

## HISTORY AND LEGEND WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BRAHMIN SETTLEMENTS IN SOUTH KANARA

Dr. Prasada N.  
HOD, Department of History  
Kukke Sri Subramanyeshwara College  
Subrahmanya, Kadaba (Tq)-574238, Karnataka, India.

### Abstract:

The etymology of Tulu Language is also not known as well the meaning of the term Tulu is a matter of speculation. There are half a dozen variations of spoken Tulu. An original Tulu script was thought to have never existed but a script resembling Malayalam was used to write it. Brahmins seeking further knowledge in Agama *Shastra* went to Kerala and jotted down notes in a script that was thought to be heavily borrowed from Malayalam. This came to be known as Tulu script, which later became extinct due to disuse. However, the close resemblance to Malayalam may have created the impression that Tulu is not a legitimate language with its own script. More recent discovery of some Tulu literature (two poems and one prose) may yet prove that Tulu had its own script derived from *Grantha* script just like other Dravidian languages like Tamil and Malayalam. It is now strongly believed that the script of Malayalam (which evolved much later than Tulu) was derived from the original Tulu script and not the reverse. With their close association with Karnataka throughout its history, the Kannada language is the official language of governance and trade. More and more evidence has been gathered to suggest that Tulu is one of the oldest Dravidian languages (one of five) with its own script, and preceded many of the major languages of the South used today.

**Keywords:** ETYMOLOGY, TULU LANGUAGE, MALAYALAM, DRAVIDIAN LANGUAGES, GRANTHA AND HISTORY.

### Introduction:

Historians and social scientists do not produce legends. At the best, they provide the raw material from which others produce them. Those who provide the raw materials for the production of legends are rarely able to anticipate the form the finished product will take. It is often far removed from the dreams

of the providers of raw materials. What makes a legend convincing is different from what makes history or social science convincing. Legends cannot be subjected to the same test of evidence to which history and social science must submit. It is this freedom from the test of evidence that appeals most to some of our public intellectuals, and their tribe is increasing.

The legends by which increasing numbers of Indians are now willing or even eager to be convinced is the myth of national greatness and glory. It is seductive legend but, like all legends it simplifies the reality and shows scant respect for contradictory evidence. It is far from my argument that historians or social scientists should not be patriotic, but they should not distort or disregard the facts of the case. The difference between history and legend is that in history, where the facts are unavailable, the argument must rest without a conclusion, whereas a legend must move to its inevitable conclusion, so where there are no facts, they have to be invented.

The natural inclination of teachers of history in India, particularly school teachers, is towards what may be called edifying history as against objective or positive or scientific history. Talking about the greatness and glory of a nation is the easiest way of teaching history - or sociology - in an edifying way to the young. It is easier to do this for the past than for the present so that teachers of sociology have a harder job than teachers of history, particularly ancient history where the facts are vague, unclear and amenable to divergent interpretations. In India teachers do not like relating unpleasant facts to the young, unless the unpleasant facts are about other people.

Indian Civilization has great achievements to its credit. Why should teachers of history be loath to talk about them to their students? It is indeed their duty to talk about these achievements provided they take care to avoid too much exaggeration and embellishment. Distortion begins when the teacher turns the spotlight only on the achievements of his nation and always away from its failings. The natural tendency in nationalist legend-making is to embellish the achievements of the nation and to brush its failings under the carpet/In this paper an attempt has been made to discuss one significant legend which has been the part of south Kanara history for a long time known as Parashurama Legend. This enjoys a close connection with the establishment of Brahmin Settlement in western coast of Karnataka.

Although many of the depressed classes in South Kanara, have practically nothing to do with the Hindu religion, the whole of the population, with the exception of Musalmans, Christians, Jains and followers of other well-known religions call themselves Hindus. About the early dynasties that ruled in South Kanara till about the sixth century A.D. we have absolutely no record, and we must be satisfied

only with legendary lore, and even of this we have very little. The most predominant social groups who command so much influence in the mainstream of south Kanara social structure are Brahmins. Their emergence has an attachment with legendary lore which is very popular in Western part of Coastal Karnataka which is called Parashurama tradition. That way all that Brahmin chronicles agree in ascribing the creation of Malabar and Canara or Tuluva and Haiga, to Parashurama, a legendary hero who according to tradition reclaimed from the sea as much as he could cover by hurling his battle axe from the top of the Western Ghats. This is the most popular legends about the early history of South Kanara is that of Parashuram. It is well known, but will bear repetition. Some thousands of years ago, it is said, a great Brahmin warrior and hero (we must remember that in those good old days the Brahmins know the use of the sword as well as that of the pen) named Parashuram (from Parashu, an axe, his favourite weapon) killed all the people of the Kshatriya or military clan 26 times over. Having obtained pardon for this crime through the prayers of fellow Brahmins, he granted them all the land in the world and went in search of an abode for himself. He solicited the mighty ocean to yield to him a small piece of ground to live upon and die in peace. The ocean in its large - heartedness consented to grant him as much land as he could hurl his battle- axe over. Parashuram threw his weapon from Gokarna westwards into the sea. The sea receded Nussara, a place north of Bombay, to KanyaKumari, measuring about 800 miles in length and forty-five miles in breadth. He then inhabited the land with all classes of people except Brahmins, who refused to settle there.

But the enterprising Parashuram rose to the occasion. Seeing several fishermen on the sea-shore, he cut their nets, and having made Brahminical strings out of them, tied them round their shoulders made them priests. Having converted the local population into Brahmins, Parashuram divided the lands among them in seven portions, Barat, Varat, Marat, Konkan, Haviga, Tuluva and Kerala, of which Tuluva and Haviga nearly correspond to the present South Kanara and North Kanara Districts respectively. After this he betook himself to a hill near Kanyakumari for prayer and meditation, directing the Brahmins that if they should at any time be in distress they should think of him. After a lapse of fifty years, in order to test the power of Parashuram, the Brahmins thought of him, and that very instant he appeared before them and inquired what distress they were labouring under. Finding that they wanted only to test his powers, he fell into a violent rage and cursed them, saying that they should eat coarse rice, dress only up to the waist and be miserable for ever. He then proceeded to Gokarna and governed the region for several years<sup>2</sup>

According to Tulu traditions, after a quarrel with Brahmins who used to come to him periodically from Ahi-kshetra, Parashu Rama procured new Brahmins for the reclaimed tract by taking the nets of some fishermen and making a number of Brahminical threads with which he invested the fishermen and thus turned them into Brahmins and retired to the mountains to meditate, after informing them that if they were in distress and called on him he would come to their aid. After the lapses of sometime during which they suffered no distress, they were curious to know if Parasu Rama would remember them and called upon him in order to find out. He promptly appeared, but punished them thus mocking him by cursing them, and causing them to revert to their old status of Sudras. After this there were no Brahmins in the land till Tulu Brahmins were brought from Ahi-Kshetra by Mayur Varma of the Kadamba dynasty<sup>3</sup>.

A modified form of the tradition states that Parasu Rama gave the newly reclaimed land to Naga and Machi Brahmins, who were not true Brahmins and were turned out or destroyed by fishermen and Holeyas (Pariahs) who held the country till the Tulu Brahmins were introduced by Mayur Varma.<sup>4</sup>

There is another curious legend about Parashuram in which a somewhat different version of the creation and the peopling of Western India below the Ghats is given. Parashuram, according to this legend, was the sixth avatar or incarnation of Vishnu, who came into this world in the form of a Brahmin, to restore to power the Brahmins who had been defeated in their wars with Kshatriyas and forced to retire to caves and forests) One day when Parashuram was proceeding to the west, he found himself on the top of the peak of the Sahyadari ranges, that overlooks the town of Chiplun, and from there he shot an arrow westward and commanded the sea, then washing the foot of the Ghats, to retreat, which it did with all possible speed. The Brahmins there upon occupied the new strip of country left behind by the sea, populated it with several people of low caste for cultivating the land, and then marched under the leadership of the redoubtable Parashuram against the Kshatriyas, who were completely routed and subjugated/There are several other versions of Parashuram's story which vary from one another in several finer details, but all of them, as well as the two mentioned above, point to the following conclusions:<sup>5</sup>

1. That the tract of the country we are now inhabiting had been once under sea, which fact geologists believe to be true from a study of the fauna of the country, and especially the curious deposits of oyster- shells in several places at the foot of the Ghats, and that it was raised above

water, not by the prowess of Parasuram, as the legendary lore of western India would have us believe, but by some volcanic eruption.

2. That this part of India, which had been undoubtedly occupied before the advent of the Aryans into the Deccan by Dravidian tribes speaking the Kanarese and Tulu and Malayalam languages, was subjugated by the Aryans. But this subjugation could have been but partial. Consisting as it did, the population of Southern India of well organized communities with powerful kingdoms and speaking highly developed languages, they offered such a strong resistance to the incursions of the Aryans that, the Aryan conquerors, while imparting much of their civilization and religion to the conquered races, had to incorporate themselves into their society and to adopt their language.) Classes according to rank and profession exist in every society and must have existed also among the Dravidians, but the influence of Aryan settlement among them was probably to crystallize these classes into castes with some of the distinctions and names prevailing among the Aryans. With the deep impression, therefore, of Aryan civilization and religion, which the Dravidians received from their conquerors, they yet retained their essential racial and linguistic characteristics. This fact is borne out by the small admixture of Sanskrit words in Kanarese, Tulu and other Dravidian languages, and by the peculiar Dravidian features still perceptible in the structure of the skulls and the physiognomy of Tulu and Kanarese-speaking Brahmins.

All traditions unite in attributing the introduction of the Tulu Brahmins of the present day to Mayur Varma, but they vary in details connected with the manner in which they obtained a firm footing in the land. One account says that Habashika, chief of the Koragas (Pariahs), drove out Mayur Varma, but was in turn expelled by Mayur Varma's son, or son-in-law, Lokaditya of Gokarnam, who brought Brahmins from Ahi-Kshetra and settled them in thirty-two villages.) Another makes Mayur Varma himself the invader of the country, which till then had remained in the possession of the Holeyas (Pariahs) and fishermen who had turned out Parasu Rama's Brahmins. Mayur Varma and the Brahmins whom he had brought from Ahi-Kshetra were again driven out by Nanda, a Holeyia chief, whose son Chandra Sayana had, however, learned respect for Brahmins from his mother, who had been a dancing girl in a temple. His admiration for them became so great that he not only brought back the Brahmins, but actually made over all his authority to them and reduced his people to the position of slaves. A third account makes Chandra Sayana, not a son of a Holeyia king, but a descendant of Mayaur Varma and a conqueror of the Holeyia king.

Nothing is known from other sources of Lokaditya, Habashika or Chandra Sayana, but inscriptions speak to Mayur Varma being the founder of the dynasty of the Kadambas of Banavasi in North Canara. His date is usually put down at about 750 A.D. The correctness of the traditions, which prevail in Malabar as well as in Canara, assigning the introduction of Brahmins to the western coast to Mayur Varma, who was in power about 750 A.D., is to some extent corroborated by the fact that Brahmins attacked the Malabar Perumal's grant to the Christians in 774 A.D., but not that to the Jews about 700 A.D.

The Brahmins are said to have been brought from Ahi-kshetra, on the banks of the Godavari, but it is not clear what connection a Kadamba of Banavasi could have with the banks of the Godavari, and there may be something in the suggestion made in the North Kanar Gazetteer that Ahi- Kshetra is merely a Sanskritised form of Haiga or the land of snakes. The tradition speaks of the Brahmins having been brought by Lokaditya from Gokarna which is in the extreme north of Haiga, and in the local history of the HonalliMatha in Sunda in North Canara, Gokarnam is spoken of as being in Ahi-Kshetra. Gokarnam is believed to have been a Brahmin settlement in very early times and there was probably a farther influx of Brahmins there as Muhammadan conquest advanced in the North.

The class usually styled Tulu Brahmins at the present day are the Shivalli Brahmins, whose head-quarters are at Udupi, and who are most numerous in the southern part of the district, but the Kota, Koteswara and Haiga or Havika Brahmins are all branches of the same, the differences between them having arisen since their settlement in Canara, and though they now talk Canarese in common with the people of other castes to the north of the Sitanadi river their religious works are written in the old Tulu-Malayalam character. Tulu Brahmins, who have settled in Malabar in comparatively late years, are known as Embrantris and treated as closely allied to the Nambutiris whose traditions also go back to Mayur Varma. Some families of Shivalli and Havika Brahmins in the southern or Malayalam portion of the district talk Malayalam and follow many of the customs of the district talk Malayalam and follow many of the Malabar or Nambutiri Brahmins.

Many of the thirty-two villages in which the Brahmins are said to have been followers of Bhattacharya, but they soon adopted the tenets of the great Malayalam Vedantic teacher, Sankaracharya, who is ordinarily believed to have been born at Cranganore in Malabar in the last quarter of the eight century, that is soon after the arrival of the Brahmins on the west coast. Sankaracharya is known as the preacher of the Advaita (non-dual) philosophy which, stated briefly,

and therefore, of course, very imperfectly, is that all living beings are one with the supreme spirit, and absorption may finally be obtained by the constant renunciation of material in favour of spiritual pleasure. This philosophy, however, was not sufficient for the common multitude, and his system included, for weaker minds, the contemplation of the first cause through a multitude of inferior deities, and as various manifestation of Siva and his consort Parvati, he found a place for all the most important of the demons worshipped by the early Dravidians whom the Brahmins found on the west coast, thus facilitating the spread of Hinduism throughout all classes. That the conversion of the Bunts and Billavas and other classes took place at a very early date may be inferred from the fact that though the great bulk of the Tulu Brahmins of South Canara adopted the teaching of the Vaishnavite reformer Madhvacharya, who lived in the thirteenth century, most of the non-Brahmin Hindus in the district class themselves as Shaivites to this day. Shankaracharya founded the Sringeri Matha near the borders of the Udupi taluk, the Guru of which is the Spiritual head of such of the Tulu Brahmins of South Canara as have remained Smartha or adherents of the teaching of Shankaracharya. Madhwacharya is believed to have been born about 1199 A.D. at Kalianpur a few miles from Udupi. He propounded the Dvaita or dual philosophy, repudiating the doctrine of oneness and final absorption held by ordinary Vainavaitees as well as by the followers of Sankaracharya. The attainment of a place in the highest heaven is to be secured according to Madwacharya's teaching not only by the renunciation of material pleasure, but by the practice of virtue in thought, word and deed. The moral code of Madhavacharya is a high one and his teaching is held by some - not ordinary Hindus of course - to have - been affected by the existence of the community of Christians at Kalyanapura mentioned by Cosmos Indicopleustes in the seventh Century. Madhvacharya placed the worship of Vishnu above that of Siva, but there is little bitterness between Vaisnavites and Saivites in South Kanara, and there are temples in which both are worshipped under the name of Shankara-Narayana. He denied that the spirits worshipped by the early Dravidians were manifestations of Siva's consort, but he accorded sanction to their worship as supernatural beings of a lower order.

### **Notes and References:**

1. Nagendra Rao, Reconstructing the Social history of South Kanara - A study of the Sahyadri Khanda, Indica, Vol. 36, No. 2, September, 1999, p. 86.
2. Ibid, Perceptions on Gramapaddathi, Poli; Kanara 200, Mangalore, 2007, p. 28.

3. P. GururajBhat, Tuluva History and Culture, Kallyanpura, 1975, p. 175.
4. PurushothamBilimale, KoragaSamskrathi, Bangalore 1993, pp. 29-33.
5. Nagendra Rao, Perceptions on Gramapaddathi, Poli; Kanara 200, Mangalore, 2007, p. 29.
6. A.K. Shastry, Sringeri Dharma Samasthana, P.187.
7. 'Validity of the Brahmana – peasant Alliance and the Segmentary State' in early Medieval south India', Social Science Probings, Vol. 1. No.2, June, 1984.
8. Krishna Bhat and others (ed), Tenkanadu, Kasargod, 1957.
9. K.G. Vasantha Madhava, Religions in Coastal Karnataka: 155-1763, New Delhi, 1985.
10. Tulunadina Ithihasadalli Sthanikanana, Udupi, 1966.
11. P. Gururaja Bhat, A Political and Cultural History of Tulunadu from 7<sup>th</sup> century AD to 1600 AD unpublished, Ph.D . Thesis, Mysore , 1967