

# Mayndala: A Legend and Possession Cult of Tulunad<sup>1</sup>

By

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## *Introduction*

In this paper I present a translation of one of the many oral legends of the Tuluva people and describe the rapidly growing cult which is associated with it. The paper is meant to serve two purposes: 1) to experiment with a method of conveying this Dravidian oral tradition into English retaining as much as possible of the original image, but without sacrificing optimum appreciation and understanding on the part of the English-speaking audience, and, 2) to establish a foundation for a later work which will describe the religion of Tulunad in which the legends and the possession cults play a pivotal role.

Tulu is the language of the majority of the people living in the southern two-thirds of the District of South Kanara, a coastal district of present Karnataka State, India. This region of bountiful rice lands, situated on the western coast between the high, jungle-cloaked Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea, has for nearly two thousand years been regarded as a distinct social, linguistic, and cultural entity known as

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1. My attention was first drawn to the cult and legend of Mayndala by Dr. Martha Ashton, who in the course of our many contacts in the field invited me to accompany her to collect the legend from a dancer, Menke Parava, who was a mutual acquaintance of ours. My understanding of Tulu legends and cults also benefited greatly from discussions with my wife, Pam, whose investigations into the medical beliefs and practices of Tuluva has contributed many insights to the relation of disease and the supernatural. Dr. Lindy Mark helped me to state the rhythm of the legends in ethnomusicological terms.

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Tulunad or Tuluva. (Saltore, 1936). Tulu has never possessed a literary script.<sup>2</sup> However, it has maintained an extensive oral literary tradition, known as *pāddana*(s), carried on largely by women in the process of performing their field and (to a lesser extent) household works, and by specialized castes of untouchable cult dancers and possession mediums. The *pāddanas*, especially those of the latter group, concern the origins, heroic or mysterious exploits, and wanderings of locally worshipped spirits (*bhūta*, *daiva*). Aside from the intrinsic value of recording, studying and appreciating the *pāddanas* for their own sake, it appears that the *pāddana* tradition preserves a cultural complex which was prevalent in all South Dravidian societies before the development of a written literary tradition (CF. Kailasapathy, 1968; Hart, 1975). One can see clearly in the *pāddanas* many of the themes, imagery and conventions which have gone into such great works as the Tamil Shilappadikaram, one example of a literary epic drawn largely from Dravidian folk oral tradition (Danielou, 1965; Beck, 1972). Of course other Dravidian cultures retain an oral tradition in conjunction with a literary one, but Tulunad's is certainly the richest. More importantly, it is still a vibrant and well patronized tradition, which integrates the social and religious life of a contemporary Dravidian society.

Anyone attempting to convey into English—not merely to translate—the *pāddanas*, has to combine the skills of the cultural anthropologist, the linguist and the poet. Late in the last century a collection of thirty core *pāddanas* were transcribed and translated by A. Manner (1886) and A. C. Burnell (1894–7). This voluminous document, the result of many years of tedious labor, to my knowledge has never been quoted, rarely referred to, seldom used. It is a gold mine of information to those very few who know how to use it, but the bare-bones, literal translation neglected to include information on how to interpret and appreciate what the *pāddanas* had to say. While I cannot claim to be proficient in all the skills necessary to fully accomplish this task, I believe the method I have used makes some steps in the right direction, and I hope that practice will make better, if not perfect, my effort.

For the purpose of discussing the religious beliefs of the Tulus, no better *pāddana* than the Mayndala can be found. It makes explicit most of the religious assumptions which underlie the cult traditions. Further, the Mayndala cult, though ancient, is suddenly growing in

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2. A modified form of Malayali script was used to copy Sanskrit *ślokas*, *mantras* and so forth. Palm leaf manuscripts using this script may be found in some of the temples today. The Tulu language was never to my knowledge, written in this script.

In modern times Tulu is published in a modified Kannada script.

popularity. Hence we have time, depth and popularity to account for, since the *pāddanas* do not merely represent a static past, but a dynamically related past and present.

Analysis of Tulu religious themes requires one to conceptualize the world as the Tuluva does. The natural world is one of paddy fields and palm trees. This cultivated portion is meticulously maintained and manicured—the result of over a thousand years of intensive effort (see Claus, 1975). The one person who is regarded as responsible for the order and prosperity of this realm is the petty king or village chief.<sup>3</sup> We need not measure the stature of these kings and chiefs by the size of their realms, for in Tulunad, even the smallest of them is nearly an absolute lord. His subjects are his tenants. They owe him not rent, but loyalty and tribute. They are more his dependants than subjects.

Beyond the cultivation is the forest, a prolific source of wild, un-ordered, uncontrolled, hungry beings of destruction and fear. The things within the forest—people, animals and events—are strange and unpredictable.<sup>4</sup> Hunting and gathering families, who live on the margin of the cultivated world are able to frequent the forest, but are regarded by the rest of society with mistrust and suspicion. They are prohibited extensive contact with society by elaborate taboos and beliefs of pollution which restrict their behavior. The king can enter the forest; but only on ceremonial occasions. This occasion is the obligatory annual ritual hunt (*keḍḍasa*) in which the king answers the plea of the villagers to contain and control the increasing incursions of wild legions into the villagers' ordered world.<sup>5</sup> The hunt is not only to contain a rampantly productive nature, but to utilize its prolificacy as a source of food. The king is thus the protector, the hero of order and prosperity and the provider.

The supernatural world, *Māya*, the Realm of Illusion, does not exist so much in a different place as in a different time and mode. It is the realm of the spirits and the ancestors. When and where the two realms meet, strange things happen. Such happenings are not easily understood and are considered dangerous. The danger, however, like the danger of the forest, is not due to the innate malevolence of the beings of the supernatural, but is due to the constant danger of their encroachment into the realm of ordered society. If they can be controlled, and their influence regulated, they can be a source of great benefit to man. Along with nature (represented by the forest beyond, and, in a different

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3. cf. Burnell, 1894, p. 48.

4. cf. Burnell, 1894, p. 46.

5. cf. Burnell, 1894, p. 85.

sense, woman within) they represent not *a* source, but *the* source of vitality. Again, it is the duty of the king to organize a means to control and utilize the mysterious powers and convert them to good. Confrontation with the dangerous and ordering the unordered are the duties of the king which earn him the reputation of heroic protector and give him the right to rule over others.

When I first visited South Kanara in 1967, before the new land reform act became law, the world of the Tuluva was evidenced much as conceptualized by the legends. The landlords, many of whom descended from village chiefs and petty kings, still ruled over their tiny kingdoms. Many, however, had already started to turn their eyes to modern professional and industrial concerns. The rural manors were being vacated and the occupants were relocating in urban centers. When this happened, the tenants were left with only the conceptual world of a by-gone day. Hopefully, over the next decades the land distribution will bring about an adjustment and a new order to their lives. Indeed, in the years since 1967, I have seen this taking place already. But curiously, there is a rural resurgence of the religious cults which would seem to pre-suppose the ancient cosmology. The increase in the incidence of new cults and new temples to the spirits and deities of the *pāḍḍanas* is no less than phenomenal. The *pāḍḍana* singing tradition, contrary to expectation, is flourishing, albeit decreasing somewhat in quality. By and large, though it is new, changed spirits which are emerging.

The cult of Mayndala is one of the fastest growing and spreading of all. Based on the evidence of the *pāḍḍana*, it appears to be quite ancient in origin. At locations where its appearance is oldest, Mayndala is a subsidiary deity and has a specialized cult. The cult is performed as an adjunct to the main village cult to the spirits of the lords and their warrior subalterns (see Claus, 1973). Mayndala is the spirit of childbirth. Her patrons are women requesting an easy childbirth and protection from disease for their infant children. In her new popular role, Mayndala is overshadowing her superior and is becoming less specialized in her appeal. She is a goddess not only of childbirth, but all womanly concerns.

The Mayndala *pāḍḍana*, never written down in any form, exists in an infinitely large number of slightly divergent variations. I heard the entire *pāḍḍana* sung through (about 2-4 hours) on three occasions, had it recited in a narrative form once and heard it summarized on perhaps a dozen or more occasions. Each time it was slightly different. On the core events and relationships, all versions were in close agreement. There were differences in the details and in names, and one version

(which I was unable to record) had a long prefatory description of the marriage of Bale Mani (Mayndala) and her term of pregnancy. It is my feeling that these variations in details are of relatively little importance for any paddana. The prefatory episode in the one version is exactly like the description of marriage and pregnancy in other *pāddanas*. Aside from the legend's core, many *pāddanas* share stock episodes which are treated as interchangeable parts.

#### Translation of the Legend

The version I have translated below was sung by an elderly lady named Kargi, of the Mundalda caste, a high untouchable caste, of Anjar village, near Hiriyadka. She is a remarkably intelligent woman and a leader in all the singing in the field labor teams. She said she learned this *pāddana* as a child from an elderly woman (now deceased) who was well known for her knowledge of *pāddanas*. Although Kargi sang for me in this instance in the evening on our open porch in order to tape-record the song, the version she sang was not significantly different from the times I heard her sing in the fields.

#### *The Mayndala Pāddana*

or

#### *Lord Pangala Bannare and Young Bale Mani*

- 1) At the court of Bannara (manor) lived Bannare,  
Lord Pangala Bannare<sup>6</sup>

As mentioned earlier, in ancient Tuluva society there were many small semi-independent feudal kingdoms. Pangala Bannare was the lord of one of these. The manors of these petty lords were the center of the social, political and religious life of the realm. On the veranda (*cāwaḍi*) of his manor he held his court. On one side of the massive veranda was the shrine to the lord's ancestral deity (or deities), and on the other was the carved wooden bench or chair which served as his throne (*paṭṭa*). It was here he would sit to decide matters of social and political importance to the realm. As head of state, the king and his deities not only symbolized the moral order and authority of the realm,

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6. I have chosen to translate as literally as possible, leaving the task of conveying the beauty of the rhyme and imagery to the commentary. Words in parentheses are added occasionally when absolutely necessary. The repeating final phrase, a characteristic of women's field song style is retained.

but controlled the natural and supernatural as well.<sup>7</sup>

Bannara appears to be the name of this lord's estate, or perhaps a feudal title. His was probably a tiny realm of no more than a few square miles. We cannot say for certain, for in this case the name has long outlived the family. I am not aware of any Bannara manor existing today, nor even memory of it except in this legend.<sup>8</sup> Given the persistent memory of other such estate names, especially one which would have been so famous as to have been the subject of a legend, I would suspect that we may fix the Bannara name and the events of this legend to some time eight hundred to one thousand years or more. Pangala is a clan (*bari*) name of a few families among the Bant caste today and probably at the time of the events of this legend, was a hereditary title. There is a village by the name of Pangala ten to twelve miles south along the ancient coast route from the city of Udipi. This is an area of ancient political significance for Tulunad and may be where the Bannara manor stood. Thus it may be that the family by the name of Pangala held the title to the Bannara vassalage in the area near Udipi perhaps some one thousand years ago.

The opening lines of the legend not only establish the personage and the setting of the events, but state the rhythm and rhyme of the poetry. Below, I transliterate the passage translated above. While it is difficult to appreciate the beauty of the original sounds of the piece in a written transliteration, one can indicate it by pointing out in the written form certain phonetic qualities which reflect that which is beautiful in the original. It must be remembered that one of the main arenas in which the *pāḍḍanas* are perpetuated is paddy cultivation by teams of working women. Singing is done for enjoyment, to make the work less tedious. In contrast to the mechanical work done by their hands and backs, their minds and voices weave intricate patterns of sound and imagery. Since each woman shares a common background in the legend there is sometimes a parsimony of allusion which strips the narrative to a minimum in favor of poetic "goodness of fit". At other times they elaborate description of a ceremony so that they may mention the minutest details of dress, behavior and preparations. At such times, a woman will playfully exhibit her talent by using all the poetic phrases for traditional

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7. This is, at any rate, the picture I got from visiting dozens of similar manors. In 1968 I sat several times at the court of such manors and heard cases of justice decided. The living descendants of many manor families can describe a vivid picture of the way in which these tiny realms were ruled.

8. Several other, unrelated, *pāḍḍanas*, such as the *kordabba pāḍḍana*, make reference to a ruler with the name of Bannare. It may be a reference to the same family title, but it does not seem to be closely related in time to this.

articles of adornment she has in her repertoire. The passage below and lines 2–6 following it are an example of parsimony; while lines 16–26, later, are an example of elaboration.

The rhyme and meter of this passage are typical of the *pāḍḍanas*, but other forms also exist. The rhyme is intricate and complex, with three sets of similar sounding syllables—1) /ban, pan-/; 2) /ull-/ and 3) /-āru, -āre, āra/—repeating and alternating with one another. Rhyme may be found within a line, between the first syllables of words or between the last syllable or words. It may occur between lines either as the last syllable of a line or first syllable. All of this may and does occur and alternate with contrasting sounding syllables and patterns. Consider the rhyme sets distributed in the above passage:

*bannare cāvāḍiḍu | ullerā bannar āru || ullaye pāngolla bannāre*

We find rhyme in the first syllables in repetition of /pan-, /ban-, and in the repetition of /ull-/. Further, these are themselves strongly contrasting sounds. We find them in alternating positions in the phrases. The syllable /āru/ and its variants provide a strong continuity to the passage as it is repeated in combination with the two other syllables.

- 2) “A great calamity (has beset) the calves in the cattle shed,  
and the children in their cradles,”  
said Lord Pangala Bannare.
- 3) “Oh, my God! Alas! What sorrows,”  
said Lord Pangala Bannare.

The word for calamity used here in the Sanskrit word, *āpottu*, which connotes a supernatural affliction of some kind. That the calamity fell upon the cattle in the sheds and the children in their cradles is not surprising for these are the things most dear to a householder and also those most vulnerable. When a new supernatural force appears it always strikes at these places; diseases which afflict children and cattle often signify the presence of some supernatural force.<sup>9</sup> This whole passage is thus a standard expression in the *pāḍḍana* tradition, a poetic device which informs the listener that a new spirit has made his appearance known. The listener also anticipates the next two sequences: action to forestall the affliction, and then to divine its exact nature.

- 4) He put his hand to his waist and slipped off his silver band,  
did Lord Pangala Bannare,
- 5) and (kept it to) vouch-safe his vow,

9. cf. Burnell, 1897, p. 51.

did Lord Panagala Bannare.

- 6) "If the calamity (which has beset) the calves in the shed,  
and the children in the cradle becomes better . . .",  
said Lord Pangala Bannare.

Because the meter does not allow it, the verse does not continue: ". . . then I will offer this token of my sincerety to satisfy its desires." The listener is thoroughly familiar with this small ritual and vow, so, an abbreviated poetic allusion to the entire action is sufficient. The action is a "holding" one, to avert the afflicting influence of the deity until steps can be taken to satisfy its demands. Too often, in real life, having made such a promise, people forget their vow. When again there is disease and suffering, they remember their unfulfilled vows. Spirits are sometimes measured in terms of their patience and the one of this legend, as it turns out later on, has very little: The assumption is that it must be a very great one.

- 7) The next day he arose,  
did Lord Pangala Bannare  
8) and went to the house of the Diviner who wears the thread,  
did Lord Pangala Bannare  
9) "Ayyo! My Lord! Listen, my Lord,"  
said the Diviner who wears a thread,  
10) "You, who have never come (to me) before,  
Lord, why have you come (to me) now?,"  
asked the Diviner who wears a thread.  
11) "Please sit, Sir" (and so saying) he brought a three-legged stool,  
did the Diviner who wears a thread.

The thread-wearing diviner is obviously a Brahman. It is interesting to note the surprise of the Brahman that the lord should come visiting, and to note the reason for their interaction. Then, as is largely true today, there was little participation even among the indigenous nobility in the religious practice of the Brahman and only marginal participation of the Brahman in the cult of the king.<sup>10</sup> The Tuluva non-Brahman population as a whole has always been much more deeply involved in ancestor

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10. Note: Pannikar in 1918 notes a similar situation in Kerala, immediately to the south of Tuluva. There the Nayars are the ruling caste. "But the important point with regard to this is that the Nayars are as a whole a people almost without a religion (i.e., Hinduism) and they use Hindu temples for practices which receive no sanction even in the generous vagueness of that creed. The religious conceptions of Hinduism have but the slightest influence on the Nayar community as a whole . . . . Though they have been Hindused in form, and have belonged to the Hindu fold, their primitive beliefs have even survived to a great extent." *Man* July, 1918, no. 62, p. 104.

and spirit worship of the type described later in the legend than it was in any of the Aryan rituals performed by the Brahman. Yet, the Brahman has apparently long been recognized as an expert interpreter of supernatural intervention, even in areas where he did not deign to participate in the ritual itself. Here we see the use of language of mutual respect. The trepidation of the Brahman before the king is a common Tulu folk image of his cowardice.<sup>11</sup> However, the service of the Brahman does not lower his status vis-a-vis the king, for he is a professional, and the king comes to him for ritual advice in time of dire need.

- 12) "Oh, Brahman will you hear (me)",  
said Lord Pangala Bannare.
- 13) "Idle whiling (must come) later",  
said Lord Pangala Bannare.
- 14) "The business I came for must come first",  
said Lord Pangala Bannare
- 15) You must cast a handful (of cowrie shells for fortune-telling)  
and tell me the truth",  
said Lord Pangala Bannare.

Lines #13 and #14 are standard phrases expressing urgency in many *pāḍḍanas*. Literally they read "sitting work behind (me); coming work before (me)", in which each of the terms contain a semantic opposition, including the word for work in each phrase: *kājja* in the first and *kariya* in the second. *Kājja* has the meaning of meaningless, menial chore, done for its own sake or to keep the doer occupied. *Kariya* has the sense of importance, duty, the very motivation of ones actions. It is a small but excellent example of a type of poetic expression through semantic contrast that occurs throughout the *pāḍḍanas*.

Line #15 is the standard *pāḍḍana* request to perform divination. The Tulu phrase is ladden with rhyme: "*puṇḍitta dīwoḍu / kaṇḍitta pannoḍu*". It literally translates: "handful (you) should keep / truthful (you) should tell." All who hear this know that the lord is requesting that a handful of cowrie shells should be cast and that the Brahman should read the signs whatever they may indicate. The implication of the second part of the phrase, if it is not mere rhythmic balance, is that Brahmans sometimes do not tell the truth. It is hard to tell, in this case, whether the mistrust derives from the Brahman's questionable dis-interest in the prediction, or suspicion that he might lie for fear that the patron might not always like to hear a harsh truth, or, perhaps, that the Brahman is feared because of his power of prediction, and the truth is better than the fate the Brahman could *cause* by what he utters. Indeed,

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11. cf. Burnell, 1894, p. 40.

perhaps the phrase reflects the ambivalent attitude toward the Brahman as to whether he is cunning, cowardly, or powerful.

- 16) The Brahman heard these words,  
did the thread bearing Brahman,
- 17) and took up a pot in his hand,  
did the thread bearing Brahman,
- 18) The Brahman went to the place of the dug-well,  
the place where the water-lift dips,  
did the thread bearing Brahman
- 19) He got himself a bucket of water,  
did the thread bearing Brahman
- 20) Then he bathed his head and body,  
did the thread bearing Brahman
- 21) The Brahman bathed in cold water,  
did the thread bearing Brahman
- 22) The Brahman brings a pot of water,  
does the thread bearing Brahman<sup>12</sup>
- 23) The Brahman circumambulates the *Tulasi* shrine three times,  
does the thread bearing Brahman
- 24) The Brahman pours the pot of water on the *Tulasi*,  
does the thread bearing Brahman.
- 25) The Brahman quickly goes into the house,  
does the thread bearing Brahman
- 26) The Brahman brings out a divining board,  
does the thread bearing Brahman.

This long step-by-step description of the details of an act is characteristic of the treatment of ceremony in the *pāddana* literature. Weddings are usually treated in the same manner. In this case each distinctive act of Brahmanical ritual, as it is seen from an uninitiate observer's perspective, is enumerated: the use of water, bathing in cold water, circumambulation of the *Tulasi* (sacred basil plant) shrine. The passage is loaded with Sanskrit loan words—*snāna* (bath), *parajāka* (circumambulation), *maṅtime* (shrine)—each associated with the Brahman's distinctive ritual, and in marked distinction to ordinary Tulu words for the same acts and items. Probably the length of this passage is meant to underscore the authenticity or the efficacy of the Brahman's prediction which is to come. Anyone who is so elaborate in his fastidiousness *must* produce something of importance!

- 27) "You must cast the handful (of cowrie shells), and tell me the truth,"  
said Lord Pangala Bannare.

12. I have retained the change of tense found in the original. I do not see any significance to it, but others may.

- 28) "Oh, Lord, You,  
Lord Pangala Bannare,"
- 29) "Touch one of the piles (of shells), and put a coin (on it),  
Lord Pangala Bannare,"  
said the thread wearing Brahman.
- 30) Then he touched (one of the) pile(s), and placed a coin (on it),  
did Lord Pangala Bannare.
- 31) Then he looked to see the fortune of the cowrie shells,  
did the fortune-telling Diviner.
- 32) "Oh, Lord, do you listen, oh Lord,"  
said the fortune-telling Diviner,
- 33) "There is a great Spirit,"  
said the fortune-telling Diviner,
- 34) "It has come to the court of Pangala Bannare, it has come within."  
said the fortune-telling Diviner.
- 38) "The Spirit is Panjila Jumadi."  
said the fortune-telling Diviner.

In Tulunad Brahmans are noted for their ability in divination. I have seen the mode referred to here. The diviner lays out a certain number of shells in a certain number of piles. Ostensibly, the fortune is read by noting the relationship of the shells in the pile selected, whether they are turned up or down, and in which direction they lie. The coin which is used to select which pile contains the patron's fortune is then kept as the fee (*kāṇike*). The word for fortune, *balme*, and for diviner, *balyāye*, come from the root, *bal-*, 'strength, power, power of sight.'

That the disease in the cattle shed and the nursery is due to a spirit is no surprise; it is implied in the use of the word *apottu* in line 2, and the cultural knowledge that misfortunes of this nature are usually caused by the presence of some new supernatural agent. The question is: which one, and what does it want?

The word I have translated Spirit, is *daiva*. Tulva culture conceives of the supernatural largely in a bifurcation of local, ancestral ghosts (*bhūta*) and pan-Indian Hindu gods (*dēvaru*). *Daiva* refers to a type of powerful spirit associated with the king, a *rājendaiva*, or royal spirit which may be regarded as a sub-category of *bhūta*. Like the social class they represent, the *rājendaiva* are elevated above and are surrounded by the ancestral spirits (*bhūta*) of the families of the king's vassals and servants. This specific *rājendaiva* is Panjila Jumadi, "Jumadi and boar". Jumadi is a common *rājendaiva* and is usually accompanied by a lesser boar spirit called *bapta*, or warrior-servant, whom she commands. Jumadi is female, but is nonetheless often pictured with a mustache. The name Jumadi, it may be said, comes from the Sanskrit *Dhūmawati*, a terrifying

form of the Goddess (*dēvi*) worshipped primarily in North India, where she is regarded by her worshippers as supreme, even over her own lord Siva. But the androgenous Tuluva Jumadi is more masculine than feminine. She controls nature in much the same way the manor lord controls society. Together they rule the realm. The raw, prolific but dangerous powers of nature are symbolized in the wild boar, *panjorli*. Jumadi has 'captured' this, tamed it, rides it, gives it permission to speak, gives it warrant to receive offerings from man and punish man if man does not. The boar is Jumadi's warrior, *baṅta*.

What the great spirit wants is sustenance and glorification. The ceremony it calls for is a *bali nēma* ('offering of ceremony'), the usual ceremony held annually for a *rājendaiva* in front of the old manor houses throughout Tuluwad up to this day. It was customary to build a manor such that the field directly down from and in front of the front gate of the manor would be the largest one in the realm. Royal families were noted by their manors, and their manor by the front gate and the size of the field in front of it. There all ceremonies took place and large crowds were able to gather. The new spirit wanted its place in this schema.

The word *bali* means sacrifice and the idea that the spirit wishes to consume an offering is reinforced by the word *bōgane*, feast. Both words are Sanskritic, and imply a religious feast-offering. We may note that there is no mention of a blood sacrifice in what is offered, but there is cooked food—rice. The request for a serving basket-full, i.e., enough for many people, indicates the appetite or 'desire' of a spirit, and, indirectly, its potential to do harm. The other two items mentioned, the tender (emerging, young) fronds of the coconut palm and the flower of the betel-nut palm, are of complex significance. The words for both items have related double meanings. The word for a tender emerging coconut frond is *siri*. While the word generally may be used for any kind of tender young shoot or regrowth (eg. of the paddy plant after harvest) its primary reference is to the young frond of the coconut. The reference is visual: the *siri* is soft, and pliable, of a pale creamy color and a slight fresh fragrance. Cut properly, it can be made into a skirt, which, when wrapped around and around the waist, produces an impressively pleasing motion as the tender leaflets flow with the movements of the wearer. It is the usual garment for possession dances. But the word *siri* has another meaning: holy, bountiful and gracious. For example, the feet of the god *Nārāyaṇo* are called, in some *pāddanas*, *siri pāde*, 'blessed feet'. This meaning probably derives from the Sanskritic term *Sri*, the name of the goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of bounty, whose name in Tulu would be pronounced *Siri*.

The word for the flower of the betel-nut palm is *pingāra*. While it

too connotes an item of tenderness, pliancy, a pale creaminess, it is associated even more strongly with ornamentation. Here the Sanskrit word *singara* (ornament, decoration) has evidently had an influence. The *pingāra* strikingly resembles the royal whisk, made of the white hairs of the yak. On the other hand, the soft white strands of the *pingāra* lined with the tiny nuts resembles a string of pearls. The *pingāra* is a common flower offering to indigenous spirits, especially female ones.

Another reason the *siri* and the *pingāra* are essential items for the indigenous ceremonies called *nēma* is because they have the common property of being the aesthetic epitome of all that is young, tender and vulnerable. In many of the offerings in Tuluva ritual we can see freshness, tenderness, virginity as common elements. Spirits, who are always dangerous, are believed to be particularly attracted to the young, who are therefore especially vulnerable. In predicting that the spirit wanted *siri* and *pingāra*, the diviner sees the commonality between these items and the calves in the shed and the babies in their cradles. He suggests a substitution. Furthermore, the *siri* and the *pingāra* are a "sacrifice" on the part of the lord. The items detract from a maximal harvest: the *siri* because it endangers the tree and sets back its growth, and the *pingāra* because it is a premature harvest of the crop. Both items are 'consumed' in the sense that they are useless after the ceremony and upon a short exposure to the air they fade and lose their attractiveness. The imagery clearly states how a situation of affliction is responded to by substitution of the victims and glorification of the afflicting agent. The offering has the sense of tribute, too, similar to the pan-Dravidian maxim: "if an elephant is fed fodder reaped by man it eats less than it simply destroys if it is allowed on the rampage in the paddy fields." This maxim is often applied to the king himself and justifies tax and tithe.

The beat of the beaded anklet in stanza 36 refers to the hollow bronze anklets (*gaggora*) worn by the possession dancer at *nēma* ceremonies. The anklet represents the warrior's anklet on which were pictured his valorous deeds. The sound of the anklets is felt to attract the spirit to the body of the dancer. Possessed, the sound of the anklet on the legs of the dancer gives auditory evidence of the frenzied presence of the spirit. The dance gives opportunity to the Spirit-king to proclaim its power and ferocity. This power is the same as the one which the lord possesses and gives him the right to rule.

- 39) "Do you listen! Diviner,"  
said Lord Pangala Bannare,

- 40) "Gather up the shells and let me be on my way,"  
said Lord Pangala Bannare,
- 41) So the Diviner gathered up the shells and bid (him) on his way,  
did the fortune-telling Diviner.
- 42) Thus, he came along,  
Lord Pangala Bannare,
- 43) He came to the court of Bannara,  
Lord Pangala Bannare,
- 44) He called the heads of the neighboring households,  
did Lord Pangala Bannare.
- 45) They came as they were called,  
did the neighboring people.
- 46) "Why have you called us, Lord? What is the matter?"  
ask the neighboring people.
- 47) "You must go down among the villages,"  
said Lord Pangala Bannare,
- 48) "Leave no standing house, leave no open door,"  
said Lord Pangala Bannare,
- 49) "From each house one tender palm frond, and one tender coconut,"  
said Lord Pangala Bannare,
- 50) "Carry them here,"  
said Lord Pangala Bannare.

In line 40 Bannare asks the diviner to "gather up the shells and let me be on my way." The request for leave (*appane*, 'leave, command,') is apparently necessary in order to 'close' the contact with those powers that determine one's fortune. This, again, indicates the nature of the power that the Brahman was seen to control in the eyes of the non-Brahman population. In general, there is little hint in the *pāddana* tradition that the Brahman occupies a position of purity, or that his acknowledgedly superior status is directly based upon a concept of purity. Instead, as suggested in this line, it is seen in relation to the specialized access to supernatural powers of potential danger.

Bannare returns home and asks his council to go among the people of his realm to collect a tithe for the ceremony he has planned. The phrase I have translated 'neighboring people' is a literal translation of the Tulu, *nire-kare tāla mandelū*. There is no specific indication that this is indeed a council. It may be that the petty lords of Tulunad, at least this one, had no specific standing council of ministers, and those he called upon to perform duties on his behalf were simply those in his immediate vicinity whom he could gather together at a moment's notice. Still, if an analogy may be drawn from the present day, this group would refer to a council of village leaders, heads of the important households of the dominant Bant caste, a body called the *kūdakattu* or *ōdikattu*. He

requests them to go down to the village (*ūru*), or the extent of his realm. All of this suggests that he was merely a petty chieftain.

Although the tithe he levies is not the *siri* and *pingāra* that the *daiva* had requested, the meaning is much the same. The tender coconut (*boṇḍa*) has the same quality of immaturity as the *siri* and *pingāra*. A tender coconut is the usual refreshment given to a respected guest on a hot day. At present day *nēma* ceremonies great quantities of these are consumed by the spirit possessing his medium. The *boṇḍa* has the quality of coolness (*tampu*) which is shared by many unripe foods and flowers, and is therefore even on hot days consumed with caution for fear of creating a great unbalance of heat and cold in the body. When the spirits consume great quantities of *boṇḍa* during these ceremonies it implies they have such enormous heat about them that they can absorb any amount of coolness. More literally what is being stated by this act is that their thirst (desire) is unquenchable. Hence the addition of the *boṇḍa* to the offering supplements the imagery of the offerings mentioned before.

- 51) The people heard these words,  
the neighboring people
- 52) They went down to the villages and hamlets,  
did the neighboring people
- 53) Leaving no standing house, leaving no open door,  
did the neighboring people,
- 54) They gathered from each house one tender palm frond, and one  
tender coconut,  
did the neighboring people.
- 55) Going along thus, they went to Hill-House which belonged to  
Alibali Nayaka,  
did the neighboring people
- 56) "Hey, Nayaka, did you hear?,"  
called the neighboring people.
- 57) "One tender palm frond and one tender coconut!,"  
called the neighboring people.
- 58) "A spirit has come to the court of Bannara—a new spirit has come  
within",  
said the neighboring people.
- 59) " 'Leaving no standing house, leaving no open door,  
gather one tender palm frond and one tender coconut' ",  
said the neighboring people.
- 60) To this Nayak says,  
says Alibali Nayak of the Hill:
- 61) "The frond (I shall give) as the tender palm frond, is the blade  
of the screw-pine tree"  
said Alibali Nayak of the Hill

- 62) "the nut (I shall give) as the tender coconut is the nut  
of the strychnine tree"  
said Alibali Nayak of the Hill
- 63) "May a host of forest spirits come to the court of Bannara!",  
said Alibali Nayak of the Hill.

Nayak's arrogant reply to his lord's request almost resembles a riddle in format. The young leaves of the screw-pine (*muṇḍēwuda nekki*) and the nuts of the strychnine are diametrically opposed to the *siri* and the *bonḍa* in all of their associational characteristics. About the only common element is that the young leaves (*nekki*) of the screw-pine and the young leaves (*siri*) of the coconut palm look somewhat similar and both the coconut and the strychnine nut are both nuts. The mature screw-pine leaf (*oli*), though, has three rows of sickle-shaped thorns running their entire length, which are sharp and dangerous. While the coconut is a valued cultivated crop the screw-pine almost epitomizes a useless wild plant which thrives in unattended abundance along the river banks. It is used to make mats, but, like all products made of uncultivated material, these are not held in esteem.

The strychnine tree is also associated with the forest and useless plentitude. The fruit is said to be sweet, but deadly poisonous. This irony of nature sums up the character of Nayak's contribution.

The name, Nayak, indicates a member of the Billava caste. In other versions of the *pāḍḍana* it is made clear that, though of relatively low caste, Nayak was quite wealthy. The name further suggests a title of some military rank. This is not the only *pāḍḍana* in which a member of the Billava caste expresses his disdain for the attitude of superiority claimed by the aristocracy. As a whole, the Billava caste harbors a barely contained animosity toward the higher castes, particularly the ruling Bant caste, who, as the Billava sees it, have risen to prosperity and glory on their labors, yet always hedge on the tacit agreement to return the favors, keeping the Billava in filial bondage.<sup>14</sup> The retort, "May a host of forest spirits come to the court of Bannara" is laden with sarcasm. Indeed, Nayak's contribution is one fit only for the lowly starving forest spirits (here he uses the term *bhūta*). What Nayak is saying is: "What is so special about Bannare's spirits that I too should honor them? Let what spirits will, come to the court of Bannara, I shall not honor them!"

13. Both of the meanings of the word 'siri', tender, young growth', and 'regrowth' may, of course, be related to the deity, also called siri. A more obvious, the classical *Srī*, the wife of *Viṣṇu*. See Claus, 1975.

14. cf. Burnell, 1896, 309-10.

This of course brings us to the realization that the spirits worshipped by one lord, despite the fact that they initially appear as an affliction, are also a representation—and, as we shall soon see, an instrument—of the nature of the lord's control over the population. His affliction is theirs; they collectively bear the brunt of converting this affliction into a ceremony bringing honor and glory to all—the spirit, the lord and the realm. Nayak, however, won't play the game. He is fed up and not a little bit jealous; a rebellious vassal.

- 64) The people heard these words,  
did the neighboring people
- 65) "Let us go, then, let us to",
- 66) When they returned,  
the neighboring people
- 67) "Oh, people, say there!",  
called Lord Pangala Bannare,
- 68) "Did you bring the tender coconut fronds,  
did you bring the tender coconut,  
leaving no standing youse, leaving no open door,  
did you bring these things?"  
asked Lord Pangala Bannare.
- 69) "We brought the tender coconut fronds,  
we brought tender coconuts,"  
replied the neighboring people
- 70) "Every house gave one tender coconut frond,  
every house gave one tender coconut",  
said the neighboring people
- 71) "Only Alibali Nayaka of Hill-House did not give."  
said the neighboring people.
- 72) " 'May a host of forest spirits come to the court of Bannara,  
the frond I shall give is the screw-pine blade,  
the nut I shall give is the strychnine nut! ' "  
repeated the neighboring people
- 73) "It does not matter if Alibali Nayaka does not give,"  
replied Lord Pangala Bannare
- 74) "If there is a great spirit at the court of Bannara,  
it will cause these things to be given."  
replied Lord Pangala Bannare

It is impossible to convey the power of the innocent-sounding statement Bannare makes in lines 73 and 74. It is not a statement of fact at all—it is a powerful curse, a *wāk*. Although the word is from the Sanskrit, *vac*, "speech", the concept is not in the nature of a spell. It is a challenge to the spirit. The proposition is this: "You (spirit) stay here. I will use my influence to 'feed' you. You protect my interests hereafter,

secure my influence in the realm and we will both prosper.” While the lord links his power, glory and perpetuity to the spirit, he also transfers it and the responsibility for maintaining it to the spirit and stands back, relieved of the troublesome job of having to bully the arrogant Nayak himself. In so doing he transfers the fortunes of the realm to the fortunes of the spirit. What has happened is the social equivalent of what a psychiatrist, speaking of personality traits, would call projection and transference.

When a *wāk* is used in everyday life it is only used as a last resort, too dangerous, too devastating to be considered a mild threat. A person, say, who has tried repeatedly to retrieve money lent to another might state: “Oh, don’t return the money to me, return it to the deity of such and such a temple”. Left out of this statement are the words: “Trying to get money from you is like trying to get water from a stone! I pledge this money to God—it is His money. Let Him perform this miracle!” An alternative to the out-and-out *wāk*, where the aggrieved gets nothing but vindictive satisfaction, is the pledge to the deity, “I will promise you (*parake*) an offering of foods and flowers costing “X” amount if you retrieve this money (or lost or stolen article) for me.” This is not regarded as effective as the *wāk*, perhaps because it is a plea, not a challenge to the deity. Intermediate is the *hoilu* (Tulu, *poilu*), described in a paper by Edward Harper (Harper, 1957), in which the aggrieved strikes a bargain with the deity: “Half of the sum if Yours, if You can get it back for us.”

- 75) “Go to where Pambada Parava Ramu lives”,  
said Lord Pangala Bannare
- 76) “Tell (him) to come here”,  
said Lord Pangala Bannare
- 77) “You must go to Pambada Parava Ramu’s hut,”  
said Lord Pangala Bannare
- 78) “tell him a spirit has come to the court of Bannara  
said Lord Pangala Bannare
- 79) “The spirit asks to descend to the field in front of the manor and  
have a ceremony performed in his honor;  
It wants to hear the beat of the beaded anklets,  
the spirit of Pancila Jumadi.”  
said Lord Pangala Bannare.
- 80) “Pancila Jumadi asks for an offering of a serving basket of cooked  
rice,  
You must call Pambada Parava Ramu,’  
said Lord Pangala Bannare
- 81) A messenger was sent and went on his way to the place of Pambada  
Parava Ramu,

## Kantanne, the Messenger

The request of the spirit—as does the traditional *nēma* ceremony—implies a spirit-medium, a person in whose body the spirit comes in order to receive the honors and offerings the lord presents to it. The spirit-medium is a dance-medium, strikingly like a living dancing idol when he is fully attired in the custom of the spirit. He actively receives the offerings and dramatically portrays the character of the spirit. One of the great curiosities of the South Indian religious tradition is why, then, this functionary should be always of a lowly caste. In Tuluva culture of today there are three castes of dance-mediums: the Pambada, the Parava (in this legend interestingly combined) and the Nalke. All of these are regarded as lowly, but not the lowest castes in the social structure. Still lower is the forest 'tribe' of Koragas whose status is almost beyond the pale of humanity. Even in this legend one can see the contrast of the medium's position vis-a-vis the lord with that of the Brahman-diviner. However, one should be careful not to view the dancer-medium's position in any way as a direct opposition to the Brahman, who is, after all, not formally a part of the cult. The lord goes personally to consult the Brahman, sends a delegation to collect the tithe, and sends a messenger to summon the Pambada-Parava. Mention of the name of the messenger, Kantanne, suggests a personal servant of relatively low status, a reflection on the low status of the person summoned. The dwelling of the Pambada-Parava is a *buḍara* (as opposed to the *illu*, 'house' of the villager, and the *aramane*, 'palace' of the Brahman) which I have translated 'hut'. The language of the *pāḍdana* suggests that the hut of the Pambada-Parava is at the parameter of the village. While it is not possible to say exactly why the medium should have a low status, it is possible to suggest that there are some 'locational' associations which link spirits to forests, ghosts to margins of the sphere of the living, and Pambada-Parava to residential boundaries. Ghosts, spirits and forests are all sources of danger unless controlled. The Pambada-Parava are the only ones who can contain and control these phenomena, but only so long as they remain peripheral entities themselves. They are themselves—their beings—boundaries which allow the living society to have proximate contact with, and exercise control of, dangerous sources of power. But even so, the king, the heroic protector of the realm, must confront this power before his subjects can approach. Here we get ahead of ourselves.

82) When he (Kantanne) called, only she was home,  
Ramu's Korati (his wife)<sup>15</sup>

15. *Korati*, the term for wife among the Paravas and other quasi-tribal people, is

- 83) "Who is calling,"  
asked Ramu's Korati
- 84) "Where has Pambada Parava Tamu gone to?"  
asked Kantanne the Messenger
- 85) "He went to the betel-nut garden in search of the sheath of the  
betel-nut pod,"  
said Ramu's Korati.
- 86) "You must call him,"  
said Kantanne the Messenger
- 87) "He is not within earshot for me to call,  
when he comes I will tell him (your message)."  
said Ramu's Korati.
- 88) "You must tell him to come to the court of Bannara,"  
said Kantanne the Messenger.
- 89) So saying, Kantanne returned,  
did Kantanne the Messenger.
- 90) "Did you tell him, child!\* Did you call Ramu? ",  
asked Lord Pangala Bannare.
- 91) "Yes, Lord. But he was not there. I told his Korati  
(to) tell him when he came",  
said Kantanne, the Messenger.
- 92) Ramu, who had gone to the betel-nut garden in search of the  
betel-pod sheath, returned to his house,  
did Pambada Parava Ramu.
- 93) "Oh, husband, did you hear, husband,"  
cried Ramu's Korati,
- 94) It seems a great spirit has come to the court of the Lord."  
said Ramu's Korati,
- 95) It is said it has asked to come down to the field in front of the  
manor, to have a ceremony performed in its honor,  
said Ramu's Korati.
- 96) "It asked for an offering of a basket of rice,  
and the beat of the beaded anklet."  
said Ramu's Korati.
- 97) They said you must come at once!",  
said Ramu's Korati.
- 98) "Hey! Korati, listen!,"  
said Pambada Parava Ramu.

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different from that of other castes, *bodedi*. The term is used by other castes as a collective term of address and reference for all married women of these castes. Similarly the word for other low castes is derived from their terms for "husband". Thus, e.g. the caste name *koraga* means husband in that caste, *Bākude*, a term for the Mundalda caste, derives from their word for husband.

\* The lord addressed his servants in familial terms. The term used here is the neuter, *maga*.

- 99) "Put out a pot (of feed) to fill the belly of the *didambōri* bull."<sup>16</sup>  
 100) Korati put out a pot of 'horse-gram' mash for the *didambōri* bull,  
 did Ramu's Korati.  
 101) Then Ramu himself brought out the *didambōri* bull and tethered it.  
 did Pambada Parava Ramu.  
 102. Ramu himself decorated and adorned the *didambōri* bull,  
 did Pambada Parava Ramu.  
 103) After decorating and adorning, he tied his pack to the *didambōri* bull.  
 did Pambada Parava Ramu  
 104) He brought the bull around and affixed the bundle holding his  
 costume,  
 did Pambada Parava Ramu  
 105) Ramu set off, driving the bull in front and coming behind himself,  
 did Pambada Parava Ramu.

Some of the preceding episode is touched with humor. The *pāḍḍanas*, especially this version which was sung in the tradition of the field songs, serve as entertaining diversion to lighten tedious work. Ramu's scrounging for free forest products to make use of; Kantanne's lack of success in finding the master of the house at home, then reporting that he told the message to Ramu's wife; then Ramu's slightly pretentious setting off with his decorated bull, are all slightly touched with the ludicrous. This is especially so if there is the suggestion that any of these people are acting on their own behalf rather than as mere servants of the king. Such situations are the fiber of village humor.

- 106) He descended into the field in front of Bannara manor,  
 did Pambada Parava Ramu  
 107) After descending into the field, the bull went three steps  
 did that *didambōri* bull.  
 108) The bull stumbled with its right leg and fell flat on its face,  
 did that *didambōri* bull.  
 109) At that Parava Ramu gasped and let out a shout,  
 did Pambada Parava Ramu.  
 110) He flew to the court of Bannara,  
 did Pambada Parava Ramu.

Hardly an accident, and not even an evil omen, there is no doubt that the magnificent bull was brought to knees by the spirit itself. I have

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16. *Didambōri* apparently is the name of the bull. It connotes a large, magnificent beast, of the sort associated with temples. There is a large ceremonial drum called a *didambu* in some temples; *bōri* is Tulu for bull. Like many expensive articles held by a Parava—who could hardly have earned the money to purchase such things himself—the bull is actually the property of either the lord or was dedicated to a deity. It is Ramu's responsibility only to care for it.

watched many times while a spirit-possessed dancer-medium, carrying torches in either hand, thrust his ferociously painted face inches from the nose of a terrified, scrawny bull and let out a series of blood-curdling screams until the trembling animal finally collapsed in fright. The act can have no meaning in a Hinduism which professes to worship the bovine. But even if we equate the bull with the king, or, as was suggested to me in the field, see it as belonging to the spirit itself, I am hard pressed to comprehend the overall significance of this act.

- 111) "Oh, Lord! the *didambōri* bull with me stumbled, Lord!"  
cried Pambada Parava Ramu
- 112) "The bull fell flat on its face, Lord!,"  
wept Pambada Parava Ramu
- 113) Hearing these words the Lord said  
"Don't fear, Ramu, don't weep."  
said Lord Pangala Bannare
- 114) "There is a great spirit in my court, Ramu,  
(but the bull will get up",  
replied Lord Pangala Bannare
- 115) The Lord descended to the great field in front of the manor,  
did Lord Pangala Bannare
- 116) "Oh, stand, bull. *Didambōri* bull, get up!",  
said Lord Pangala Bannare
- 117) he put his hand to the bull's withers,  
did Lord Pangala Bannare
- 118) With a start the bull arose and stood aright,  
that *didambōri* bull.

The power of the lord to control and undo the destruction caused by a wanton force is brought to light. This is the essence of the king's religious functions: the confrontation with foreign power and the protection of the beings of his realm.

- 119) Then Ramu the *didambōri* bull forward and came to the courtyard  
of Bannara manor,  
did Pambada Parava Ramu
- 120) He tied the *didambōri* bull to the stone pillar,  
did Pambada Parava Ramu.
- 121) "Now you must unpack (and put on) the ceremonial ornaments",  
said Lord Pangala Bannare.
- 122) Then the Lord induced the spirit (to come to) the court (in the  
body of Ramu),  
did Lord Pangala Bannare

In a present day cult possession ceremony (*nēma*) the Parava takes a long time to don his garb and takes elaborate pains to request the village

lord's permission to be possessed by the spirits of the village. Here Ramu does not state this request but only dons the garb and undergoes possession at the command of the lord. To invite the spirit into his body while not in the presence of the lord (or one of his representatives) would not only be illegitimate, but dangerous. Only a powerful medium would take upon such a force alone, without the controlling power of the king. Such mediums are greatly feared.

- 123) (We) must bring the ceremonial ornaments (*siri* and *pingāra*) to the field,  
 (We) must take the offering of a serving basket of rice",  
 said Lord Pangala Bannare
- 124) The Lord had the ornaments carried to the field,  
 did Lord Pangala Bannare
- 125) With Ramu and the *didambōri* bull in front,  
 and the ornaments (carried) behind,  
 they went in procession to the middle of the great field.  
 The spirit was thus established in that place,  
 that great Spirit.

This then is the ceremony promised by Bannare to honor the spirit. We have to picture for ourselves the larger scene. The field is perhaps ten acres, flat but bounded by the walls which retain water during the paddy cultivation. Tonight it is filled with throngs of people, the villagers. At the center of the field is the shrine decorated with mango leaves, whole banana stalks, hundreds of *pingāra*, surrounded by the light of torches. Into this comes the procession of the spirit, the lord, the magnificent bull, bearers carrying the ornaments of gold and silver, others carrying banners of the Manor. The tribal Koragas line the walled perimeter of the field beating enormous log drums in unison such that the earth itself seems to be rumbling. Musicians meet the procession with the blare of brass horns and drum rolls. A spectacle of light, sound and humanity.

- 126) "Hold a while the offering of rice!",  
 said that great Spirit.
- 127) "Let the decorations and preparations remain in the field!"  
 said that great Spirit.
- 128) "I need one hour's time",  
 said that great Spirit
- 129) "I will take just one hour's time",  
 said that great Spirit

Why? Remember Alibali Nayaka? Remember the challenge

Bannare put to the spirit? Bannare has fulfilled his part, it is now the spirit's turn.

- 130) The spirit took the form of Lord Bannare,  
did that great Spirit
- 131) In the form of Pangala Bannare it went out,  
did that great Spirit.
- 132) The Spirit went along till it came to Hill-House of Alibali Nayak  
did that great Spirit
- 133) In the house of Alibali Nayak lies the young woman,  
Bale Mani,  
Young Bali Mani
- 134) In the form of the Lord, Jumadi came in the middle of the night;  
at the time a cock crowed,  
Lord Pangala Bannare
- 135) "Mani, oh, Mani!,"  
called Lord Pangala Bannare (really the Spirit)
- 136) "Oh, My Lord! Why do you call me in the middle of the night?,"  
asked Young Bale Mani
- 137) "May I come in?,"  
asked Lord Pangala Bannare
- 138) "Give me a bit of a coal (fire), Mani! Get up!,"  
asked Lord Pangala Bannare
- 139) "Three days ago I gave birth, My Lord  
I am a new mother of but three days,"  
replied Young Bale Mani
- 140) "How am I to give you what you want, My Lord,"  
asked Young bale Mani.

The association of the lord and the spirit which we have traced through its various stages is completed with the remarkable merging of the two beings. What began as an affliction in the court of the king has been transformed, step by step, into an instrument of the king's rule. The spirit acts now as an agent of feudal morality, responsible for maintaining order and punishing rebellion within the realm.

Again, the approaching affliction takes a classic form. The vulnerable young Mani with her baby must know fully well that the appearance of her Lord in the middle of the night, announced by the unexpected crow of the cock, must be that of a spirit in the form of the lord. Asking for a lighted coal is a sure clue. All spirits have a desire for fire; when their kind-hearted human victim gives it to them they grab the human life. This fire is life to the dead, and death to the living.

Mani's response in lines 139 and 140 is both a ruse and a dilemma. She may suspect her Lord is in reality a dangerous spirit, and she knows

that as a new mother she and her baby exist in that most vulnerable state between the living and the dead—childbirth—but she has customary practice to fall back on. No one, especially the king, may enter the room for fear of pollution. Though spirits lurk all about, they cannot traverse the doorsill into that room. Nor would anybody expect her to rise and leave her baby alone for even a moment to bring something out of the room. Surrounded by taboos, guarded by special personnel, equipped with charms of magical power and motivated with a mother's instinctive desires to protect her child, she is confined in a compartment of liminal existence for 16 days until finally 'decontaminated'. She and her newly-named child may then enter the realm of society. But what if her Lord should ask her to come out? Is her duty not first to Him? And He asks so little. This is the second request the Lord has made. We remember that her brother, Alibali Nayaka, already refused a request of the king. Agreed, Bannare himself would not put Mani into this predicament, but this is a Spirit. The spirit is clever, and has the power of illusion (*māya*). He comes in the form of the lord himself and refusal is much harder than was Nayaka's. Hence the situation sharpens the conflict: to serve the king, or the family; to give to the spirits desires, or to protect the baby.

- 141) "There are seven mid-wives in waiting with me, Lord,  
shall I wake them?"  
asked Young Bale Mani.
- 142) "Don't wake the mid-wives, Mani,"  
said Lord Pangala Bannare
- 143) "Your mid-wives work hard all day, Mani  
They are exhausted,"  
said Lord Pangala Bannare
- 144) Don't spoil their sleep, Mani,  
Don't rouse them,"  
said Lord Pangala Bannare
- 145) "Then my brother is there."  
said Young Bale Mani
- 146) "From morning till evening Nayake's work  
is to climb the sago and palmyra palms, Mani,"  
said Lord Pangala Bannare
- 147) "Nayake sleeps for his life!  
Don't wake him, Mani!"  
said Lord Pangala Bannare
- 148) "You get up, Mani! Bring me a coal."  
said Lord Pangala Bannare
- 149) So Mani got up and took hold of her small silver sickle and tiny  
umbrella,  
did Young Bale Mani

- 150) She took a coal from the incense pot,  
did Young Bale Mani.

The personnel who protect the new mother and her child from the influence of danger from without are the men of a house and the midwife. Of course they have other duties as well—and it is by reference to the other duties the spirit, master of trickery and deception, is able to lure Mani close to him. She falls back on her magic: the small silver sickle (*gajje katti*, a small sickle with tiny metal bells), the tiny umbrella (*pani tatra*) and frankincense (*lōbana*). Without giving conjectural history and significance of these items, suffice it to say they are magical charms provided to women in childbirth and forty days thereafter to ward off evil influence. In *pāḍḍana* after *pāḍḍana*, we find in these instruments the source of mystical power of females.

- 151) She brought the coal to the edge of the doorsill,  
did Young Bale Mani
- 152) Holding the tiny umbrella in front of her face,  
she placed one foot on the other side of the doorsill,  
did Young Bale Mani
- 153) In her right hand she passed out the coal to her Lord,  
did Young Bale Mani
- 154) “It is the middle of the night, Mani,  
don’t spoil your brother’s fortune.  
Put both feet across the sill, Mani”  
said Lord Pangala Bannare.

References to superstitions and charms such as these, the sacred nature of the doorsill, passing alms with the right hand, prohibitions on giving alms from within the house or straddling the doorsill, and restrictions at certain times of the day, are all part of an elaborate and intricate code of etiquette. To break these rules is not merely to be rude, but to injure the good luck and fortune of the house. A woman would hardly willingly do anything to lessen the fortune of her husband’s or brother’s house, for she too is dependent upon it. Singularly these acts appear as superstitions, but when we add them all up, see them in context, we see that they are a whole language of morality, filled with allusions to the boundaries of social categories and the relationships of respect which exist between them. The spirit cleverly reminds Mani of her social responsibilities in the terms of this language in order to lure her out of the house, which he himself may not enter.

- 155) Out away from the (protection of) the doorsill,  
holding the tiny umbrella in front of her face,  
she gave over the coal to the Lord  
did Young Bale Mani.

- 156) Though the tiny umbrella was held between them,  
he took the coal,  
did Lord Pangala Bannare
- 157) While he took the coal with his left hand,  
he abducted Mani into the Realm of Illusion with his right,  
did Lord Pangala Bannare.
- 158) "Alas! For the sake of one tender palm frond,  
For the sake of one tender coconut!"  
cried Young Bale Mani.
- 159) "My brother gave me into the hand of Jumadi!"  
cried Young Bale Mani

The Realm of Illusion is the land of the spirits and ghosts. It is not some distant world, though it is sometimes associated with the forests and lies beyond the boundaries of human habitation. It appears to be more a separate mode of existence: *māya*, 'illusion-form'. Despite all of her precautions and charms, despite social custom and her basic maternal instinct, she was lured to the spirit, the master of illusion. But it was on the basis of a moral obligation—precisely the one her brother, Alibali Nayaka failed in—that she was enticed away. So, in more ways than one was she the payment for his wrong.

As soon as she crosses that border which separates the two realms she realizes painfully what has happened.

- 160) "Oh, Lord, please listen, my Lord!"  
asked Young Bale Mani
- 161) "However you made me (to enter) the Realm of Illusion, Lord",  
asked Young Bale Mani,
- 162) "So too make my baby to come also,"  
asked Young Bale Mani
- 163) Thus the Lord returned to the house,  
Lord Pangala Bannare.
- 164) Putting his hand through the window  
he drew the babe's cradle out,  
did Lord Pangala Bannare
- 165) He brought the Babe to the Realm of Illusion,  
did Lord Pangala Bannare
- 166) Then he returned to the court of Bannare,  
that great Spirit.

At this point the tight interweaving and building up of the themes at the natural, supernatural, social and religious planes seem almost complete. The spirit and the lord have been merged, the social obligations of Nayaka to his lord have been fulfilled by his sister to the spirit, and the *siri* and the *pingāra* have become his sister and her baby. Only the proportions have changed.

Yet there has been a new sub-theme created and established in the now spirit-form of Mani which is to fill-out the larger picture in the end. She is what would be called a *bhūta*, or perhaps a ghost (*saitinaye*), the spirit of a once-living being now in the retinue of a more powerful spirit, a *rajendaiva*. Two beliefs of the Tuluva must be mentioned here. One is that people who die with strong desires, or attachments to this world are believed to become dangerous spirits. The other is that the dead are believed to aggregate around the family spirits. The spirits sometimes prematurely take those they especially wish to have with them, that is they kill them in what appears as an untimely death. But if the spirits are remembered and honored and their desires partially satisfied, they will be appeased, and, in fact, be the spiritual protectors of their living relatives. Especially wish to have with them, that is they kill them in what appears as an untimely death. But if the spirits are remembered and honored and their desires partially satisfied, they will be appeased, and, in fact, be the spiritual protectors of their living relatives. Especially, and this is important because Mani falls under this category, if a person dies—i.e. enters the Realm of Maya—by doing a just, virtuous, moral act, that being, now a *bhūta*, may be counted on to look after the welfare of the family which worships it. Conversely, should any punishment of the living be attributed to that spirit, one can always look for a moral justification behind its affliction. While we cannot in Mani's request to Jumadi to take the child look for anything beyond the strong desire of a mother for her child, and the fulfillment of spirit-lord's demand of an offering from Nayak, we shall see that Mani will become a powerful spirit of the realm on her own right.

- 167) "The new spirit carries on the ceremony in his honor in the great  
field of bannara,  
does Panjila Jumadi  
168) Just then, Alibali Nayaka awoke,  
did Alibali Nayake  
169) "Mani! On, Mani!"  
called Alibali Nayake  
170) Wherever he shouts, Mani replies with a "coo",  
Young Bale Mani  
171) She calls out from the drain of the bath house,  
does Young Bale Mani  
172) "If you wanted water, child, Mani,  
do you hear, you have seven attendants"  
called Alibali Nayake  
173) Nayake jumped up and ran outside,  
did Alibali Nayake

- 174) "Mani! Mani!"  
called Alibali Nayake
- 175) While he searched she called out from the taro patch,  
did Young Bale Mani.
- 176) "If you wanted taro, Mani, you have seven attendants",  
called Alibali Nayake
- 177) Nayake rushed to the taro patch,  
did Alibali Nayake
- 178) "Wher are you, child, where are you, Mani?"  
asked Alibali Nayake
- 179) She gave a call from the bank of the river where the clothes  
are washed,  
did Young Bale Mani
- 180) "If you wanted to wash the clothes, child, then I am here,  
Said Alibali Nayake.
- 181) "What has happened to my sister Young Bale Mani?"  
cried Alibali Nayake

Actually, what has happened to Nayake is no different from that what had happened to Bannare. Both were attacked by an afflicting spirit where they are most vulnerable. Nayake need not go to a diviner, though, for he knows the source of his troubles and what is needed. While an earlier Nayake might have said it was really Bannare who came in the night to abduct the sister of an errant servant, the eerie ghost-like, elusive cries indicate to even the most materialistic person that this is a mysterious death. Should he still be in doubt, Mani replies.

- 182) "Oh, brother", said Mani,  
Young Bale Mani
- 183) "For the sake of one tender palm frond,  
for the sake of one tender coconut, do you hear!",  
said Young Bale Mani
- 184) At that did Nayake break down and cry,  
Alibali Nayake
- 185) The following day, he had clusters of tender coconuts cut from  
his trees,  
did Alibali Nayake
- 186) He had bundles of tender palm fronds removed from his trees,  
did Alibali Nayake
- 187) The bundles of fronds and the clusters of nuts  
he had carried to the court of Bannara,  
did Alibali Nayake
- 188) "Oh Lord, please hear me, Lord Pangala Bannare!",  
said Alibali Nayake
- 189) "I have brought bundles of fronds and clusters of nuts"  
said Alibali Nayake

- 190) "The blades of the screw-pine tree are Nayake's tender fronds,"  
replied Lord Pangala Bannare
- 191) "The nuts of the strychnine tree are Nayake's tender coconuts",  
said Lord Pangala Bannare
- 192) Only forest spirits have gathered at the court of Bannara"  
said Lord Pangala Bannare

Bannare uses bitter sarcasm to still further hurt and belittle the repentant Nayaka. He refuses the gifts. Now the king is arrogant.

- 193) "Please have mercy.",  
asked Alibali Nayake
- 194) "Why, brother, do you ask for mercy?",  
said Young Bale Mani.
- 195) "I am here, who have the brightness of the fire which rises in  
your stomach."  
said Young Bale Mani
- 196) I shall raise a fire in his stomach, now, brother,"  
said Young Bale Mani.

So, now Mani is a powerful spirit in her own right, defending the interest of her brother against a king who is treating him unjustly. The entire picture begins to fill out.

- 197) At that time the niece of Lord Pangala Bannare,  
was lying in, having given birth.  
Mani rushed to the new mother,  
did Young Bale Mani
- 198) She sat on the mat where the new mother lay,  
did Young Bale Mani
- 199) "Oh, Do you listen, my Lady!",  
said Young Bale Mani
- 200) "How many days since you gave birth?"  
asked Young Bale Mani
- 201) "Will you come along with me, my Lady?",  
asked Young Bale Mani.
- 202) Thus she brought her Lady into the Realm of Illusion,  
did Young Bale Mani
- 203) You must stay in the carved rail of the cattle shed",  
said Young Bale Mani
- 204) Just then Lord Pangala Bannare came,  
to the inner rooms of the house,  
did Lord Pangala Bannare
- 205) He searched and called for his niece,  
did Lord Pangala Bannare
- 206) "Alas! My God! What sorrows!",  
cried Lord Pangala Bannare

- 207) She made the niece into the illusion form of a waterfowl,  
did Young Bale Mani
- 208) In the form of a waterfowl she stayed in the carved rail of the  
cattle shed,  
the niece of Pangala Bannare
- 209) "Because of one tender coconut and one tender palm frond,  
she came to my court!"  
cried Lord Pangala Bannare
- 210) And so they remain at the court of Bannara  
Young Bale Mani sits by the side of Jumadi  
The niece of Bannare stays in the form of a waterfowl  
carved in the rail of the cattle shed,  
Lulling her baby to sleep.

So, while Jumadi, a spirit which initially appeared to Lord Bannare as an affliction to his calves and children, is transformed into the lord's representative and the rationale of his rule over others, Bale Mani, a spirit of the king's vassal and a product of the king's punishment of the errant subject, comes to ultimately accomplish the affliction as an act performed in defense of her first patron, her own surviving family member, against the king who commits an injustice. We have in this sequence the essence of the spirit cults of Tulunad. We understand now why and how it is that the spirits are regarded as *both* protectors and punishers, *both* beneficial and dangerous (for analysis of cult material of contemporary Tulu material coming to the same conclusion see Claus, 1973). In this *pāddana* it is only clear that Bale Mani, the spirit, is a champion of the king's vassal against the king, but more generally today she is honored and worshipped in regard to childbirth. Her connection with childbirth is on one hand a more general and on the other a more specific role. It is more general in that she is the tutelary spirit of all women, not simply of a particular family, caste or class. It is more specific in that her protection and punishment is restricted to the birth process. However, as I have already indicated, the birth process is critical to every household and in this, the king is no different than anyone else in the realm. Thus when Bale Mani sits on the side of Jumadi at the court of Bannara, she does so not as a spirit champion of a vassal family, nor as an underling of the royal spirit (*rajendaiva*), Jumadi, but as the "Goddess of Procreation."

### *Myth and Cult*

In this section I shall attempt to relate the Bale Mani *pāddana* to the rapidly growing cult of Mayndala. Ostensibly the connection is that it serves as a charter for the king's (read landlord's) control over his vassals (read tenants), which is replicated in the activities of the cult (*nēma*)

of the *rājendaiva*. The *nēma* is a ceremony held once a year to honor the spirits (*daiva* and *bhūta*) of the village (*ūru*). During the *nēma* the spirits manifest themselves by possessing priestly members of the caste they champion, and members of the dance-medium caste (Pambada, Parava and Nalke) who allow them to portray their character. The Landlord's *rājendaiva* possesses a member (*mukaldi*, 'priest-leader') of the landlord's caste and then the Parava on the first night's performance, just as related in the *pāddana*. On the second night, the warrior-hero spirit of the tenant class possesses a member (*pūjāri*) of the Billava caste whose cause they are often called upon to champion. The *nēma* is almost exclusively a male cult. Its social and religious concerns are those of men. Each household of the village is required to send at least one responsible adult male to the ceremony. Each household must contribute to the expenses, and it is the male household head who is responsible for this contribution. Men perform all of the rituals at the ceremony even when the work which these rituals entails (e.g. cooking the food offering) is otherwise a female job. A male specialist serves as a possession vehicle even when the spirit is of a female. The work which is required of the men of the various castes is a quintessential expression of that caste's role in the village. Some castes, such as the Pambada and the Parava derive virtually all of their caste identity from their role in the village *nēma*.

In villages where Mayndala has been worshipped from time beyond memory, her cult is seen in conjunction with village cult of the men. It is held on the third day after the performances of the royal and vassal spirits. Although the functionaries are still all male, the patrons—those who approach the spirit and make offerings—are the women. Mayndala is housed in the shrine with the warrior-heroes of the tenants. Her cult is subsidiary of the major lord-vassal cult of the males, but its themes of protection and punishment can be understood in the context of the larger cult. These themes we have discussed in the commentary to the *pāddana*, and there is no need to restate them here, since this is only true of her cult in places where it was established earlier, not, as we shall see, where her cult has recently spread.

In the past 10–15 years the villages to which the Mayndala cult has spread, still give Mayndala a subsidiary position and her cult is held in a subsidiary time. However, in most cases her cult draws a larger crowd, more offerings and greater interest than do the ceremonies to the royal spirit and his vassal warriors. Thousands of women come to make offerings to Mayndala at these new places while only dozens do at the old. There is no mistake in seeing this as evidence of a change in the religious behavior of the Tuluva people. But is Mayndala really the Bale Mani of

the *pāddana*?

Actually the question of the identity of Mayndala bothered me in the field, and it took me some time to discover that she and Bale Mani of the *pāddana* were the same spirit. In one village where her cult had recently sprung into popularity, many worshippers could only tell me that she was the "sister" of the warrior heroes, Koti and Chennaya (champions of the tenant Billava caste). All Tuluvas know that Koti and Chennaya have only one sister, Kinni Daru, and that this person is not Mayndala. What is meant by "sister" in this context is merely that she is a "caste sister" of the Billava heroes and thus her rightful place is in their shrine.

But who she was could not be told until they heard the *pāddana*. Obliging, when the new spirit was installed and her cult performed for the first time in the village, the management of the village shrine complex set up a loud speaker system in order to have the *pāddana* broadcast. Traditionally, as the Parava dancer-medium attires himself in a costume befitting the spirit which is to possess him (a sari in this case), he, or the women of his family, sing the *pāddana*. Normally the audience pays little attention to this recitation. This time, however, hundreds gathered in close to hear, and many of the remainder stood close to the speakers. To the surprise of many of the women in the audience, the Mayndala *pāddana* turned out to be the Legend of Bale Mani and Lord Pangala Bannare they had often sung in the fields. So, according to the Paravas, Mayndala is Bale Mani. It should not be surprising that the fame of a spirit would spread faster and further than the cult, when one considers that the *pāddanas* are not only a vehicle of religious doctrine maintained by a specialist caste of bard-dancers, but also a source of entertainment for women as they work in the fields. It might yet be objected that the Parava women simply passed this well-known *pāddana* off as the authentic account of the new spirit. However, the majority of the women accepted it and so do I. For one thing, it is the duty of the Parava to know these things and they take their duty quite seriously. The Parava's profession brings them in contact with cults of a fairly large region. Beyond this, they have relatives living in other regions to whom they often turn for advice and consultation on matters of doctrine. On the whole, the Parava (and other dancer-bard castes) may be said to be reliable preservers of cult doctrine and legend.

For another thing, the legend of Bale Mani conforms closely to the reasons why Mayndala is worshipped by the people. But here is where we must account for the transformation in the nature of this spirit, and explain the concomitant change in the religious behavior evidenced in the decline of the male-oriented royal spirit-vassal spirit cult. Previous-

ly, at places where she has been worshipped for a long time, Mayndala was a spirit of the ruled. She was regarded as a subsidiary champion of the rights of the vassal-tenants, who had as their main heroes Koti and Chennaya. Only at the court of Bannara is Bale Mani seated with the *rājendaiva*, Jumadi. Yet even there, her legendary role was to protect the vassal's honor and rights. While there is enough evidence to suggest Bale Mani and Mayndala might not be "the same spirit" historically, the deity of the cult and the deity of the legend are clearly analogous.

There is one aspect of Bale Mani which goes beyond the lord-vassal cult complex, and this is her association with childbirth and the problems of women. While the lord-vassal cult wanes for lack of support, due undoubtedly to the economic conditions which have drawn the landlords away from the villages and the land reform act which made each tenant a landowner, the cult of Mayndala is not necessarily bound to this decline.

Even if it is relatively clear why the Mayndala cult should not decline, there is still no apparent reason for its increase. No one familiar with the medical and population statistics of the rural countryside would reasonably suggest that the women's increased interest in the cult was associated with an increased anxiety over maternal care, infant mortality, or fertility, which are the aspects of life Mayndala purports to protect.

One broad reason for the increase in the cult may be said to be the greater participation by women in religion generally. Women tend to be more interested in possession cults of female spirits, just as they are generally more interested in women's affairs. Women are pleased to honor a revered female spirit in their midst just as they would be pleased to be present to honor a woman dignitary to the village. Village women appear to be fascinated by a 'kindred spirit' who has broken out of the restrictions and controls which govern the members of their sex. There is an unabashed awe and delight in the faces of the woman audience as they watch beautiful Mayndala dressed in a sari and laden with jewels swirl and dance the movements of a free and powerful spirit. Later they come with offerings of small change and flowers to perpetuate the cult.

There is another, more specific reason for the inverse development of the Mayndala cult and the decline of the royal spirit-vassal spirit cult. To understand this we need only to look to the *pāḍḍana* itself. Mayndala and her child were killed—brought into the realm of illusion—because of the negligence on the part of her brother, the male head of her household, when he refused to support the village cult of the *rājendaiva*. As women today see their men neglecting their duties to the village cults, they begin to show signs of anxiety that Jumadi or the spirits under Jumadi may come looking to punish their households and feed upon the lives of women and children. Not wanting to wait for such disastrous

limits, since they themselves are the targets of such punishment, the women take matters into their own hands. In this sense Mayndala is the women's champion, their protector in a rapidly changing world. In the *pāddana* Bale Mani suffers a fate which they all fear will be their own. By worshipping her, for the same reason Pangla Bannare worshipped Jumadi, they turn a potential agent of affliction into an object of worship.

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