

Tulu Script and Dialects

Tulu language is one of the five Dravidian languages of South India (Pancha- Bhasha, others are Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam). The four major languages spoken today are dominantly spoken in their respective states (Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala), whereas Tulu is spoken in a small niche, mainly in coastal Karnataka and Northern Karala (Kasaragod district). About 2.5 million people speak Tulu and call it their mother tongue. Tulu nadu is a region where many languages are spoken. While Kannada is the official state language, different ethnic communities in Tulu Nadu speak different languages. Tulu, derived from proto-Dravidian is the predominant language spoken by Hindus of various castes and by the Jains of Tulu Nadu. Konkannasthas and Catholics speak two variants of Konkani. Muslims speak a language of their own that is derived from Tulu as well as Malayalam.

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There are about 24 Dravidian languages recognized by linguists. Of these the five languages in the South developed into major languages. Tulu is the only developed language that has not received the recognition it is due. However, Tulu language with its near extinct script has been generating much enthusiasm amongst the linguists, as it is now believed to be one of the oldest Dravidian languages.

The ScriptThe Tulu language has lost its prominence as a major language. Lack of serious literature in Tulu language has also hampered its claim as a language to be taught in educational institutes. Though it is certain that most of the literature has been lost because of difficulties in preserving palm leaf scrolls, the earliest literature available is from the 15th century. This indeed is a much later work than the language itself, which is thousands of years old. There was also some confusion regarding the script of Tulu language, which closely resembles Malayalam. It was thought that priests from Tulu Nadu went south to Kerala to perform and learn Agama Sastra rituals, where they jotted notes borrowing the Malayalam alphabets. This was the prevailing thought of many researches although now there is a consensus that Tulu language possessed its own script before Malayalam script existed. Perhaps the reciprocal is true that the Malayalam script developed from Tulu script as the language predates Malayalam by more than a thousand years. The priests who went south are now credited with carrying mantras written in Tulu script to Kerala. Like Tamil and Malayalam, Tulu script is derived from the Grantha* script.

The earliest piece of literature, Tulu Mahabharata is from the 15th century written in Tulu script. Another manuscript that was discovered Tulu Devimahatme, a prose work like the Mahabharata, is also from the 15th century. Two epic poems written in 17th century namely Sri Bhagavata and Kaveri have also been found. Madhvacharya's eight matts established in Udupi in the 13th century were centers of Tulu literature during his lifetime and thereafter. However, very little of this has survived. So it is not inconceivable (as it is claimed) that Madhvacharya himself did all his writings in the Tulu script. Other inscriptions discovered are Sanskrit mantras transliterated in Tulu script. It appears as though the Brahmins used the script mainly for this purpose. {mosgoogle}{tab=Page2}{mosgoogle}In the first half of 19th century the German missionaries undertook a renaissance of the language. Unfortunately, they published Tulu literature and materials related to Christianity in the Kannada script as they had established printing presses in that language in Mangalore. In addition the German missionaries also produced Tulu lexicon and Tulu-English dictionary. They are also credited with transcription of Tulu folklore, Tulu proverbs and works on spirit worship in Tulu Nadu. Printing material in the Kannada script led to further disuse of the original Tulu script. By late 19th century Tulu script became remote and was endangered. Today there are no books or literature in the Tulu script and there are only a handful of Tuluvas who can read the script. All the classic literatures discovered thus far are written only in one of the four dialects of the language, namely the Brahmin dialect. The dialect spoken by Brahmins in the southern part of Tulu Nadu is used in these manuscripts. The priests belonged to a sect of Tuluva Brahmins called the Shivalli Brahmins. (Only the Shivalli and the Sthanika sects in Tulu Nadu spoke the Brahmin dialect.) Tulu script was used by these Brahmins to write mantras. The Brahmin dialect also has imported many Sanskrit words into its dialect and lexicon. The Common dialect, which is spoken by the non-Brahmin class, was not used in writings of Tulu. However, the Common dialect is used in many of the folk songs, proverbs and riddles. The folk songs called the Paaddanas are treasures reflective of the rich culture of Tulu Nadu. They also allow a glimpse into the society of Tuluva people. These were never written down and have been passed on through generations as oral traditional songs. {mosgoogle}{tab=Page3}{mosgoogle}The Language and its DialectsResearch in Tulu language and script has been sorely lacking. In 1856 Robert Caldwell undertook a systematic study of the Tulu language with his monumental work, "A Comparative Grammar of Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages." Caldwell called Tulu one of the most developed Dravidian languages. In 1872 J. Bigel wrote, "Grammar of The Tulu Language." Then in the 20th century S. U. Panniyadi and L.V. Ramaswamy Iyer published more books about its grammar. These authors contended that the language was well developed, and was one of the earliest off-shoots of proto-South Dravidian language, with many dialectal variations. (Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada also were derived from it, whereas Telugu was derived from proto-Central Dravidian). There is renewed interest in the language as evidenced by the fact that many universities both in India and abroad are promoting more research of Tulu language. Rashtrakavi

Govinda Pai Research Center in Udupi has encouraged such research. Dr. D.N. Shankar Bhat and Dr. Padmanabha Kekunnaya have been doing commendable, ongoing research in the field.

Different regions within Tulu Nadu developed its own dialect of the language. The language developed with various dialects and peculiarities, unimpeded by the proximity of the regions. Five main such geographical divisions with dialectal variations can be seen.

1. Southwest: comprising of Kasargod District of Kerala

2. Southeast: Includes Sullia and Kodagu

3. South Central: comprising of Puttur, Belthangady and Bantwal

4. Northwest: area including Mangalore and Udupi

5. Northeast: includes Karkala. Other languages have influenced some of the dialects in these regions. Thus Malayalam may have influenced Tulu in the Southwest (Kasargod), whereas in other areas Kannada has influenced it. The differences in the society also influenced the dialects. Brahmins developed their own dialect influenced by Sanskrit that they were proficient in. Four main social dialects have developed.

1. Brahmin Dialect

2. Jain Dialect

3. Common Dialect and

4. Harijan/Tribal Dialect
Brahmin Dialect - spoken by Shivalli and Sthanika Brahmins - is the language used in writing the few classical literature discovered thus far. They also borrowed Sanskrit words and pronunciation of words. Even the local Dravidian words were enunciated with retroflex words (unusual in Dravidian languages, where non-retroflex sounds are used). Jain Dialect spoken by the Jains in the northern part of Tulu Nadu. They have a distinct dialect where the initial t and s have been replaced by letter h. As an example the word tare (head) is pronounced as hare. Saadi (path) is haadi. Common Dialect is spoken by the majority of people (non-Brahmins) of Tulu Nadu, and is the dialect of commerce, entertainment and art. It is the language of the Paaddana. It is subdivided into more than five groups as spoken by Bunts, Billavas, Mogaveeras, Gowdas and Kumabaras etc. Due to the similarity in these dialects, they are grouped under the common heading of Common Dialect or Common Tulu. The borrowed Sanskrit words in this dialect are invariably altered to a non-retroflex sound unlike in the Brahmin dialect where the words are pronounced just as in Sanskrit. Harijan and Tribal Dialect is spoken by the Mera, Mansa, Harijan and Tribal classes. They closely resemble the Common dialect though in the South they still have maintained their distinction. The sound c replaces the sounds t, s, and k of other dialects. Hence tare is care and saadi is caadi. Onasu (meal) is pronounced onacu. Non-retroflex words are pronounced with retroflex in this dialect. New words like baanaaru (Brahmin), jeerklu/jeerlu (children), dekke/meere/korage (husband) and dikkalu/meerti/korappolu (wife) are also found in this dialect.

There is a common perception that there are only two kinds of Tulu dialects, namely Brahmin and Common. Dr. P Kekunnaya suggests studying the language in four different dialects by combining both geographical variations in the dialects and the different social dialects. Hence the divisions studied are:

1. Sb: Brahmin dialect of Southwest, Southeast and South Central region.

2. Sc: Common dialects of the same regions in the South

3. Nb: Brahmin dialects of Northwest and Northeast.

4. Nc: Common dialects of the same regions in the North. Some of the differences in the words and sounds used by the Brahmin dialect and the Common dialect in the Northern regions have disappeared or are nearly imperceptible now. However, in the Southern regions, the differences are more commonly maintained and are more apparent.

Some examples of different dialects are cited here. SbScNbNc Iklegunikleguniinklegunigaleguto you (pl.) eraduraddueraduraddutwomeklemeklemokle moguleof these

persons subipnaubipuneubipunaubbiyunispittingolettelettelettelette called barepribarepujibarepribarepujidoes not write Conclusion In conclusion, it is fair to say that Tulu is one of the five major Dravidian languages, the script of which has not received the attention it is due. The Tulu script was mainly used to write Sanskrit mantras by the priestly class. Lack of serious literature before 15th century hampered its claim as one of the legitimate South Indian languages. Some literary works have been unearthed recently. The German missionaries in the early 19th century, perhaps, did much disservice to the Tulu script as they opted to transliterate Christian literature into Tulu language but used Kannada script to do so. But they are also credited with introducing print medium to the language, though in the Kannada script, thus helping in preserving many of the dying stories and folk songs. The dominance of Kannada print medium led to further disuse of the script. Currently there are no attempts at resurrecting Tulu language or the scripts in the universities and other institutions in the Tulu Nadu. The language and the script had remained a curiosity for researchers until recently but now there seems to be renewed interest in this ancient language. There seems to be some hope for a Tulu renaissance mainly because of works done by Padmanabha Kekunnaya, Drs. U.P and Susheela P Upadhyaya and the diligent work in the Rashtrakavi Govinda Pai Samshodhana Kendra in Udupi. There are many households in Tulu Nadu with many Tulu manuscripts and inscriptions, especially in the Brahmin homes. Many have been lost because of lack of interest in attempts to preserving them. Though most of these are Sanskrit mantras written in the Tulu script their numbers must be significantly high. Much effort and resources need to be spent towards research of the language of Tulu Nadu and its unique script. Author: Neria Harish Hebbar Source: Boloji References: A major source of reference for this article is Dr. Padmanabha Kekunnaya's thesis, "A Comparative Study of Tulu Dialects." Other referral sources are "Renaissance in Tulu literature" and "Tulu Lexicon: A New Experiment in Dictionary Making" both by Dr. U. P. Upadhyaya.

*Grantha script: emerged from the Gupta script that in turn was derived from Brahmi script. Grantha script developed in the 5th and 6th century C.E. Veda Vyasa was said to have written the Vedas in the Grantha script. This led to the postulation that the Vedas were written down much later than their origins as oral traditions. This also suggests that the Tulu script developed much later than the language itself. All the Dravidian literature developed from Grantha script after the 5th century C.E. However, there is literature in Tamil dating back to 3rd century B.C.E. to 3rd century C.E. (Sangam literature). Currently Sanskrit language is written in Nagari script that developed in the 7th century C.E.

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