

Culture of Tulunadu: Traditions, Practices and Modern Transformations - A Critical Review

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Abstract: *Tulunadu, a distinctive cultural region of coastal Karnataka, has developed a rich cultural identity through language, oral traditions, ritual practices, performing arts, agrarian life, and interactions among diverse communities. This review examines major dimensions of Tulunadu culture through a qualitative and interdisciplinary assessment of existing scholarship. Particular attention is given to Tulu oral traditions, Paddanas, Daivaradhane, Yakshagana, Kambala, nature-related traditions, and changing cultural practices. The review shows that these traditions function as important forms of cultural memory while continuing to respond to modernisation, migration, media, and changing social relationships. Tulunadu culture is therefore best understood as a dynamic cultural system rather than a static collection of inherited customs. Its long-term preservation requires systematic documentation, responsible scholarship, digital archiving, and active community participation.*

Keywords: Tulunadu, Tulu culture, Paddanas, Daivaradhane, Yakshagana, Kambala, oral tradition, cultural heritage

1. Introduction

Tulunadu represents a distinctive cultural region along the coastal belt of Karnataka. Its geographical setting between the Arabian Sea and the Western Ghats, together with its historical interaction with different communities, has contributed to the development of a rich and diverse cultural tradition.

Tulu functions as an important medium of folk expression, while oral literature has preserved knowledge concerning agriculture, social relationships, beliefs and customary practices.

The culture of Tulunadu cannot be understood through a single religious or social tradition. It has developed through the interaction of different communities and cultural practices. Bhutaradhane, Paddanas, Yakshagana, Kambala, Naga worship and various agricultural and seasonal festivals form important components of this cultural landscape. Therefore, a review of Tulunadu culture requires an interdisciplinary approach involving history, folklore, anthropology, literature and cultural studies.

2. Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of this review are:

- 1) To examine the major characteristics of Tulunadu culture.
- 2) To review the importance of Tulu oral traditions and folk literature.
- 3) To understand the cultural significance of Bhutaradhane and Daivaradhane.
- 4) To examine the contribution of Yakshagana and other performing arts.
- 5) To study the relationship between agriculture and traditional culture.
- 6) To analyze the impact of modernization on traditional cultural practices.
- 7) To identify major challenges in the preservation of Tulunadu's cultural heritage.

3. Methodology

The section was expanded into a concise methodological paragraph detailing:

- Databases & Repositories Consulted: Google Scholar, JSTOR, Taylor & Francis Online, Oxford Academic, and regional research archives.
- Search Themes & Keywords: "Tulunadu culture," "Tulu oral traditions," "Paddana," "Bhutaradhane / Daivaradhane," "Yakshagana," "caste and ritual in South Kanara," and "modern transformation of Tuluva traditions."
- Period Covered: Literature published between 1985 and 2025.
- Selection Criteria: Peer-reviewed journal articles, foundational ethnographic monographs, canonical text editions of oral folk literature, and recent museological/transcultural studies addressing socio-religious change.

4. Review of Literature

- Oral genres and Indian folkloristics: (Claus & Korom, 1991)
- Tulu folklore and textual compendiums: (Rai, 1985; Someshwara, 1997)
- Subaltern memory and history from below: (Bhat, 2008)
- Village ritual authority and kingship: (Suzuki, 2013)
- Contemporary ritual possession and caste contestations: (Ryzhakova, 2024; Vijayashree, 2023)

Paddanas:

- Compilations and oral narrative categories: (Someshwara, 1997)
- Oral genre system and epic narratives: (Rai, 1996)
- Agrarian, kinship, and historical dimensions: (Rai, 1985; Someshwara, 1997)
- Subaltern perspectives, Koti-Chennaya/Siri, and history from below: (Bhat, 2008)

Bhutaradhane and Daivaradhane:

- Spirit possession and altered states of consciousness: (Ryzhakova, 2024)
- Village-level authority and ritual kingship: (Suzuki, 2013)
- Caste contestations, symbolic capital, and mask disputes: (Vijayashree, 2023)

Yakshagana:

- Performance aesthetics, epic storytelling, and oral genre interactions: (Claus & Korom, 1991; Rai, 1996)
- Agrarian Culture, Nature, Diversity & Social Structure:
- Agrarian references and buffalo culture: (Bhat, 2008; Someshwara, 1997)
- Ecological sanctity, Naga worship, and village shrines: (Rai, 1985; Suzuki, 2013)
- Composite community spaces and social conflict: (Bhat, 2008; Suzuki, 2013)
- Gender roles, kinship, and social inequality in folklore: (Claus & Korom, 1991; Rai, 1996; Bhat, 2008)

Impact of Modernisation:

- Continued ritual evolution and caste politics: (Ryzhakova, 2024; Vijayashree, 2023)
- Exhibition ethics, sacred ritual objects, and Western museums: (Adityan, 2024)

Critical Analysis:

- Continuity through oral tradition and performance: (Claus & Korom, 1991; Rai, 1985; Someshwara, 1997)
- Diversity and negotiation of caste/authority: (Bhat, 2008; Suzuki, 2013; Vijayashree, 2023)
- Modern transformation and global transcultural display: (Adityan, 2024; Ryzhakova, 2024)

Research on the folklore and culture of Tulunadu has a long history. Scholars have examined the region through folklore, anthropology, history, literature and performance studies. Studies of Tulu oral literature have particularly highlighted the importance of Paddanas and other oral genres in understanding the social and cultural history of the region.

Research on Bhutaradhane has examined the relationship between ritual, society, local identity and political authority. Contemporary scholarship also discusses Daivaradhane as a living ritual tradition that incorporates change while retaining important elements of its historically established cultural structure. Thus, the existing literature indicates that Tulunadu culture should be studied as a dynamic cultural system rather than as an unchanging heritage.

5. Major Dimensions of Tulunadu Culture

1) Tulu Language and Oral Tradition

Language is one of the most important foundations of cultural identity. Tulu has played a significant role in preserving the collective memory of the people of Tulunadu. The oral tradition includes Paddanas, folk songs, folk tales, proverbs and riddles. These compositions preserve information about social life, agriculture, customs, kinship and local beliefs. Oral literature is particularly significant because much cultural knowledge was transmitted from one generation to another through performance rather than through written records.

2) Paddanas

Paddanas are among the most important elements of Tulunadu's folk tradition. They are oral narrative compositions associated with heroes, spirits, communities and historical-cultural memories. The Paddanas contain references to agriculture, marriage, social customs, gender relations, warfare, occupations and everyday life. The Koti-Chennaya and Siri traditions, for example, provide insights into social relationships and customary practices. From a historical perspective, Paddanas are important cultural sources, although they need to be critically evaluated alongside inscriptions, literary sources and archaeological evidence.

3) Bhutaradhane and Daivaradhane

Bhutaradhane or Daivaradhane occupies a central place in the cultural life of Tulunadu. It combines ritual, music, costume, dance, oral narrative and community participation. The ritual involves communication between people and local deities through ritual specialists and performers. Modern research demonstrates that Bhutaradhane cannot be viewed only as a religious practice; it is also connected with questions of social identity and caste relations. Therefore, Bhutaradhane represents both continuity and social transformation.

4) Yakshagana

Yakshagana is one of the most prominent performing arts associated with the coastal region of Karnataka. It combines dance, music, dialogue, elaborate costumes, narration and dramatic performance. Its importance extends beyond entertainment. Through stories from epics and traditional narratives, Yakshagana has contributed to the transmission of ethical ideas, religious themes and cultural memory.

5) Kambala and Agrarian Culture

Agriculture has historically influenced the cultural life of Tulunadu. Paddy cultivation, coconut, arecanut and other crops have shaped the economic and social structure of the region. Kambala, the traditional buffalo race associated with the agricultural landscape, represents the close relationship between farming communities, land and seasonal traditions. Tulu oral literature itself reflects this agrarian orientation through references to paddy cultivation and other agricultural activities.

6) Naga Worship and Nature-Based Traditions

Nature has an important place in the traditional worldview of Tulunadu. Naga worship, sacred groves and local guardian-deity traditions reflect the relationship between human communities and the natural environment. Such practices also demonstrate how ecological beliefs were incorporated into social and religious life. Consequently, traditional cultural practices can provide useful perspectives for understanding historical attitudes towards nature and landscape.

6. Social and Cultural Diversity

Tulunadu has historically been home to different linguistic, caste and religious communities. Its cultural traditions have consequently developed through interaction and exchange. The shared cultural space created around particular rituals and performances illustrates the contribution of different communities to the cultural formation of the region. This

diversity is one of the important characteristics of Tulunadu culture.

Culture and Social Structure

Culture is closely related to the social structure of Tulunadu. Ritual traditions, kinship practices, agricultural relations and community institutions have historically shaped social organisation. The study of Paddanas reveals information about marriage, inheritance, women's roles and community relations. Some Paddanas also preserve memories of social inequality and conflict. Therefore, folk traditions should not be treated merely as entertainment. They can also be analysed as records of social experience and collective memory.

Impact of Modernisation

Modernisation, urbanisation, migration, education, mass media and globalisation have transformed many aspects of Tulunadu culture. Some traditional practices have declined or changed in their original social context. At the same time, certain traditions have gained renewed public visibility through cultural festivals, academic research, digital media and tourism. Contemporary studies show that Daivaradhane continues to evolve in response to contemporary social concerns while retaining its ritual significance. Cultural preservation therefore does not necessarily mean keeping a tradition completely unchanged; it involves maintaining its cultural meaning while allowing communities to adapt it to changing circumstances.

Critical Analysis

The existing literature reveals three important dimensions of Tulunadu culture. First, it is a culture of continuity. Oral traditions, rituals and performing arts have enabled cultural knowledge to pass from generation to generation. Second, it is a culture of diversity. Different communities have contributed to the cultural formation of the region. Third, it is a culture of transformation. Contemporary social relations, technology, migration and changing values are influencing traditional practices. Therefore, representing Tulunadu culture as a completely homogeneous or static tradition would be inadequate.

Research Gap

Although considerable research has been conducted on individual elements such as Bhutaradhane, Paddanas and Yakshagana, there remains scope for more integrated studies that examine language, folklore, ritual, performing arts, agriculture, social structure and modern transformation together. Future research can focus on digital preservation of Tulu oral traditions, the changing role of women in traditional cultural institutions, cultural transformation among younger generations, the relationship between tourism and cultural heritage, documentation of endangered folk traditions, and comparative studies of Tulunadu with other South Indian cultural regions.

7. Suggestions for Preservation

The preservation of Tulunadu culture requires cooperation between local communities, educational institutions, researchers and cultural organisations. Important measures include systematic documentation of Paddanas and oral traditions; digital archiving of folk performances; promotion

of Tulu language and literature; academic documentation of ritual traditions with community consent; preservation of traditional performing arts; encouragement of younger generations to learn traditional arts; creation of museums and cultural archives; and responsible presentation of cultural traditions in tourism.

8. Conclusion

Tulunadu represents a distinctive cultural region shaped by Tulu language, oral literature, ritual traditions, performing arts, agrarian practices, and interactions among diverse communities. The reviewed scholarship demonstrates that these traditions preserve cultural memory while continually responding to social and economic change. Paddanas, Daivaradhane, Yakshagana, Kambala, and nature-related practices should therefore be understood not simply as inherited customs but as living cultural expressions. Their preservation requires careful documentation, community participation, academic engagement, and appropriate use of digital technologies. Future research should particularly examine changing participation among younger generations, gender roles, tourism, and the preservation of vulnerable oral and performance traditions.

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