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Oral Traditions in South India

Essays on Tulu Oral Epics

Edited by

Heidrun Brückner and B. A. Viveka Rai

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Heidrun Brückner and Viveka Rai

Würzburg and Mangalore
May 2017

Note on Transcription and Transliteration

Words from Indian languages are, in general, transliterated in this book according to the accepted scholarly conventions for each language. The high degree of variation in the pronunciation of words in oral texts rendered by different singers is reflected in the transcriptions by the editors of their respective texts. Some of the variants in the spelling of terms and names have been listed in the glossary. In the case of the article by Claus reprinted from an earlier publication, we have left the spellings as found in the original article. As is common usage, some words in Indian languages are given in their standard pan-Indian form, or in an anglicized form without diacritical marks. This is especially the case with place names and personal names. Contributors have made use of anglicized spellings to different degrees.

Introduction

Heidrun Brückner and Viveka Rai

The present volume studies three oral epic traditions in Tulu language (one of the Dravidian languages), which are living traditions in the Tulu speaking coastal districts of Karnataka up to the present day. All texts discussed here belong to the indigenous Tulu genre called *pāḍḍana*, which ranges from shorter invocatory texts of the local deities to texts of epic dimensions like the ones exhaustively studied here. *Pāḍḍanas* are also recited by women working in the paddy fields. A basic characteristic of a *pāḍḍana* is that it is sung or recited. In a ritual context, *pāḍḍanas* are mostly sung by male members of professional bardic castes who also impersonate the deities. Because these texts had been transmitted exclusively orally until the 19th century, when some of them were first reduced to writing, it is very difficult to assign their composition to a particular historical period. Linguistically, it can be observed that some archaic words are used in the *pāḍḍanas*. Some of these words, it seems, have become obsolete even in the 19th century, since, in the oldest transcriptions, some such words are explained by more common synonyms in brackets (see Brückner and Rai's contribution).

The social universe described in many *pāḍḍanas* may reflect a 16th- or 17th century late-medieval period, when petty rulers, like the Ballālas, who figure in the Kōṭi-Cennaya texts, administered small regions and struggled for dominance with one another. Lower-class heroes like the twins Kōṭi and Cennaya fought against them and tried to strengthen their own position, while, at the same time, they sought the rulers' patronage and support. In these texts, the combination of caste and traditional profession is subjected to dynamic change. The twin heroes, Billavas (biruva), whose caste profession was toddy tapping, opt for agriculture, which was considered the privilege of the upper castes like Ballālas, Baṇṭs and Jainas. But perhaps even more important for the twins' recognition and status were their extraordinary strength and fighting skills, almost a guarantee of success for the lords they fought for.

The texts presented and analysed here have been collected and partly published over a period of almost 150 years. The story of the heroic twins Kōṭi and Cennaya was reportedly first collected by the Basel missionary Herrmann Mögling in the mid-19th century. It was first printed as part of an unpublished collection by the Basel missionary August Männer in 1886. English translations of this and one more version were published posthumously from the papers of

A. C. Burnell by his friend R. C. Temple in *The Indian Antiquary*, Vols. 23–25, 1894–96.

Two papers in this volume are devoted to the story of the heroic twins, Kōṭi and Cennaya (Brückner and Rai; Nandavara), three to the Siri tradition with its strong focus on women (Gowda; Alva; Schuster-Löhlau) and one to the epic of Kōḍḍabbu, a Dalit hero with supernatural powers (Claus). Heidrun Brückner and Viveka Rai retrieve historical versions of the Kōṭi and Cennaya story collected and published in the 19th century in a colonial context. Vamana Nandavara makes accessible for the first time four epic texts of the same tradition that he recorded between 1988 and 1990. The two papers on the Kōṭi-Cennaya epic are complementary, one being archive-based and the other fieldwork-based. Vamana Nandavara's study not only provides information on the various ritual and other performance contexts, but introduces individual singers of different communities and their backgrounds. This throws new light on their respective renderings of the epic.

Chinnappa Gowda opens the Siri group of papers with a concise overview of the textual and performance traditions and the history of research. Ashoka Alva contributes a comparison of selected episodes of the Siri epic from published and unpublished sources. Pauline Schuster-Löhlau studies three hitherto unpublished versions of the text collected in the 1960s and 1970s, and presents selected portions in Roman transliteration and English translation.

Finally, the volume also contains a reprint of an important article by Peter J. Claus on Kōḍḍabbu (Kordabbu), the deified caste champion of the Muṇḍālas, a formerly 'untouchable' community about whom very little is so far known. The paper provides a long synopsis of Kōḍḍabbu's story and an in-depth analysis of the rituals during which he is worshipped and portions of his story are recited in different modes.

Contrary to the Kōṭi-Cennaya tradition, the epic of the Baṇṭ heroine, Siri, was not part of the old collections. In spite of the storyline being well-known to people from oral sources, it has come to be studied by scholars only since the 1960s and 1970s. It is a predominantly female tradition, both in its textual and its ritual dimensions, and this may be why it did not attract the attention of male European missionaries and colonial officials-cum-scholars. Women of different castes and communities know the epic. They are initiated into the cult and come together for the annual Siri festival rituals, where they get 'possessed' by different female characters in the epic. They interact by chanting lines from the epic in the first person as these characters. The male protagonists of the epic are not represented at all, except perhaps for Siri's son, Kumāra, whom she 'made *māya*' – that is, caused to vanish from the visible realm – when he was a small child. His name, Kumāra, is the designation of priests associated with the individual groups of women; the Kumāra priests also know the epic well.

The first publication, in 1998, of the entire text of the Siri epic along with an English translation was an Indo-Finnish venture, in which two of the contributors

to the present volume, Viveka Rai and Chinnappa Gowda, were involved. Starting as early as the 1960s, the American anthropologist Peter J. Claus was studying the Siri tradition. He published several papers on it, but not the texts that he had recorded. In this book, some of his materials have been retrieved. The German research scholar Pauline Schuster-Löhlau, to whom some of Claus' notebooks were made accessible, has undertaken a study of three versions of the Siri epic collected by him and provides excerpts of original passages in Tulu with English translations. Ashoka Alva published in 2009 a newly recorded text recited by the female *pāddana* singer Kargi Shedti in Kannada transcription; for the present volume, he has contributed a paper comparing selected passages of this text to three other published versions and one unpublished one. His paper also makes parts of the Tulu texts available in English for the first time.

A major difference between the Kōṭi-Cennaya and Kōḍḍabbu traditions, on the one hand, and the Siri tradition, on the other, is that the first two are strongly related to particular communities to which the epic protagonists belong, i.e. the Billavas and the Muṇḍālas, whereas the Siri tradition is not community-based but, rather, based on gender. If we look closely at the Kōṭi-Cennaya epic as compared to the Siri epic, one point to be noted is the abundance of female life cycle rituals described in the Siri texts. The most elaborately described life-cycle rituals in the Kōṭi-Cennaya story are the ritual shaving as a puberty ritual for boys and the cremation of the dead heroes at the end. In the Siri epic, the corresponding puberty ritual for girls is found, along with many others, including engagement, wedding, pregnancy ritual and funeral ritual.

The Kōṭi-Cennaya and the Kōḍḍabbu stories share the motif of a child of lower status being brought up or reared in a landlord's family. However, this motif is more pronounced in the Kōḍḍabbu story. The hero's mother, orphaned as a small baby, is taken into the manor house. When she grows up she miraculously gets pregnant and has to undergo trials to prove that she did not have illegitimate relations with her master. Thanks to her power of truth, she survives the trials unharmed, and she gives birth to Kōḍḍabbu, who starts speaking to his mother right from the womb. When she dies giving birth to her child, her son, like her, is brought up in the manor house. He starts displaying unusual powers at a very young age. Like Kōṭi-Cennaya, he has encounters with people from different castes who do not show respect to him. Making use of his miraculous capacities, he humiliates them and makes them apologize to him.

Both Kōṭi-Cennaya and Kōḍḍabbu encounter other children and play games with them in which the other children cheat them. Thus, in the first part of the Kōṭi-Cennaya story, a young boy called Bāmalla Kumāra is sent into a well to retrieve a ball his playmates had thrown in. After he enters the well, they close the mouth of the well and plant a tree on it. Miraculously, his mother finds him and feeds him breast milk from above. This makes him grow so tall that he can get out of the well and return home. In the Kōḍḍabbu story, it is kings who consider the boy a threat to their power, conspire and request him to climb down into

a well which has not struck water. Despite his forebodings, he gets down into the well and they have the well shut with a big bolder. His shouts are heard by a young girl who, by her power of truth, makes the bolder crack. She lowers her saree into the well for Kōḍḍabbu to climb out. Despite having promised not to look at her, he does so inadvertently on his way up. The two of them ask each other's lineage and become brother and sister. They then disappear together into the invisible realm of *māya*.

Similar to this incident and to the trials undergone by Kōḍḍabbu's mother, the power of truth (*satya*) is invoked by most of the heroines in the three epic traditions studied in this book, most conspicuously by Siri. Concepts of Truth and Justice play a central role in these narratives. Whereas women invoke truth and proclaim justice in order to protect themselves against injustice and to activate miraculous powers (many examples in the contributions by Alva and Schuster-Löhlau), male heroes often fight against injustice in a more martial setting (instances of the invocation of justice by Kōṭi and Cennaya are quoted and discussed in Brückner and Rai's contribution).

The wealth of texts and versions reflected in this volume, allows, for the first time, to make systematic comparisons between different texts of the same tradition as well as between narrative elements and cultural concepts found in different traditions. Depending on their contexts, they may convey very different meanings. Small variations may give a completely different thrust to an episode, and similar stories may take an entirely different turn, as in the well incident just cited. Linguistic analysis, too, is just beginning to reveal possibly unique textual and narrative features in the respective traditions. Thus, it appears to be a special feature in all renderings of the Kōṭi-Cennaya story that the two protagonists at times switch over to first person direct speech, in both the singular and the plural, and often without any speech-markers (examples in Nandavara's and Brückner and Rai's contributions). In the recorded Siri epic texts, this narrative mode is not found, but it can be observed in the ritual interaction of the Siri groups.

The editors consider this book, which brings together for the first time Indian, European and American scholars working on Tulu oral epics, as a first step on these lines of investigation. We hope that this work will encourage further detailed studies and analyses of both the texts and rituals and their wider social and cultural significance and impact.

Three versions of the Kōṭi-Cennaya story collected in the 19th century

Heidrun Brückner and Viveka Rai

Abstract: This paper studies three versions of the Kōṭi-Cennaya story collected and partly published in the 19th century in *The Indian Antiquary* 23–26 (1894–97) by Major R. C. Temple under the title *The Devil Worship of the Tuluvas. From the Papers of the late A. C. Burnell*. We analyse the English translations as well as the language, style and content of one of the original Tulu texts as printed by A. Männer as manuscripts in 1886 and of another text and translation as found in the original Burnell manuscripts preserved in the India Office Library, London. The third version is available only in the English translation provided by A. Männer for publication in *The Indian Antiquary*. Following the textual analyses, our paper also discusses the major themes of the narrative and tries to place the texts and their collection in a historical context.

Introductory

The story of the twin brothers Kōṭi and Cennaya is one of the most well-known and popular legends of the Tulu-speaking area, known even today to most people in rough outline from oral sources. It has been adapted in traditional media like Yakṣagāṇa theatre as well as in modern media like drama and cinema. Our own presentation and analysis in this paper will focus exclusively on the versions collected in the 19th century.¹ Besides evaluating these texts in their historical context as documents collected in the colonial period by British administrators and European missionaries, we want to do justice to them both as literature and as sacred narrative.

To provide a first orientation to the reader we give a brief sketch of the story line:

Two of the three accounts start with the life-story of the twins' mother, a Brahmin girl abandoned by her parents in the forest because she attained puberty before she could be married off. She is found by a man of the Billava (Biruva) caste who is pursuing his traditional caste profession of tapping toddy. He adopts her into

1 See V. Nandavara's contribution to this volume for more recently collected versions and for a sketch of contemporary contexts of recitation.

his caste and family and gets her married to his nephew. She is named Dēyi and becomes an expert in herbal medicine. When the ruler (Ballāla) of the place hurts his foot while hunting and cannot be cured by any of the other physicians, Dēyi is called. She finally goes there, in spite of her advanced stage of pregnancy. She gives birth to twin sons in the ruler's palace itself. In the meantime, the Ballāla has been cured by her medicines. Out of gratitude he promises to look after the twins' future welfare. When Dēyi dies at a young age, the twins are brought up by their uncle. The Ballāla provides for their ritual shaving ceremony. He also assigns a plot of agricultural land to them for cultivation. This leads to a conflict with his minister, who owns the neighboring field. In a rash act, the younger brother finally kills the minister. The twins decide to leave the country. On the way, they punish several people who offend them. They are first received well by the ruler of the neighboring principality, until their former master requests the latter to imprison them. From this point onwards, their supernatural strength and their qualities as warriors start getting foregrounded. They break free from the prison and move to yet another small principality, where they also happen to meet their elder sister for the first time. Again, the ruler of their new place assigns land to them, and they cultivate it. They introduce the practice of hunting to this kingdom. When the king undertakes a big hunt, Cennaya kills a giant boar. Since the animal falls down on the border of the neighbouring kingdom, an armed conflict arises, in which their side wins. Shortly afterwards, the two rulers in whose principalities the twins had lived previously form an alliance and attack the kingdom in which they now live. In a great battle, they perform many heroic feats. But at the end, Kōṭi is hit by a poisoned arrow and dies. His brother, who cannot live without him, commits suicide. After their death the twins join the world of god Bermeru and people begin to worship them.

The part of the narrative summarized here is, in one version, preceded by mythical and cosmogonic portions which also explain the supernatural ancestry of the twins' mother, Dēyi. She is born from an egg (or lemon) found by a Brahmin couple on the seashore and is brought up by them as their daughter. Thus, two versions begin with the Brahmin girl being abandoned and found in the forest (Text 1 and Text 3), whereas the third (Text 2) contains a lengthy mythic section preceding the story of Dēyi and her twin sons. Since the circumstances of collecting and editing the texts are not known in any detail, we have to deal with them in the form in which they have come down to us. About their 'authenticity' and original form we can only speculate. In the absence of any documented texts for the next hundred years after their publication, they, in any case, have to be considered as valuable historical documents in their own right.²

2 Another such text retrieved from the archives has recently been published by the present authors (Brückner and Rai 2015).

In the following sections, we will first present a textual analysis of the versions collected in the 19th century and then study the major themes of the narrative. As we understand the narrative, the major themes are: 1) social mobility and consequent social conflicts and clashes; 2) spatial mobility in search of patronage, and loyalty (or lack thereof) to kings and masters; and 3) the concept of justice as understood by the protagonists. In the concluding section, we try to go beyond the texts and place them in a historical context both in terms of the setting they reflect and in terms of the circumstances of their collection and publication.

Sources and textual analysis

Major R. C. Temple (1850–1931) was the editor of *The Indian Antiquary. A Journal of Oriental Research*. Between 1894 and 1897, he published a collection of oral Tulu texts in the journal. The texts had been collected by his friend A. C. Burnell, who died in 1882. In his preface, Temple reports that, among other things, his friend left behind a set of manuscripts “bound together in one volume of 325 leaves of large quarto writing-paper ..., written generally on both sides, making up altogether 650 pp.” (1894: 1). Arthur Coke Burnell (1840–1882) was a British civil servant who was posted at different places in the then Madras Presidency between 1860 and 1868. He acted as a district judge in the same Presidency between 1870 and 1880, including postings in Tanjore and Mangalore. He is known mainly for his work on South Indian paleography and Hindu law and for preparing a catalogue of the manuscripts in the Tanjore library. Mangalore is now the district headquarters of one of the coastal districts of the Federal State of Karnataka, and the home of Tulu language. Living in a Tulu-speaking area, Burnell took interest in the local oral literature and he was also in touch with some of the members of the Basel Mission in Mangalore who shared his interest. For example, it is attested that the Basel missionary Herrmann Mögling (1811–1881) not only published classical works of Kannada literature in his *Bibliotheca Carnatica*, but also collected oral Tulu texts.

Concerning the contents of Burnell’s collection, Temple’s preface quotes a handwritten note by Burnell:

This contains a collection of the Tuḷu incantations, used at the ceremonies of Bhūta worship as practiced in South Canara, and which are chanted by the *pombaḍas* or priests. The first 5 are from Dr. Mögling’s MS (at Mangalore). The next 5 were written down by a Tāntrī (Tuḷu Brāhmaṇ), at the Mangalore *tahsildār*’s request, for me. The remainder were collected by agents I sent to different places, and several were dictated by a blind *pombaḍa*, named Kānta, who also gave me information as to where other such compositions could be heard. They are all oral and contain many words not now in use. (1894: 1)

Temple then provides a list of the 30 texts contained in Burnell's manuscript (1894: 1–2). Number (3) is a “Deyibaidi-pārdano” and number (4) a “Koṭi Channayya-pārdano”. These two texts are among the five provided by Mögling. In a footnote to text (4), Temple observes: “This seems, however, to be part of the preceding (sic) story, and the versified version is followed by one in prose (1894: 1)”. The title of number (15) is listed as “Koṭi and Channaya”. According to the handwritten note quoted above, number (15) must belong to the group of texts either collected by Burnell's agents or dictated by the blind Pampada Kānta.³

Temple goes on to describe the steps he took to get this collection edited and published. Since almost all of the original Tulu texts were written in “Canarese” (Kannada) characters, introduced by the Basel Mission for printing Tulu, in 1886 Temple requested the Basel missionary August Männer to transliterate some of the texts. Männer chose six texts. These are the ones whose Roman transliterations came to be included in *The Indian Antiquary* publication (nos. 1, 11, 16, 24, 25, and 26 of the list). Männer, the author of Tulu-English and English-Tulu dictionaries and editor of an unpublished collection of oral Tulu *pāḍḍana* texts in Kannada characters (Männer 1886, see below), also checked the translations and provided variants of some of the stories. Since Temple could not find a competent editor for the Burnell manuscript, he finally decided to publish it himself.

The three versions of the Kōṭi-Cennaya story to be studied in the present article are labeled by us as Text 1, Text 2 and Text 3 respectively.

Text 1

The first text comprises “The Song of Deyibaidi” (IA 1894: 22–24) and “The Song of Koti and Channayya” (IA 1894: 29–49, 85–91), the latter continuing the former story, since Dēyi (Deyi) is the mother of the twin brothers Kōṭi and Cennaya. In both cases the editor remarks, “Original in the Kanarese character from the MS. of Dr. Mögling, Mangalore, and signed ‘M.’: translation according to Burnell's MS.” Fortunately, in this case, the original Tulu text, or a text coming very close to it, was printed by A. Männer in his unpublished manuscript *Pāḍḍanoḷu*, page 33–52, in Kannada script as no. 16 Dēyi Baidyedi and nos. 17 and 18 Kōṭi Caṇṇaye I and II.⁴

3 Pambadas are a caste of bards and ‘god dancers’. Burnell spells the term as *pombaḍa*. They are not priests, but the priests of the local deities also know the songs and stories and can recite them. Burnell uses the word *pārdano* for the chanted texts; we spell the term *pāḍḍana*. The spelling of other names also varies in the manuscript, thus Koṭi-Channayya and Koṭi-Channaya. We spell these names as Kōṭi-Cennaya.

4 Heidrun Brückner located a copy of this collection and procured a xerox copy of it at the Basel Mission archive, Basel, in 1983. Another copy is available at the Tübingen University library archive, from where a scan was obtained in 2015. Our thanks are due to both archives.

Text 2

Our second text is Burnell Ms. no. (15) “The story of Koti and Channaya” (IA 1895: 114–121, 141–153, 211–215, 242–244, 267–272). The editor states, “Original in the Kanarese character. Translation according to Burnell’s MSS Original, text and translation, occupies leaves 168–230 of Burnell’s MSS.” The original Tulu text of this version is found neither in *The Indian Antiquary* nor in Männer’s collection *Pāḍḍanoḷu*. In January 1985, Heidrun Brückner first located and studied the original Burnell manuscript at the India Office library, London, and obtained copies of some of the texts, including text (15). In the manuscript, Tulu texts and English translations are written in two columns on the same page. The copy allows us to compare the published and the unpublished English translation with the original Tulu text and get valuable information on the style and (sub-) genre of the original.

Text 3

The third text taken into consideration here has been preserved, to our knowledge, only in English translation. It is one of the texts included by Temple in his *Indian Antiquary* publication as “Mr. Männer’s Variants. No. 1 – The Origin of the Beiderlu” (IA 25, 1896: 295–310, 328–342). Baiderlu is another name for the twin brothers Kōṭi and Cennaya.

Burnell’s list distinguishes between texts referred to as *pāḍḍana* (*pārdano*), those called *sandi*, and others that are without any specification. Our Text 1 is called a *pāḍḍana*, as is Männer’s collection (*pāḍḍanoḷu*, plural of *pāḍḍana*). Our Texts 2 and 3 are not labeled. Text 2 (Burnell MSS 15) is the most comprehensive one, starting with a lengthy cosmogonic section, before the mother of the twin heroes Kōṭi and Cennaya, Dēyi Baidyedi, is introduced and their birth, life and feats are described. Text 1 starts with the life of Dēyi and continues with the feats of the twins up to their heroic death in battle. Text 3 tells the story of Dēyi and her sons from a different narrative perspective and is available only in English.

Text 1: Tulu texts Männer 1886, English translations Burnell 1894

We will quote four short passages from *Pāḍḍanoḷu* in Roman transliteration with diacritics and add the corresponding English translations from *The Indian Antiquary* passage by passage. After each passage, features of the Tulu text and the English translation are discussed.

The first passage is the beginning of the text and of the story. It has been selected because it refers to important cultural and narrative elements of relevance for the entire story. Thus, we learn that Dēyi was a Brahmin girl abandoned blindfolded by her parents in the forest because she attained puberty before they could get her married. She is found by a man of the Billava (Biruve) community, among whose traditional professions ‘toddy-tapping’ was important. In fact, he finds her while tapping toddy in the forest. However, before taking her home with him,