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# Ritualistic World of Tuluva: a study of Tuluva Women and the Siri Possession Cult

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## Abstract

The paper could roughly be divided into two sections: first provides a brief outline of Bhūtārādhane or the ritual-performance traditions of the Tulu-speaking region in the coastal region of Karnataka. Second offers an insight into the mass possession cult of Siri, which like the other rituals of Bhūtārādhane derive their referential script from the oral tradition of the land. Connected intricately with the Siri epic or *pāḍḍana*, Siri rituals are performed annually in many places of the coastal region of Karnataka. During these rituals thousands of ‘afflicted’ women gather and get ‘possessed’ by the pantheon of Siri spirits. This paper is an attempt to delve into the emancipatory potential that this platform could offer women who participate every year, first as novices and then as adepts.

[**Key words:** Tulu, culture, ritual-performance, oral tradition, women, possession cult, emancipation]

## Introduction

Tuḷunāḍu, or the land of Tuḷuvas<sup>1</sup> roughly located in the Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts of coastal Karnataka (Figure 1), has been a land of distinct cultures fostering year-long rituals woven around the indigenous belief-system; matrilineal family system; a rich repertoire of oral tradition; linguistically diverse<sup>2</sup> communities; popular performance arts like Yakshagāna<sup>3</sup>; active theatre and film industry, etc.

Tulu, one of the earliest off shoots of the South Dravidian languages, developed as an independent language since about 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.<sup>4</sup> The pre-colonial literature in Tulu has been predominantly oral, and it is this vast vista of remarkably sophisticated oral tradition – *pāḍḍana* and *sandi* (oral epics narrating the legends of the local spirits, *būtas* and *daivas*<sup>5</sup>), *kaḍita* or *obeḷe* (lively shorter poetry sung in the agricultural fields), etc – bequeathed by this land for centuries that has come to occupy prominence in the folk culture of the world.<sup>6</sup> Apart from the vast corpus of folk literature available, the socio-religious fabric of a large section of the Tuḷuvas include: worship of spirit/local deities which is roughly and perhaps more wrongly<sup>7</sup> translated as

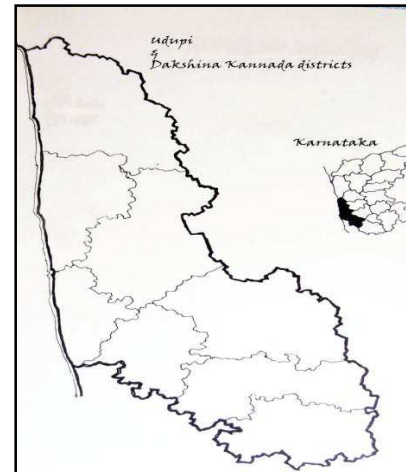


Fig 1: Tuḷunāḍu or Tulu-speaking area  
PC: Navada, G (1999)



*bhūtārādhane*<sup>8</sup>; possession cults like *siri ālaḍe/jātre*;<sup>9</sup> ritual practices associated with local deities like *nāgamaṇḍala*,<sup>10</sup> *dakke bali*,<sup>11</sup> *nēma*, *kōla*<sup>12</sup> etc.; matrilineal system of society, favouring the inheritance and succession of family property by the sister's son through a system called *aliya santāna kaṭ* and so on makes it a region with some distinct cultural features, also sharing with some of the similar practices found in the Kerala region.

### ***Bhūtārādhane***

As this paper is an attempt to discuss in detail the mass possession cult of *Siri* in Tuḷunāḍu, it would be appropriate to dwell a little on the ritual tradition associated with the local deities of this region. The different ritual-performance traditions are an intrinsic part of the 'religious' world of many castes like *bunṭa/nāḍava*, *billava*, *mogēra*, *parava*, *pambada* and *nalke*. Organized generally by the *bunṭa* or *billava* caste, and carried out/impersonated by castes 'low' in the hierarchy like *nalke*, *parava* and *pambada*, 'high' caste Brahmins' participation in these rituals is minimal. Apart from *nāgarādhane* (serpent worship) which is found extensively through different rituals (*sarpākalam*, *sarpa tullāl*, *nāgamaṇḍala* and *dakke bali*) the most striking feature of the worship-system of Tuḷuvas is *bhūtārādhane* or the worship of a large pantheon of local gods, ancestral spirits, and semi-deities. It runs parallel or, we could say is more prevalent than the worship of vedic gods and goddesses mediated by Brahmin priests.<sup>13</sup> *būta* worship includes the worship of localized and personalised (also hierarchized) semi-deities or ancestral spirits like *Bobbarāya*, *Kōṭi-Chennayya*, *Panjurli*, *Kallaḍa-Kallurṭi*, *Jumādi*, *Māyaṇḍala*, *Mula Mysonḍāya*, *Pili Chāmundi*, to name only few (Figure 2). These spirits have fixed spheres of influence and are generally associated with a family or village or region. The devotees offer them periodic oblation by arranging annual ceremonies of great pomp and festivity like *nēma*, *kōla*, *bali*, *tambila*, etc. at household and at village levels. In turn, the spirits protect the families, villagers and their livestock from danger, and warn them whenever it is necessary. The chief



Fig 2: Panjurli Būta being worshipped in the ritual

aspects that get enacted on the ritualistic stage of *būta* worship are possession, trance, performance of the self-hypnotized *būta* impersonator, and his dialogue with the members of the respective family or village regarding their worries, problems and ways to resolve their physical, material related issues. The *būta* impersonator also enacts as the medium of folk judicial system. These night-long rituals are a means of ensuring an escape from the wrath of



afflicting spirits (termed *upadra* in Tulu). The aura that is predominantly surrounding these *būtas* is that of fearful reverence. Most of the worries befalling the family or village are considered to be the result of a lacuna on the part of the members in giving due offerings, and their failure to appease the personalized deity through annual rituals.

Besides being a pronounced 'religious' phenomenon, *bhūtārādhane* intricately involves more social dimensions to it. The annual rituals arranged around these personalized *būtas* is primarily a binding force as every member of the family or village is obligated to partake in it. The otherwise scattered families – especially in the present times with extensive migration into larger cities like Bangalore, Mumbai and Gulf countries – gather particularly during the ritual, failing which they believe to be inflicted with worries. One striking feature of these rituals is also that the *būta* impersonator, who is a medium between the deity/spirit and the community members, is invariably from the 'lower' castes like *nalke* and *parava*. The impersonated *būta* wears make up, consecrated clothing, sings the respective deity's *pāḍana* and dances to the rhythm of background music throughout the night. These rites have continued from generation to generation, and the artists, the managerial and other personnel associated with this tradition have always worked towards maintaining the ritualistic norms and patterns.<sup>14</sup>



Fig 3: A man impersonating the Kallurṭi *būta*

The reversal of societal hierarchy that takes place during the ritual night – otherwise 'lower' caste person assuming the status of a dictating deity – could be, with all the disagreements it can generate and the complexities it involves, seen as a platform to seek a temporal liberation from the caste-ridden hierarchies. It opens the possibilities of a hitherto marginalized individual from the 'lower' strata becoming important in the intermediary world of worship, an otherwise untouchable becoming touchable and acquiring the reigns of voice and power. "Bhuta is a complex ideology. It is a mystery. But there is a message behind masks of bhutas... (it) signifies the fight against injustice and exploitation in society. It is a fight against denial of social justice by upper class to the suppressed class of society. The different actions of the bhuta impersonator in the performance-situation like exaggerated shouts, swallowing fire, wounding himself with sword, walking on a heap of embers signify impatience against injustice and exploitation" says Prof. K. Chinnappa Gowda,<sup>15</sup> a senior researcher on Tulu folklore and *būta* worship.



Nevertheless, the role of women in these rituals is that of a logistics-provider alone. The female spirits/deities like *Kallurṭi*, *Ullālti* are also impersonated by the professional male members of a caste (*Figure 3*). Female members of the *būta* impersonator's family sing *pāḍdana* during the elaborate make-up and costume preparation of the impersonator prior to the ritual-theatrical performance, thereby creating an atmosphere for the ensuing performance and possession. The rituals are headed by male member of the family or village who also get possessed in the course of the ritual, albeit for a short while, and women assume the secondary role of assisting the entire process.

Finally, "It has to be borne in mind that *Bhuta* worship is not a theatre form, meant only for entertainment. As a composite 'system,' it has functioned as an instrument of establishing a close balance associated with the social, political and judicial systems of Tulunaadu. The dynamics of the social and political systems of Tulunaadu are reflected in the dynamics of *Bhuta* worship. The changes in the details of *Bhuta* worship and in the materials used therein have always responded to the social compulsions." (Gowda 2005: 22)

### The Siri Cult

The lengthy narratives of *Siri* and *Kōṭi-Chennayya* are considered to be the two prominent oral epics or *pāḍdana* of Tulunāḍu by many scholars. The different available *pāḍdana* form a vast mythological and poetic corpus, constituting a chief element of the cultural identity of the region. These orally transmitted narrative corpuses also traverse from the mythic tradition to the different ritual contexts mentioned in the above section on *bhūtārādhane*. The legend of *Kōṭi-Chennayya* is sung in the traditional *garaḍis* (martial arts cum worship centres), and the legendary twin-brothers have also been included in the pantheon of the spirits/semi-deities creating the cult of *Kōṭi-Chennayya*.



Fig 4: The 'possessed' Siris

The *Siri pāḍdana* sung primarily by women in the fields during paddy transplantation is considered to be a major epic in Tulu. It is the story of three generations of women – Siri, her daughter Sonne, and twin granddaughters Abbaga and Daraga, and the tragedies that befall them. Like the epic of *Kōṭi-Chennayya*, what is prominent is the translation of *Siri* text from the mythical to the ritual context of *Siri jātre* or *Siri ālaḍe*,<sup>16</sup> and the deification of these women as spirits or semi-deities. For the matrilineal society of Tuluvās, Siri occupies a very special position as she is regarded as their founder from whom the matrilineal descent is traced. A synopsis of the major episodes bringing out the most relevant themes to account for the distinctiveness of the *Siri* cult and its 'religious' activities is provided in the Annexure.



The *Siri* festivals take place annually on the full moon night during the months of March-April-May primarily in 15 to 20 locations, called as *ālaḍe* in the Tulu speaking areas (*Figure 4*). During these rituals, thousands of women gather in the temple premises, sing the *Siri* epic, get possessed by different spirits of the *Siri* category, and thus get transferred into the mythical world of *Siri* as spirits. These apotheosized humans are said to be seven in number – *Siri*, *Sonne*, *Ginde*, *Abbaga*, *Daraga*, *Daaru* and *Kumara* (referential script for this is the *Siri* myth outlined in the *Annexure*). These annual ceremonies are considered to be the places of ‘spirit investigation’<sup>17</sup> as the participant women are brought to the festivals because they are said to have been ‘troubled’ (*upadra* in Tulu) by spirit possession. The ritual performance is regarded as curative healing the women of ‘abnormal’ behaviours like speaking inappropriately or not speaking at all, shivering, sickness, delayed puberty, lack of appetite, etc. Such behaviour is diagnosed to be the ‘trouble’ of *Siri* spirits and the relatives are advised to take her to the next *Siri* rituals so as to resolve by their promise to serve (*seve*) *Siri* spirits as possession vehicles in subsequent years. Along with the experienced *Siris*, many participants partaking each year are newcomers.

During the night-long ceremonies, the women participants gather in small groups and recite a ritual version of the *Siri* myth. Soon all are possessed in one form or another, usually under the supervision of *Kumara*. Attention of the adepts is given to helping novices to more easily and fully express the character of their possessing spirit. While singing the story of the *Siri*, they get possessed and get individually transformed into the characters of the story they sing. Once the context is transformed into that of the story, the ritual stage is taken over by the male priest in the mythical form of *Kumara* who controls the spirits and leads the entire night-long ceremony. *Kumara* interrogates the women/spirits who already reported to have had a history of troublesome individual possession, helps in spirit identification, acts as a priest-medium in nursing the ‘afflicted’ women back to ‘normality.’ The ‘healed’ women vow their allegiance to the cult by ensuring their participation in the rituals in subsequent years, not as novice but as adepts. In short, “recitation of myth and ritual action are brought together in a dramatic model through which the individual is reintegrated into a moral order” to use the words of Claus.<sup>18</sup>

In order to avoid the trap of a ‘scientific’ observation which leads to making ‘logical’ statements about the possible causes of these women’s ‘possession,’ this paper will keep itself away from delving into this area of investigation. As for now, the paper will only concentrate on the ritual as it is available for any observer to see and understand. Probing into the reasons for why and how women get possessed, what is or is not the logicity behind society’s over-all perception of it are deliberately kept out of the purview of this paper. We merely continue with the understanding that women who are said to have been troubled by *Siri* spirits are inducted into the cult as novices during the annual ritual, and thereafter they continue to participate every year as adepts. What is more important for the



author here is the emancipatory potential that the space of this ritual can extend to the participating women.

Moving on to the ritual tradition of *Siri jātṛe*, one is faced with a situation where women participants feel that the rituals are good and sacred. Although many non-believers, especially the younger generation raise scepticism about the entire process, – and, the ritual activities could, and at places probably do, easily devolve into this if the drama-dimension and entertainment function overwhelm the ritual- dimension and social functions<sup>19</sup> – it could also be relevant to observe that the *Siri* rituals serve as a space where women make an attempt to reclaim their self or forge new identities by identifying with the characters in the *Siri* myth. The inextricably linked worlds of myth and present-day serve as a platform for the ‘afflicted’ women to construct their new self-identities. The tragic dimensions of the *Siri* story lends multiple models – of quarrels and jealousies between husband and wife, between co-wives, and between sisters; the tragic plights that could befall a woman; the economic deprivations that a woman may face under the *aliya santāna kaṭ* of Tuluva community; etc – for the women to identify with and find solace in thereby lending them a cathartic effect. Women’s identification with tragic proportions of the *Siri* myth may bring about a realization that misfortune was a part of life and that a blessed and divine woman like *Siri* could also not escape from it. The women-centred narrative structures of *Siri* thus re-enact and dramatize women’s struggles and her search for identity.<sup>20</sup>

Women who have perhaps been relegated to secondary position in the household when come into the fold of *Siri* cult are faced with a different world – a world wherein they are welcomed by the divine Kumara; attentive gestures and talks from him and the adept Siris; special care and reverence from the family members; and the exalted feeling that comes with the idea of a divine spirit having chosen and dwelling in her body. *Ālaḍe* acts as a space for the women to temporarily forgo their individual identities and with that, their anxieties, traumas of the real life. The ritual stage acts as a protected podium for the women to vent out their anger, frustrations, unfulfilled desires, tensions generated by family,



Fig 5: Kumara performing his task  
PC: www.daijiworld.com

caste, class conflicts, rules and regulations of the society, sexual dissatisfactions, etc which they could otherwise not express in day to day lives. In the mass hypnotized scene of the *Siri jātṛe*, they lay their hearts bear in the disguise of a divine spirit. Suspended in the state of trance, the women switch to a different language (*kucchona* in Tulu, roughly translated as ‘teasing’) and articulate the anger, frustration, injustice

meted out to them in the past and present. The outside world is sealed for few hours wherein they get transported to the world of Siris which lends them the



power to articulate that is otherwise missing in their real lives, all amidst the presence of the family members.

The hypnotized state to which they are induced by Kumara enables them to adopt an imaginative role enactment thereby shedding their scattered identities of being a daughter, mother, wife, sister at home, at least for few hours of that night. The alternative self adopted by these women perhaps ensure better place within the socio-cultural context of their own lives. This interchangeability of roles could be seen as a strategy adopted by the women to claim their due social status. Also the spatiotemporal all-women space offered by the geo-ritual world could build new affinities, new communities offering the benefits of empowering group affiliations.

The central role performed by the male priest, Kumara (*Figure 5*) who initiates the singing, gets possessed by the divine spirit of Kumara and controls the other personated women Siris also lends for an interesting study, which due to the paucity of space is not taken up here. In the dramatization of the mythical episode of quarrel between Abbaga and Daraga, in the ritual context of some of the *Siri jātre*, Kumara comes to assume great proportions as against projected in the referential script of *Siri pāḍḍana* sung primarily by women in other contexts. In the re-enactment of the fateful event which puts an end to the three-generation of Siri,<sup>21</sup> the tragic end is subverted by Kumara. In the dual role of the priest/uncle of the myth, he stops the quarrel before the girls re-enact their earthly deaths thereby also fulfilling the primary role assigned to 'uncle' (*maamu*) in the matrilineal society of Tuḷuvas. By acting both as the priest and the medium, he becomes a nexus between the two worlds of myth and reality. Thus, the *Siri* narrative of women in the 'akam' when comes to the public ritual performance of the 'puram,' is controlled and monitored by the male member, Kumara, thereby reinforcing the primary role assigned to men in the society.<sup>22</sup>

## Conclusion

In recent times, rituals like *bhūtārādhane*, *Siri jātre*, *nāgamandala*, etc have become tools to assert one's cultural uniqueness, and are celebrated with festivity and pomp. They gradually have been losing the high aura of devotion, belief and faith that were associated with these rituals in the earlier days. Women are growing more sensitive to the visual display of their bodies in the public sphere and this keeps them away from participation in the rituals as possession vehicles. Nevertheless, these rituals are performed without fail in many parts of the coastal region annually even to this day. A closer analysis of the socio-cultural factors associated with 'spirit possession,' will throw more light on the entire episode of the 'disorders' and therapeutic influence of the *Siri* rituals. Without having to rely on the modern psychoanalytic studies to 'throw light' on such a cultural practice of a community, and to view these rituals as a site for the multilayered emancipation



of the women could lend a comforting thought to the author's mind. To conclude with the words of Prof. Rai "emancipation should be redefined by distinguishing between the point of view of the performer and that of the audience... Rather than considering 'emancipation' as a social activity of the outsider, I would like to stress here the transformation of mind and body of the performing women as a way of emancipation... how the performance of folk narratives and rituals contributes to brining it about."

### ***Annexure: the Story***

An old wealthy man named Berma Alva or 'Ajjeru' (grandfather) as he was fondly called, living in the palace of Satyanapura, was beset with grief as he had no issue. Lamenting his state, he had vowed that he would give his wealth as alms to beggars if he could have a child. He prayed to the lord Naga Berma who shortly afterwards came to his door disguised as a beggar. Berma Alva, following his word but not aware of the beggar's real identity, ordered his maidservant Daru to give alms generously. The beggar, however, refused to accept alms from the maid but insisted that the master of the house personally give him alms. When Berma Alva appeared, the beggar asked him the reasons for his grief and suggested Ajjeru to renovate the family's ancestral home and the shrines, the ruin of which was the reason for his issuelessness. Ajjeru complied with the Brahmin's suggestion and performed regular worship at the shrine.

In the large ceremony performed for the family god, Bermeru and all of the family *butas*, Ajjeru offered the lord a flower pod from the areca nut palm (*pingara*) containing a ball of sandalwood paste, begging to be forgiven for his neglect. At that moment the pod opened, revealing a baby girl. Pleased Ajjeru named her as 'Siri.'

Siri grew up at a phenomenal rate and at the age of five she was married to Kanta Punja of Kadengadi and a huge sum of gold and land, all of Berma Alva's wealth was given to Kanta Punja as Siri's dowry. However, Siri's beauty and faithful devotion could not dissuade Punja from favouring a prostitute Siddu on whom he squandered all of Siri's wealth and property. When Siri became pregnant Punja refused to perform the customary *bayake* ceremony which honours the wife as she departs to her natal home. Ajjeru visited her and insisted Kanta Punja to perform the bayake, and even provided money for Kantha Alva to buy a saree for Siri. On his way back from the town brining saree and jewels for Siri, Kanta Punja visits his prostitute Siddu who wears the garment of Siri. Siri refuses to wear the polluted saree and returns to Ajjeru's house dishonoured.

Siri gave birth to a son named 'Kumara' in Ajjeru's house. Her wish to meet her husband and mother-in-law Sankaru Punjedi in the ninth month of pregnancy went unfulfilled. Also, the father refused to come and acknowledge the child. Infuriated Siri cursed her husband's family, lands and estate to go barren (and so, it is said, they are today). On the birth of the child, an astrologer forbade the grandfather from seeing the child as that would cause his death. One day, when Siri had left Kumara alone while bathing him, the grandfather enters and takes the child in his arms. He collapsed immediately and was found dead on the floor with the baby still in his arms when Siri returned. He breathed his last telling Siri not to lose her freedom come what may. Siri



sent message to her husband and her in-laws who didn't respond to it. Thus Siri and Daaru were made to arrange the last rites of Ajjeru.

Annu Shetty of Sulura Guttu convened a village court and claimed stake over the palace as per the *Aliya Santana Kattu* of Tuluva Community. Although Siri made an attempt to resist this, she failed to succeed. She refused to submit and cursed the palace to be reduced to cinders. Overcome with grief, Siri wandered aimlessly with the child Kumara and maidservant Daaru. She had renounced her husband, lost her only kinsman, and her wealth had been squandered on her husband's mistress and by the kinsmen. In her wanderings, Siri comes across many people and the story also narrates the use of her magical powers at times. At a place called Booladapavadu, after Siri fed Kumara with milk, he started talking and predicted his mother's second marriage and said that he would not be there for the ceremony. At his request, Siri disappeared him and Daaru was also sent to the invisible world.

As she wandered southward, she met two warriors (*ksatriyas*) of Boolamallige palace who both desired her greatly, but recognized her as a virtuous woman. She begged their help and asked them to regard her as their sister. She was taken to their palace. A man called Kodsara Alva of Kotrapadi sought to marry her in a special ceremony called *kaipptawuni* ('taking-the-hand') as both of them were already married. No dowry, no Brahman, no feast, no relative's consent would be necessary for this ceremony.

Saamu Alvedi, the wife of Kodsara Alva resisted the second marriage of her husband and left the palace devising a curse that if Siri were to look into a certain oil lamp she would go blind in the palace. While accompanying Kodsara Alva to his palace, Siri intuited that Kodsara Alva had another wife and that she was angered. She refused to enter the palace unless she was welcomed by Saamu Alvedi. When Alvedi realizes the honesty and forthrightness of Siri, and how pitiable her plight was, she welcomed Siri into the household as a co-wife.

At Kodsara Alva's house Siri became pregnant with a second child. Just before her time of delivery, Siri went to an areca nut grove at the edge of the jungle where she made a bed of betal leaves. There at dusk she had her baby, a daughter, whom she named Sonne (white lime). Kumara came in the disguise and helped his mother in the delivery. He blesses the child, put her on an areca leaves and floated it on a stream. He also made his mother disappear (*mayi*) who is still said to be guarding the land.

The child Sonne was found by Kaanebottu Ajjeru who brought her up. At the same time, he also found Gindye, the daughter of Paddantaya and Ginde Giliramu in the forest and brought her up too along with Sonne. Sonne was married to Gurumarla of Urukototu palace. On Gindye attaining puberty, a ritual was arranged. Sonne was ridiculed in the ceremony as she had not yet attained puberty. At the end of the ritual Sonne made Gindye disappear who later joined the divine circle of Kumara.

On both Sonne and her husband's prayer and vow to god that they would make him a big offering, Sonne attained puberty and became pregnant. She gave birth to twin girls, Abbaga and Daraga. Caught up in the joys of family life, they neglected their vow to Bermeru. Bermeru appeared to Sonne and Gurumarla disguised as a fortune teller. He foretold that they would suffer most deeply if they neglected their vow to him. All that the god had given them would be taken back. Guru Marla was angered by the fortune teller and told him to leave.



One day when Sonne and Gurumarla went away to invite the Kaanebottu ajjeru for the twin's marriage, Bermeru appeared in the palace disguised as a Brahmin. Although Gurumarla had locked the girls' favourite game Cenne Mane as they often quarrelled over it, Bermeru enticed the girls to play the game again. As expected, the game took a violent shape where the girls started fighting with each other. Abbaga hit her sister on the head and killed her. Shocked at the heinous crime she had committed, Abbaga also jumped into the well. When the parents returned, they were met by the sage who warned them that should never neglect a promise made to a god, for all that they were, all that they had was a god's gift. What was given by a god was taken away. The twins were later sent to the divine circle of the deities. The story of the three-generation women of a matrilineal family thus ends on a tragic note.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Tuḷu is the lingua franca of this region, and hence has popularly been referred to as Tuḷunāḍu.'

<sup>2</sup> Apart from Tuḷu, Konkani, Kannada, Havyaka Kannada, Beary, Malayalam, Urdu, Kodagu, English languages are spoken in the region (Reference: *Survey of English: South Kanara District*. Hyderabad: Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages. 1985)

<sup>3</sup> Yakshagāna is a theatrical, dance-drama form that combines, dance, music, dialogue, costume, make-up and stage techniques with a unique style and form. This theatre style is mainly played in the coastal districts and other adjacent regions of Karnataka, and traditionally played from dusk to dawn. Yakshagāna is the recent scholastic name (used in the last 200 years) for art forms known as *kēḷike*, *āṭa*, *bayalāṭa*, and *daśāvātāra* (source: wikipedia).

<sup>4</sup> Upadhyaya, Dr. U.P. in "Renaissance in Tuḷu Literature" (1996)

<sup>5</sup> Terms used to refer hundreds of local deities of diverse origin in the region.

<sup>6</sup> The 'folk' art and ritualistic world of Tuḷuvas was introduced outside India through different studies undertaken by scholars including American Anthropologist Peter J. Claus, Finnish Folklorist Lauri Honko, Heidrun Bruckner from, etc. The 15,682 lined *Siri* epic is published in three volumes by FF Communications, Kalevala Institute under University of Turku in Finland.

<sup>7</sup> The word *Bhūta* in Kannada also translates as devil or demon. A.C. Burnell's collection of Tuḷu folk songs, later published by R.C. Temple in *The Indian Antiquary* between 1894 and 1897, was titled as *The Devil Worship of Tuḷuvas*, thereby creating the 'other' category of the 'heathens.' As against the general norm, I have used the spelling *būta* instead of *Bhūta* throughout the article, which according to me is closer to its Tulu pronunciation. Latter spelling is retained when it occurs in quotes.

<sup>8</sup> A brief outline is provided in the next paragraph.

<sup>9</sup> Dealt with in detail in the latter part of the paper.



<sup>10</sup> Elaborate and pompous rituals conducted while worshipping serpent, one of the chief deities worshipped. *nāgamaṇḍala* is now become an Aryan rite performed by *Vaidyas* who belong to Brahmin caste.

<sup>11</sup> Form slightly similar to *nāgamaṇḍala*, performed chiefly for non-Vedic deities like *Swaami*, *Hayguli*, *Bobbarya*, and so on.

<sup>12</sup> ritual-performances, also sometimes referred as *nēma*, involving the worship of hundreds of semi-deities, spirits in impersonated forms. *kōla* rituals are conducted annually at family and village levels in different parts of Tuḷunadu so as to appease these protecting spirits. Find more details in *Bhūtārādhane* section.

<sup>13</sup> To quote Prof. Chinnappa Gowda “Tuḷuvas worship bhutas with first priority. That is why in every prayer they say *daiva devarugalige*. The first word used is *daiva* and not *deva*” (2011)

<sup>14</sup> Chinnappa Gowda (2005) pg 21.

<sup>15</sup> In *The Hindu*, January 26, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> The place in which Siri Jatire is conducted, generally the temple premises, is also referred to as *alāḍe*.

<sup>17</sup> Peter J. Claus in “Ritual Transforms a Myth” (1991).

<sup>18</sup> Peter J. Claus in “Medical Anthropology and the Ethnography of Spirit possession.”

<sup>19</sup> Peter J. Claus in “Ritual Transforms a Myth” (1991)

<sup>20</sup> To quote an example for the way the story of Siri has seeped deep into the lives of Tuḷuva women: During the documentation of the *Siri pāḍḍana* as sung by a Bunt woman Kargi Shetty in 1999, while narrating the episode of Siri delivering her daughter Sonne with the help of her son Kumara and disappearing with him into the divine world soon after that, Kargi Shetty broke into emotional excitement and fainted on the spot. While enquired about this incident later, she replied, “Aren’t such episodes from the life of Siri similar to the incidents in our lives? Therefore it sorrows us a lot. It is similar to the pain we experience when our own children face difficulties. Isn’t it?” (*translation mine*) (Alva, Ashok 2009)

<sup>21</sup> Refer Annexure for the story.

<sup>22</sup> Dealt in detail in Claus, Peter J. (1997) “Ritual Transforms a Myth.”

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