

# Mayandal as succor of distressed Women

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*Paddanas* are a distinct form of Tulu folk literature. They are a repertoire of oral records depicting in detail the beliefs, practices, thoughts, customs and manners, rules and regulations, worships, wars, sports, occupation, economy, polity, judiciary, caste and kinship structure, gender relationships, etc of Tulunadu.<sup>1</sup> *Paddanas* are a representative of the multifarious aspects of Tulunadu. They draw our attention towards the exploitation meted out to the lower sections in society, and thereby lend voice to the otherwise voiceless groups. They provide instances of suppressing the rebellious articulation among such people.<sup>2</sup>

Being an intrinsic part of the *bhuta* and *daiva* worship in Tulunadu, *paddanas* express the uneasiness of downtrodden communities in such religious platforms. They draw heroes and villains from various communities, and translate their bravery, sacrifice and deception into poetic forms. They offer as a suitable stage for the hitherto sidelined groups to express their fight against exploitation and the need to succeed in such dissensions.<sup>3</sup> At least in the intermediary world of *daivas* and spirits, the exploited groups are provided an opportunity to rebel against hierarchized systems of power. They offer interesting insights into the communities that exert authority and disregard others for generations.

*Paddanas*, like any other oral tradition, interwine illusion into the realm of reality. By bringing the illusory creations into the fold of belief and day-to-day lives, *paddanas* convert anecdotes into authentic accounts. The worship practices are lent a wider interpretation through the contemporary concerns and historical modes of *paddanas*.<sup>4</sup>

*Paddanas* undoubtedly and undisguisedly are folk antiquities. They offer a realistic portrayal of the lives carried out for centuries since pre-feudalistic times.<sup>5</sup> While Koti Chennaya *paddana* is a depiction of the twin heroes' combat against feudal lords, Siri *paddana* delineates the struggles of a female from matrilineal system for women empowerment. If, an informed hero from subaltern caste Koddabbu is an example for the tragic succumbing to the dominant caste trickeries, the tragedy of Koraga Taniya also follows the same pattern. The

<sup>1</sup> Peter. Claus & Frank J. Korum., *Folkloristic and Indian Folklore*, Udupi, 1989, pp.19

<sup>2</sup> Peter. Claus., (original) *Tuluva Darshana*, translated by A.V. Navada and Subhaschandra, Kundapura, 1987, pp.161.

<sup>3</sup> Surendra Rao, B., *Bunts in History and Culture*, Udupi, 2010, pp. 117-118

<sup>4</sup> Peter. Claus., (original) *Tuluva Darshana*, translated by A.V. Navada and Subhaschandra, Kundapura, 1987, pp.161.

<sup>5</sup> Amrutha Someshwara., *Tuluva Baduku*, Kotekar, 1984, pp.3.

amputated body of Kalkuda – despite engraving the marvelous Gommata statue enhancing the King's prestige – also offers a heart wrenching picture elsewhere. *Paddanas* around Madanaga, Mukambijevu, ParatiMangane and so on express the sexual exploitation of women from different strata of society. In all, *paddanas* are a representation of the exaltation of struggling lives into deity figures.<sup>6</sup> We could observe that the women-centered *paddanas* are generally tragic in nature.<sup>7</sup> Some examples of such tragic verses are Honnamma Jevu *paddana*, ParatiMangane *paddana*, Mattadiballu, Bale Chandramu, Jattodi Pergade, and so on.

*Paddanas* are a very significant oral source in reconstructing the history of Tulunadu. They assist in producing a people's history by portraying the inequalities, exploitations and feudal system existing in the society.<sup>8</sup> As the traditional history is predominantly based on written sources it largely concentrates on the literate, powerful, ruling and affluent people's lives and deeds. Since the inscriptions are, especially, written at the behest of the authoritarian rulers they merely describe the rulers' grandeur and wars; heralding their charity works; honoring the brave who sacrificed their lives; etc.

The voice of revolt expressed in *paddanas* could be categorized into two kinds. One is that of a direct confrontation as portrayed in Siri sandi, Koti Chennaya *paddana* and Kalkuda Kallurti *paddana*. Apart from these, many other *paddanas*, *Kabita*, folk games, proverbs and riddles, dances record a silent revolt against the social and political systems of exploitation. To cite an example, the 'Tiger and Cow game' played in villages is a mockery of systemic authority. The 'Crow-Parrot game' generally played by girls also conveys the same message.

The substitute terms of *paddana* and *sandi* incorporate features of folk poetic stories, they are related to *bhutaradhane* narrating the history of *bhutas*. This corpus of literature is identified as mythology of Tulunadu or as poetic stories of *bhutas*. They are sung during the staged event of *bhutaradhane* by the performers and his related people. During elaborate make-up for *bhutaradhane* and while embodying the divine spirit, the *bhuta* performer sings portions from *bhutas* birth, its brave deeds, miracles, etc. in the presence of audience, they attractively sing these portions attuned by the drum of *Tembare*.<sup>9</sup>

Fighting against injustice is the main theme of this *paddanas* as well. In the real world there is a lot of *injustice*. The culprits often escape. There is no rational relationship between the efforts of the people and their rewards. The wicked prosper and the virtuous suffer. The weak are exploited by the powerful. The working classes are often exploited. For the sake of fulfilling the ambitions of the moneyed or influential people the interests of the common people are often sacrificed. The popular mind cope with this by getting into the world of supernatural

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> Navada.A.V., *Tulu Poli, Mangalore*, 2013, pp. 47.

<sup>8</sup> *Paddanas* are not created at the behest of power or as agents of sovereignty. They emerge in the rural milieu, especially from the vast experience of the agricultural life of village people.

<sup>9</sup> Chinnappa Gowda, *Bhutaradhane; Janapadiya Adhyayana*, Madipu Prakashana, Mangala Gangotri, 1990. pp.173

narratives which is ideal and where *justice* rules. The characters of supernatural world often interact with people in the real world and apparently rectify the situation brought about by accidents, actions or misdeeds of the real world. The border between the real world and the supernatural world is very thin. Infact the supernatural world is not conceived as supernatural. It is just the extension of the real world.

**Mayandal Paddana** revolves around a woman called Mani bale or Mayandal and also shows the different dimensions of clash and stringent attitude between two dominant castes.<sup>10</sup> That does not mean that these caste groups were always engaged in feuds. It indicates the challenges laid to Bunt *guttu* who evolved their existence and authority through social leadership and land ownership.<sup>11</sup> This story is interesting also because it gives us an idea of the society which existed a few centuries ago, and exists even today. The social customs, ritual practices, belief systems, the close affinity among the members of the same community and at the same time the ill-feelings, rivalries, the demand for retributive justice are presented before us quite graphically.

The worship of Mayandal or Manibale is a very unique tradition in Tulunadu as she is a deity meant to oversee well-being during child delivery. Emotions attached around childbirth are ecumenical. It is a touching situation, concerning all women. They identify their condition with that of Mayandal. Attendant agony, ecstasy and perils of pregnancy, make them to look up at Mayandal as succor in their distress. In a matrilineal family structure, when men dishonor their role and responsibility, it is the women of the family (sister and daughter-in-law or nephew) who become the most common victim.<sup>12</sup> It also elaborates that it is women who take revenge against any injustices meted out against their brother or maternal uncle after attaining deified status in the world of *maya*. According to the laid cultural norms, worshipping gods of the house, family and village is of paramount importance. When a man of the family trespasses rules and responsibilities, these deities could punish for their irresponsibility. This sentence is generally aimed at womenfolk of the family who sustain its internal spirit, and thus lead to the destruction of a lineage.<sup>13</sup>

According to the *Mayandal paddana*, the landlord of Pangala Gudde Bunt Pangolla Bannara had a dream in which *Malai Jumadi* asked for ceremonial ritual offering or *Balinema*, which was also confirmed by the soothsayer or family priest.<sup>14</sup> Pangolla Bannara makes all arrangements for *Malai Jumadi Balinema* in his manor house. He ordered village people to get coconut tree tender leaf or *Siri* and tender coconut (*siri -siyala*) for *Balinema* as per the demand by *bhuta*<sup>15</sup>. It is also customary to donate arecanut flower or *pingara* on such

<sup>10</sup> Peter. J. Claus., *op.cit.*, pp. 41-93.

<sup>11</sup> Surendra Rao.B., *op.cit.*, 135-136.

<sup>12</sup> There is an inter relationship between the male, female and the *daivas* in the conceptual world of the Tuluvas. All the three have certain responsibilities. The men and the *daivas* protect the women of the family from the worldly and unworldly evils. It is believed as long as the men abide by these cultural mores, the women are secure.

<sup>13</sup> Gayathri Navada., *Karavali Janapada Sahithyadalli Strivadi Nelegalu*, Udupi, 1999, pp. 44-46.

<sup>14</sup> Peter. J. Claus., *op.cit.*, pp. 55.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 61.

occasions. But this instruction of Bannara was refused and ridiculed by a young Billava man by name Alivoli Nayaka, thereby ignoring the cultural regulations.

Alivoli Nayaka refuses to give and haughtily conveys his intention by uttering, '*for one tender coconut leaf and siri, I will send one kayarda kayi (nut of strychnine tree) and mundevuda oli'* (thorny leaf of a screw pine tree). When Pangolla Bannara could not control the protest of Alivoli Nayaka, he complains against him to *daiva* Jumadi. Receiving Bannara's verbal complaint, Jumadi appears in his courtyard and gradually transforms into a tool of Bannara's authority.<sup>16</sup> It assumes the responsibility to accord ethicality to feudal hierarchy, and control the rebelling forces within. Even Jumadi *daiva's* act was in favour of the affluent here. Alivoli Nayaka's refusal to conform with cultural norms resulted in his sister Manibale paying the price.

From the ritual arena, *daiva* Jumadi arrives at Alivoli Nayaka's house disguised as Pangolla Bannara. It asks for burning cinder or charcoal from Manibale who had delivered a child just three days ago. She entreats that she cannot come out as she is in confinement having given birth to a baby and is under puerperal (*it is period of about six weeks after childbirth during which the mother's reproductive organs return to their original non-pregnant condition*) treatment under the care of her household elders and midwives. She suggests waking up any one of them but deity commands not to do so but herself come out to give the cinder. The deity spreads a spell, sending her household to deep sleep. As soon as she steps over the door-step to give, Jumadi abducts her into spiritual realm of divine power or *maya*. Manibale wants her baby too, so both get *maya* form. When Manibale gave charcoal to him, Jumadi disappeared along with Manibale and her child.<sup>17</sup>

As soon as Manibale attained deified status in the divine world, she turned out to be a powerful goddess to protect her brother and punish Pangolla Bannara. When Alivoli Nayaka realized that his protest and cultural breach resulted in the mysterious death of his sister, he went back to Pangolla Bannara with tender coconut leaves, and requested him to forgive. But arrogant Bannara rejected his request. Looking at the pathetic condition of her brother, Manibale took a vow to punish Pangolla Bannara and inflict him the same pain of separation from his loved ones. By taking away a lactating mother Duggame who was Bannara's niece to the world of *maya* Manibale tries to punish Pangolla Bannara.<sup>18</sup>

When Manibale became victim of Bannara's cruelty for mere tender coconut leaves and tender coconut, she also eventually becomes a powerful force whom Bannara comes to worship. This is a victory or justice she

<sup>16</sup> Gayathri Navada., *op.cit.*, pp. 44-46.

<sup>17</sup> Peter J. Claus., *op.cit.*, pp. 76.

<sup>18</sup> Gayathri Navada., *op.cit.*, pp. 84.

attained after her entering into in to the realm of *maya*. It is important to observe that Manibale is established as force to question and control Bannara's social, political dominance.<sup>19</sup>

Mayandal *paddana* is surrounded by complex and stringent diversions as many other *paddanas*. Formal existence of *Malai Jumadi* and establishing worship conducted by Bannara indicates the establishment of new *guttu*. According to Surendra Rao, Pangolla Bannara tried to get villagers' acceptance through ensuring the existence of *Malai Jumadi*.<sup>20</sup> Alivoli's rejection to give symbolic gifts to the new God, turns out to be his mistake. It could also be the result of spoilt relationship between Alivoli Nayaka and Pangolla Bannara, or like Bannara, Alivoli Nayaka could have also be a landlord of big stature.<sup>21</sup> Because rather than directly taking any action against Alivoli Nayaka, Bannara complains to *Jumadi daiva*. Probably Pangolla Bannara didnot have much strength to oppose the Billava leader.<sup>22</sup>

With the help of *Jumadi daiva*, Pangolla Bannara tried to take revenge against Alivoli Nayaka. This shows the hierarchical tendency in gods and their favour towards upper caste rich people. However, it is not appropriate to generalize it as well.<sup>23</sup> The same *Jumadi daiva* did not intervene when the newly inducted goddess Manibale tried to take revenge by abducting Bannara's niece. It raises the simple question of – Why is it that *Jumadi daiva*, who was used as an instrument to take revenge for Bannara, remained silent in the case of Duggame?. So in her existence as an inhabitant of the world of *maya* or illusion Manibale interacts, for instance, with the high caste woman in the real world and punishes them for their unjustified haughtiness. But interestingly in the world of *maya* also, the laws of justice donot seem to operate differently. Manibale as Mayandal punishes Pangolla Bannara, who got Alivoli Nayaka punished through *Jumadi* by getting Bannara's niece transported in to the world of *maya*, by getting Bannara's niece drowned in the pond. Someone else has to pay for the wrong of Pangolla Bannara, here his niece.

Thus, *paddanas* are essentially narrative and supernatural. But in addition to the supernatural elements, they have the features of a story; for instance, a plot which is made up of several incidents which have an organic relationship between them. At the centre of the plot is a conflict or several conflicts which get complicated in the course of its development but ultimately get resolved, temporarily or permanently. Ultimately we look forward to *justice* by way of punishment for the wicked or the establishment of righteous people at the proper position of responsibility. In a folk legend we may even see the deification of the victim of injustice in the work-

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 46.

<sup>20</sup> Surendra Rao, B., *op.cit.*, pp. 135-136.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 136.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

a-day world as a deity to be worshipped eventually. Behind this simplistic overtone there are hard facts and tragic implications. It seems as if the legends are a defense mechanism developed in the folk consciousness in order to deal with the harsh realities of the world.

In a folk narrative there is generally a hero or a heroine, who vanishes and is transported to the world of *Maya* or illusion. He or she continues to exist, though not in flesh and blood, but in spirit. Apparently he or she gains the ability to communicate with others who have been transported to the world of this illusion or *Maya* and they retain their powers to communicate with living people, often by manifesting themselves in their body. This is slightly at variance with the other belief that the souls of the dead are born again. They may undergo cycles of births and rebirths. In the folk tradition, as narrated in the above story, the individuals do not die but disappear and exist no longer in flesh and blood, *bhutas* in spirit. In the world of illusion or *Maya* a different dispensation is expected, if not experienced. The very victim of injustice in the real world becomes the dispenser of justice in the world of illusion or *Maya*. He or she punishes oppressors responsible for the disappearance and transportation into the world of illusion. Infact, this expression of disappearing and getting transported into the world of illusion is a euphemism for getting sacrificed, killed or persecuted.

In this way, folk literature sends across many symbolic messages. It works outside the traditional structure of power. It could not only question the whole idea of cultural centralization, but could also build its own power structure. *Paddanas* not only explain about exploitation of people under feudalism but also express its anger and dissatisfaction against such exploitations. They elucidate the struggles of working class against the affluent upper strata. They are a treatise to understand how justice denied in the human life is acquired in the non-human realm, if not in *joga*, it is attained in the world of *maya*.



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