *Kuravankodi* in Jeppu, near Mangalore. *Koragajja* or *Koragathaniya* was orphaned at an early age by the demise of his parents. He was engaged in the caste profession of basket and drum making. According to the *Paddanas*, he left his home or *Koppam*, and walked further north. During his journey he have said to performed many miracles like turning sand grains into rice. He met a Billava women named *Bairakkabaidethi* who herself was with her two children and a pot of toddy while travelling from Kadiri to Bediri. She enquired *Koragajja* about himself and came to know that he was an orphan and belongs to her *Illam*. *Illam* was specific way of tracing lineage irrespective of the caste. It is possible that two individuals could possibly belongs to the same lineage even though they belong to different castes. This shows that, humans do have a common origin irrespective of different social stratification parameters. *Bairakkabaidethi* had accepted *Koragathaniya* as her adopted son and received him at Enasoor, her ancestral home.

Fortune had glistened upon the Enasoor ancestral home after the arrival of *Koragathaniya*. *Bairakka* loved him as her own son. She build a new hut for him. *Koragathaniya* then engages in his caste profession. There are lot of versions about *Koragathaniya*. In some versions, his father is *Vayaranthaodiya* and mother is *Kadinalumaire*. During the *Nema* of *Daivas* like *Mada Maisanthaya*, *Kunjikodangannara* and *Padavu Lakeshwari* at Enasoor, *Koragathaniya* was chosen to carry the load of supplies. He informed that once if he is gone, there will not be a return. He also informed *Bairakka* that, once he was offered with the rice for seven, toddy for seven, curry of seven chickens and betel leaves for seven he will go with the supplies. She agrees and *Koragathaniya* departed with the load of supplies. He climbed an arecanut, jumped seventy arecanut trees and seventy coconut palms in order to reach his destination. When the officials of the *Nema* saw him coming, they asked him to unload the supplies right there itself and move away. As a Koraga, he might pollute the sacred grounds. *Koragathaniya* questions them by asking that although they could accept what all he brings but why cannot they allow him to near. This question poses a strong protest against the rigid caste system followed in the Indian society particularly among the Tulu society. The Tulu folk culture and its tradition had always questioned the hegemonial hierarchical order of the society through *Koragathaniya*. The *Paddanas* along with their metaphorical narrative styles had construct a defence status against the hegemonial hierarchies. In some versions, it was the Kadiri temple near Mangalore, where *Koragajja* went to deliver the load of supplies. In this version also, he demands the food for seven IN return for his service. At Kadiri Temple, he saw a Pomegranate tree that was leaning against the sanctum sanctorum of the shrine. He climbs the tree but suddenly disappears. This offers a strong chance for interpretation on the backdrop of the harsh caste system prevailed right back then. The Untouchables, especially Koragas were not allowed inside the Temples as it was in many other part of the Country. It also able to read that *Koragathaniya* may fallen for the prey of Caste system. The *Paddanas* uses Disappearance as an indirect method of narrating the demise of the marginalized hero.

The concept of *Koragajja* was peculiar with in the Tulu Folk culture as it was a question of caste system and status of survival among the downtrodden societies. *Koragajja* and *Koragathaniya* becomes a topic for debate as the term *Koragajja* indicating a Grandfather character. There are colloquial usage of *Ajja* for *Koragajja*. The Tulu/Kannada word *Ajja* stands for Grandfather. The recent representations of *Koragajja* depicting him as an old man. *Koragathaniya* was disappeared at a young age. This contradicts the fact of describing the *Daiva* as *Koragajja*. Some scholars observes the fusion of two *Daivas* into one cult. The Cult of a *Daiva* known as *Neecha* was popular in northern parts where he was described as an older person. This cult can be identified with *Koragathaniya* cult prevalent in Southern Tulu country. These two cults may have merged to form the *Koragajja* or *Koragathaniya* Cult. Whatever the social origin of the *Koragajja* cult maybe, it indicates the importance of questioning caste hegemonial hierarchies in the Tulu folk history. Now a day, the cult of *Koragajja* is widely popular throughout Tulu population as well as some adjacent Malayalam Speaking populations practicing Theyyam. The cult breaches the caste boundaries, even the elitist castes holds *Nema* on behalf of *Koragajja*. Ironically, the origin and status of *Koragajja* was never discussed or spoken. From the critical aspect, it is necessary to observe that the cult and the social stature of the Koraga Tribe today. Despite the tremendous efforts by the BMS Missionaries and figures like swami Anadatheertha, the Koraga Community is dwells in lower strata of the Tulu society. The representation of Koraga in the Tulu folk culture is becoming a paradox when comparing the social status of the community.

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