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## Origin and evolution of Tulu script

1

Studies suggest that humans can pronounce nearly 60 to 70 different sounds, but every sound need not to be present in every language. For example, Kannada hardly uses řa řa but there are plenty of words in Tulu which use řa řa. English doesn't have řa, but Sanskrit has. Indian languages do not use F, Z but English does. If a language does not have a particular sound, then the alphabetic representation of the same will not be there.

Tulunad and Tulu language are so old that many scholars believe Tulu is the oldest language in Dravidian family, next to Tamil. However, it is clear that Tulu is older than Malayalam. Inscriptions and manucripts found in Tulund support this fact.

Most of the Tulunad was ruled by Alupas from 7<sup>th</sup> century to 15<sup>th</sup> century, who were subordinates of Kadamba dynasty. In 1774 Hyder-Ali captured Tulunad and in 1793 the British. During the linguistic region sorting Kasaragod was cut off from Tulunad and added to Kerala in 1956.

Recently four literary works were discovered and published by Dr. Venkataraja Puninchittaya. One among these **řřī mahābhāratō** belongs to 14<sup>th</sup> century. It consists of stories like **Rukminī svayaṃvara**, **Kīcaka vadhe**, **Baṇāsura vadhe**, **Aṃbariṣopākhyāna**. This proves that literary works were there in Tulu prior to 14<sup>th</sup> century. For any language it takes at least two centuries to develop an epic in written form. This beautiful relation between any language and a script does not take place in just a span of 10-20 years. From this we can conclude that the relation between Tulu language and Tulu script evolved from 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century itself.

In total Dr. Puninchittaya have collected 5 Tulu works – **řřī bhāgavatō**, **Mahābhāratō**, **Dēvī mahātmè**, **Kāvēri** and some pages of **Karṇa parvō**. There is a possibility that the author of Tulu **Karna Parva** may be **Hariyapparasa**, Tulu king of Vijayanagar dynasty. Dr. S. R. Vighnaraj have collected **Shri Madbhāgavatāntargata**

**rāmāyaṇō** and palm leaves explaining incarnation of Lord Vishnu with the name **Nārāyaṇa dēvere avatāra varṇane**. He has also collected two Tulu language palm leaves named **Gaṇapati havana vidhi** and **Puṇyāha vidhi**. The author of this book has also found palm leaves of **Nārāyaṇa dēvere avatāra varṇane**, but they are the geographical and chronological illustration in the form of prose. The fifth chapter of **Śrī bhāgavatārthō** is also in prose form. Interpretation for **Ananta vṛta kathè** is also available in Tulu. Karnataka Tulu Sahitya Academy have published the palm leaves of **Siddha maṇḍūra kramō**, a medicinal book along with **Ananta vṛta kathè**.

Stone inscriptions found in Anantapura, Eeshwaramangala, Vittla, Dharmasthala, Bajakoodlu, Kidooru, Maameshara, gosada, kelakuli, kulashekhara, Parakkila, Kumata and many places stand as evidences for reach of Tulu script. A copper inscription in Tulu was also found in Ubrangala. Tulu witnessed literature works back in 10-11<sup>th</sup> century. Tulu script was also in wide use in Tulunad. A claim of Dr. Puninchittaya stating Tuluvas gave script to Malayalam seems to be rightful looking at all these facts.

2

In olden days Vatteluttu script was used in both Tamilnad and Kerala. This is an altered form of Ashoka's Brahmi script. In the time of Pandyas and Cheras this was the official script. All the records, literatures, writings and inscriptions were in Vatteluttu. This script was used in Southern Tamilunadu and in Kerala. Till 18<sup>th</sup> century there was a practise of writing Malayalam in Vatteluttu.

Vatteluttu was spread in Tamilunadu and Kerala around 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century, which was originated from the Brahmi scripts found in the caves of south Tamilnadu. It had 30 letters. The script used to write Pallava inscriptions in 7<sup>th</sup> century is called Madhyagrantha script. Modern Grantha script evolved from here. In coastal region of Karnataka i.e. Tulunad this script is used to write Sanskrit books. It is also called Tulu-Malayalam script because its transformation began in the hands of Tuluvas. Some have also coined the term Aryaeluttu, because it is also used to write Aryan language Sanskrit. Vatteluttu, a script with 30 characters was used to write Tamil

and old Malayalam. As the influence of Sanskrit increased on Malayalam, there was a need to use a script with one character set. This need was overcome by gradually borrowing the characters from Aryaeluttu which was used by Tulu Brahmins who were performing poojas in Temples of Kerala. According to graphologist A.C. Burnell present day Malayalam script attained this form after 15<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the Malayalam inscriptions and records are found in Vatteluttu itself. A.C. Burnell in his work Elements of South Indian Paleography says **“This is the original Tamil alphabet which was once used in all that part of the peninsula south of Tanjavore and also in south Malabar and Travancore were it still exists through in exceedingly limited use and in a modern form.”**

Tulu inscriptions found till date stand as proof for the fact that Arya eluttu was used to write Tulu way before it was used for Malayalam.

Difference in handwritings of different people produces different script forms. In case of Tulu, it is much higher. After typing/printing presses began scripts attained uniformity. Everyone follow the one form which is being used for printing. Tulu lacks standard form because it was never used in printing form.

There was a question “Why a script used for writing Sanskrit is called as Tuluscript?” This question as answered when ancient Tulu epics were discovered in this script. These Tulu works proved that many Tulu works were produced before 15<sup>th</sup> century. This strengthens the fact that the script called as Aryaeluttu by Malayalis was basically Tulu Script. According to researcher Puninchittaya, this script was spread in Kerala around 12<sup>th</sup> century by Tulu Brahmins.

3

Tulu script has both circular shaped and flat letters. Usually, Kannada script follows Anti-clockwise movement whereas Tulu follows clockwise movement. Generally consonant conjuncts can be found above, below, before or after a letter. In Kannada there is no practise of using consonant conjuncts before a letter and usually these are half form of the main letter. In Tulu whole letter written below



or just right bottom are considered as conjuncts. Kannada letters have flatheads whereas Tulu letters miss this feature. Many letters in Tulu have similar shapes but they differ in their orientation.

In the book **The Elements of South Indian Palaeography** published by A C Burnell in 1874 discussed about Tuluscript and shown the alphabet. A similar contribution can be found in **Bharatiya lipi maala** a hindi book published by Roy Bahadur Gowrishankar Ojha in 1971. Dr. Venkataraja Puninchittaya published a book 'TuluLipi' in 2001, which has different symbols compared to Burnell and Ojha representations. This notation is found in south side of Kasaragod. Dr. S R Vighnraj, from thousands of Tulu script palm leaves which he has read, have proposed a standard Tulu script, which shares good similarities with Burnell and Ojha versions.

Book published by Udipi Puttige Mutt have slight changes in Tulu Script. These changes are mere results of changes in handwriting and are not to be confused with other script. Bannanje Govindacharya also compiled a chapter on Tulu script. All these are compiled from studying thousands of palm leaves and eliminating dissimilarities.

Tulu has its own number system. Generally, it's rare to see Tulu numbering system is palm leaves. The number system proposed by Dr. S R Vighnaraj, after referring number of manuscripts is accepted and standardized.

Most of the palm leaves found in Tulunad are in Tulu script. Kannada, Nagari, Grantha, Malayalam all put together do not contribute as much as Tulu script. Most of palm leave books are mantra books. Some books with medicinal, astrology, literature is also available. Majority of these are in Sanskrit language. One can find few palm leaves of Kannada language written in Tulu script. Paper manuscripts of Tulu are also available. These are the sources which helped standardizing Tulu script.

During the refinement of Tulu script scientific facts are considered. Sizes of letters are made uniform according to standard to eliminate the confusions. The script

shown here is the copy of canonical script. Though there is no chance to change the shapes of letters, there is enough room to make it look more beautiful.

### **la- ra in Tulu: ।**

'**।a and ɾa**' were popular in Kannada till 11th century. It is still present in Tamil and Malayalam. The existence of ' ।a- ɾa' in Tulu is observed through its ancient manuscripts. '।a- ɾa' which was existed in Kannada only till 11th century was seen in Tulu until 17th century too. Few '।a- ɾa' sounds found in Tulu epics are ē। - seven, ō।।a - wherever, jāno।i - what left, tinga। - month/moon, gha।iye - time etc.

Even '।a- ɾa' vanished in Kannada during the time of writing of bhagavato, mahabharato it was prominently used in Tulu hence Tulu poets had to use these characters. Hence, they coined a separate symbol to represent '।।a- ɾa' in Tulu which is very different from Kannada, Tamil or Malayalam.

### **Half vowel in Tulu**

A special vowel in Tulu, half u represented by (ɸ) mostly found at the end of the words and in between. There are a few cases where this special sound appears in the beginning.

Example: ɸmbye = this guy

badɸkɸ = life

kāɸɸ = forest

### **Palm leaf manuscripts in Tulunad**

Hundreds of thousands of palm leaf manuscripts are found in Tulunad region. Most of them deals with vedas, astrology, Ayurveda, vaasthu, Sanskrit literature. Accidental discovery of Tulu epic 'Sri Bhagavato' by Dr. Venkataraja Punincittaya side lined the long run argument of Tulu being only a spoken

language. After this a lot of Tulu literary works were discovered in Tulu Script. This script was extensively used in Tulunad for all the literary purposes.

## Tulu inscriptions

### 1. Gōsāda Inscription



This inscription is in Kasaragod Taluk, Kumbadaje Village Gōsāda Sri Mahishamardini temple.

Kabesimha is the colloquialized Tulu form of 'Poet Simha'. There was no king named Kabesimha in Alupas, but this might have been referring to Kabi Alupendra. He reigned in power from 1110 A.D to 1160, which has a historical record. In his "Mittanādhike" meaning in his in-charge work related to temple's Grabhagriha was undertaken, inscription also of Umbali given. Therefore, we can

conclude that the inscription can be dated back to early 12th century. A practice called “Kumbachha” can similarly traced in Mameshwara Inscription too and may be an old ritual that is practiced. “vendikārya” means “work done”. These words can also be seen in Anantapura Inscription also.

## 2. Anantapura Inscription



This stone inscription was found at Ganapati shrine in Ananthapura Temple's outer portion, Kumble, Kasaragod Taluk.

First Read: Dr. K.V Ramesh: Further Read: Dr. RadhaKrishna Bellur, Udupi

The third line Vaikindeveyāyi kabayasimha can be read as vekindeveyayiku jayasimha

“Vaikindeva” surely means “Bankideva”. There is more chance that this inscription might have been installed by Aliya Bankideva. He ruled the kingdom between 1285 to 1315 AD. In 1275 when Veera Pandya died his son Nagadevarasa was still

juvenile hence Queen Ballamahadevi took the power. Aliya Bankideva was her subordinate and after learning that he had intentions of overthrowing her. So, she divided the Kingdom into two and let Bankideva rule Mangalore. Hence there are more chances that Bankideva might have made this inscription in his new territory. Again in 1300 he overthrew Nagadevarasa and acquired the whole Tulunad to himself. So, if he was the king during this period then this inscription can be dated to the end of 13th century.

In Tulu “ben” root verb means “serve” or “to do the work” so here we can imply Vendi Kārya->Bendi Kārya = Done Work, this meant of “Installed Inscription”.

There is no historical clear evidence of King named Jayasihma and the inscription found in Talangere mentions “Jayasihma” so there is a doubt if Jayasihma was Bankideva’s another name. By this we can conclude ‘vekindeveyayiku jayasimha’ meant “The one who is Vainkideva Jayasimha”

Dr.K.V Ramesh states “manevana” means “Tadya parihara” which is apt. Dever here means King himself.

Finally, we can conclude: The inscription is dated in the month when Jupiter was in Pisces house. Vaikindeva/Jayasimha King saved houses at Mugraira Village (Today’s Mogarālu Village) from imposed house tax. He took care of the village. The person who doesn’t belong to this village/ the one who disobeys the inscription will be thrown out of the village.

### **3. Kidooru Inscription**



This stone inscription was found in a paddy field, backside of Kidur temple, near Kumble, Kasaragod Taluk.

Read: Dr. RadhaKrishna Bellur, Udupi

This inscription has details about Kabesinga, meaning Kabi Simha giving donations to Kidoor temple.

He's the one who installed the Gōsāda inscription. There is mention of Kabesimha also in "Madhwa Vijaya"

He must be Kavi Alupendra. He has installed this in "Munnūtva radded sjtina sanketa" meaning 302 year. This date is in the Kollam Era Calendar which was prevalent in Tulunad during that time, the timeline can be classified to 1127 AD. This matches the rule of King Alupendra from 1110 to 1160.

#### **4. Kulashekara Inscription**



This stone inscription is in the right corner of Sri Veeranaryana temple's Garbhagriha, Kulashekara, Mangalore. It is in Tulu script, Tulu language. It is a donation inscription, time is unknown. But the inscription says it was Mesha(Aries) Month. It mention's Dharmasena \_\_\_\_ Jayavandya. It is clear by the word "Devalayo vend" meaning the King built the temple.It is clearly mentioned that he yearly donated 12 Mudi (measure) 'Baar'(Paddy) and gold to the temple.

Read: Dr. RadhaKrishna Bellur, Udupi

#### **5. Mameshwara Inscription**

Read: Dr. RadhaKrishna Bellur, Udupi





This is a Tulu script – Tulu language stone inscription found in Mameshwara Umamaheshwara Temple near Vitla. This was installed by Alupa King Bankideva. He Built the temple and temple’s “Devara Tine” He controlled the “Badacha” and gave donations to the temple. We find the mention of “Kumbhagachhagamita” which we can also see in Gōsāda Inscription found in Kumbadje Village. Vaikindeva is mentioned in Ananatpura Incription. Both these inscriptions refer to the same vaikindeva. Ananthpura shashana has mention of Jayasimha while this doesn’t.

The inscription was inscribed in memory of victory that we achieved in a tough war, The Umameshwara Temple and the temple’s “tiñe” were built. Also, there is mention of controlling “Badacha”. Considering this both lines we can clearly see Bankideva might have had a war with Badacha. Badacha(Badaja) was a native king of this region.

If this was so, this might be Bankideva! who overthrew the local king and Alupas started controlling this region. Form the Tulu script point of view. This inscription and recently found Kidoor Inscription tally a lot, meaning this must be around 12th century. Concluding that Mameshwara Inscription is of 12th century. This confirms the Vitla Mameshwara Sri Umamaheshwara. The idol is a monolithic statue of Shiva having Parvati (Uma) on his left lap. Normally temples will have



Parvati in Linga Rupa (phallic form of Shiva). It is clearly different from the Statue worship of Shiva. This is an extremely rare form of worshipping Shiva.

#### 6. Kolanakōdu Inscription



This stone inscription was found in Kolanakōdu, Kandavara in Kundapur Taluk. It is written in Tulu script – Kannada language.

Read: Dr. RadhaKrishna Bellur, Udupi

#### 7. Ubrangala Copperplate Inscription

This is the only one available copper plate inscription which was found in Ubrangala Tantri's house, this is in Tulu script, Tulu language. Purushotama Nochilathaya tantri writing down to Kideyoor Narayana's son Keshava. The subject of the Inscription is Adoption of a baby boy into the Kideyoor Family. Time is unclear.

Read: Dr. RadhaKrishna Bellur

### **8. Bajakoodlu Inscription**



### **9. Holakuli Inscription**



10. Parakkila Inscription



## 11. Kota Inscription



## 12. Shiriya Inscription



13. Padnooru Inscription





14. Kabaka inscription



15. Kitre inscription



16. Gunavante inscription 1



17. Gunavante inscription



18. Kananjaru inscription





19. Manjanadi inscription



20. Kodippadi inscription



21. Kumata inscription



22. Kodangala inscription



23. Ilantila inscription

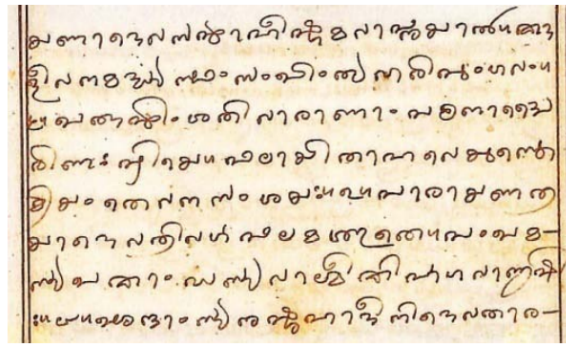


24. Eshwaramangala inscription





## 25. A manuscript of Tuluscript



## 26. Palm leaf manuscript



## **Debate on Tigalari Script**

The book 'Alivinanchinalliruva Tigalari lipi hasthaprathigalu' compiled by Dr.Keladi Gunda Joisa and Dr.Keladi Venkatesha Joisa, published by Keladi research foundation in 2017 compares Tigalari and Tulu scripts to be the two variant scripts with minor differences. They further add an assumption that Havyakas were the one who put forth this script custom during the time of Shivappa Nayaka. ' Due to the migration of people in later part of 16th century and 17th century from Ikkeri to South Canara, this script became popular in South Canara. Perhaps they used this script to pen down the literature of their regional language. The original script of Havyakas of Malenadu is Tigalari and they maintained their day-to-day writings such as home accounts, details of temple expenditures, astrology etc in this script'(Page XXVII).

There is no doubt that this script has been popular in Tulunad region ever since 10th century. This is more evident by the facts that recent excavations of various Tulu inscriptions belonging to 10th, 11th and 12th centuries. Along with that, ancient Tulu epics such as Karna parva, Sambhava parva, Shri Mahabharato, Shri Bhagavato could be easily traced back to 15th century and earlier. If one observes the linguistic difference between the Tulu used in inscriptions, epics with the current Tulu one can easily identify the more variation compared to the difference between 12th century Kannada language and Morden Kannada. The reference of Bankideva, Kavisimha, Kulashekhara in the Tulu inscriptions gives more information on the antiquity of Tulu script in Tulunad region. Hence the debate of Tulu script custom being borrowed during the time of Shivappa Nayaka in Tulunad is not an acceptable argument also the 'original script of Havyakas of Malenadu is Tigalari'. The Havyakas and Shivalli brahmins of South Canara and Kasargod too have extensively used this script. In fact, one can find more palm leave vaidhik manuscript in the vicinity of Shivalli brahmins. Also, the density of palm leaves in this script is abundant in Tulunad region with the fact that in this region the term Tigalari is not being used. Hence the claim of ' Tulu people influencing this script in recent days (page XXVI)' is not true. Upon that while providing the Tigalari

Alphabets from 26th page to 40th page they used the computerised font symbols developed by K.P. Rao not the publicly used Tigalari alphabetical symbols (computerised script is published in the current book)

We don't find much connection between Tigalari and North Canara. This is just 'Tigala's Arya Lipi'. Synonymously this is the script used to write Arya language in Dravidian country. We could find the several examples of using this script for writing Tulu, Sanskrit, Malayalam, Kannada languages in Tulunad region. Tamil of Pallava's time and current Malayalam too make use of this script.

### ABOUT TULU SCRIPT

Tulu is a native language of people inhabiting the land called as “Tulunadu” since ancient times. In the year 1945, Robert Caldwell mentioned tulu as the language of Dravidian origin along with tamil, telugu, kannada and malayalam. Later researchers noted a total of 27 languages to be of Dravidian origin. Furthermore, with the identification of these languages the previous belief that Dravidian language is of south Indian origin has been changed. Apart from India, countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan also had these languages of dravidian origin. Among those languages Brahui is identified to be the most prominent by language experts. Several languages of dravidian origin still exist as spoken languages also in various parts of northern India. A place near Afghanistan named as “Prak” originating from the tulu word “prak” translates itself to “prayer” in Sanskrit language. Existence of these places named over by the words in tulu clearly proves the existence of dravidian languages outside India and their usage as spoken languages in various parts of the world. “Tulu” as the name suggests is the most soft-spoken language. The name “tulu” originates as it is widely spoken by the people of Tulunadu. There is least usage of aspirated consonants in this language. However, “Anunasika swaras” or vowel nasalization are tremendously used. Tulu is known to directly originate from dravidian base and is not a sublanguage of any of the dravidian languages. According to language experts, its history dates back to 2600 years. Squadran leader P. S Rai in his works noted

several tulu words in 2000 year old Greek scriptures at the museum of Oxyrhynchus , Egypt. These words were noted in a humorous play named "Chaurison "written on papira pages. Notable polymath Dr. Shivaram Karanth also agreed with the same. This play has an instance of an incident at place Malpe of Udupi and uses several old tulu words in its conversations. A Greek lady named Sariti is the leading character of this play. It was mentioned in an encyclopedia called "Encyclopedia of Britannica" that there were nearly 1.19 crore tulu speaking people in the world. However, this number has decreased with time. Decline in these numbers are majorly due to factors such as lack of written literary works, monarchies, lack of support from the government and spread of people speaking other languages in Tulunadu. Until recently, people were unaware of the written script of tulu language. However, tulu language inevitably had a script since ancient times. All existing languages do not possess its own script, languages including Sanskrit and other north Indian languages uses a common Devanagari script. European languages including English make use of Roman scripts. Languages of Tibet, Burma, China, and Japan use similar scripts. Furthermore, Urdu, Persian and Arabic languages possess similar scripts as well. Tulu characters were originally taken from thousands of ancient scriptures written on papira pages. These scriptures are worshiped till now in several vedic households. The Deacon of Dharmastala Dr. Virendra Heggade has preserved thousands of these scriptures under the surveillance of Dr. Vignaraj. Dr. Venkataraj Puninchittaya has conducted transcriptions of several such scriptures. Important among them are Tulu bhagavatha written by Vishnutunga, Tulu Mahabharato written by Aarunabhja of Udupi Kodavoor, prose of Devi Mahatme, Kaveri, and Karna Parva of 13 th and 14 th century. Nearly 45 inscriptions of tulu, kannada and Sanskrit languages written in tulu scripts have been found which dates back from 7 th century BC to 14 th century BC. Tulunadu has witnessed immigrants from various parts of the world. Arabs as traders were major among them. They were here for its major crop-rice known as "Arishi" in ancientdravidian language. The same is derived into "Ari" in Tulu, "voraisa" in Arabian language, "rice "in English and "raiees" in French. Hence, Tuluvas were the people who introduced rice to the people of Europe through Arabs. Similar to rice several other words derived from

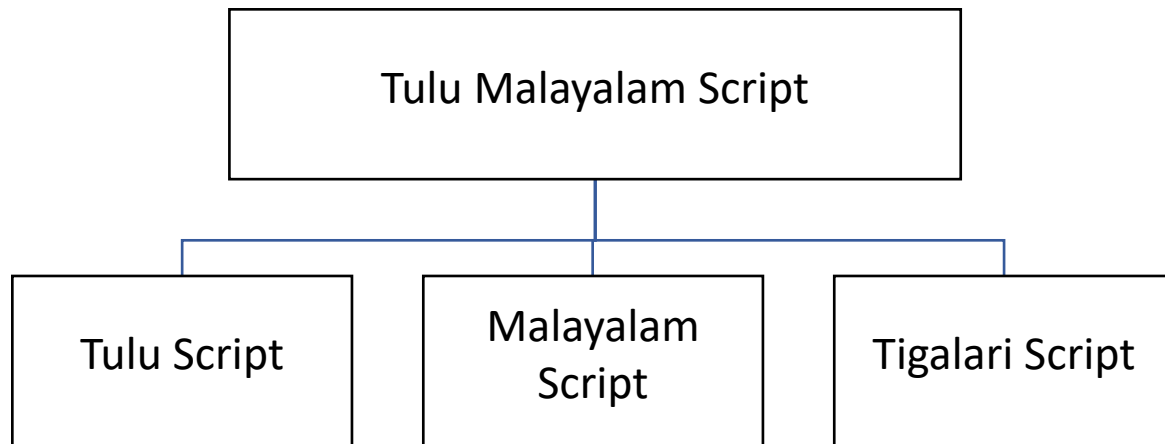


tulu were introduced by the Arabs into European languages. However, Tulu also received several words of Sanskrit, English and other Indian languages. In turn Tulu has also contributed its words to Sanskrit and other Indian languages. In 18th century BC, German protestant missionaries came to Tulunadu. They learnt tulu in the view of spreading Christianity and wrote several texts in tulu. They also made use of kannada scripts to write tulu texts. In 1886, first text printed in Tulu which was a collection of "Paddanas" or song constituting of an important aspect of the folklore of coastal Karnataka by Rev. August Maenner. Several such works include tulu grammar by Reverend Brigel, Tulu-English dictionary by Rev Maenner and missionary bible songs. These missionaries also started tulu medium primary schools. In 1892, first Tulu textbooks for standard One was also published. However, due to unwillingness of people to send their children to a tulu medium school these classes were made to end at standard third.

**Summary of the preface by Mr. Venkataraja Puninchittaya in the book 'Tulu lipi' (Published by Karnataka Tulu Sahitya Academy in 2001)**

The script used by the migrating Tulu priests in Kerala to write vedas and mantras around 11-12<sup>th</sup> century is popularly known as the Tulu Script. As this script form is popular in both Tulunad and Kerala, it's called TuluMalayalam script.

This Tulu-Malayalam script became Malayalam script in Kerala and Tulu script in Tulunad. These two scripts share much similarities because they originated from same parent script



Western researcher Burnell, in his book 'Elements of South Indian Palaeography' have published complete alphabet of Tulu script.

Shri Manjunatheshwara Cultural Research Foundation at Dharmasthala founded by DR. Veerendra Heggade has more than 2000 Tulu manuscripts. This is a solid proof for the existence of Tulu Script.

As there are a lot of differences in Tulu script being used in different Books, it is very challenging to accept one single form. This book proposed a uniform script for Tulu after studying different palm leaf manuscripts.

15.08.2001  
Puninchittaya

Venkataraja

"Gaayatri", Kakkebetu