

EAT RIGHT

There is certainly a resurgence of interest in local food and a growing awareness of the benefits of eating fresh and seasonal produce, writes *Rashmi Vasudeva*

Your state on your plate



Millet pongal

One state. Many worlds. The catchphrase of the Karnataka Tourism Department is arguably more apt for the state's cuisine than anything else. Unfortunately, the state's many thriving food sub-cultures and mouth-watering dishes are hidden under the flamboyance of the Mysore *masala dosa* or its drippy cousin Davangere *benne dosa*.

Anecdotal evidence sadly suggest that forget the so-called 'outsiders', even Kannadigas themselves are quite unaware of the rich variety of cuisine the state offers.

Ask anyone to name a few Karnataka-specific dishes and, yes, you will get to hear about the same-old *doses*, the odd *maddur vada* or two, or that all-consuming behemoth — *bisibelebath*. Really, we owe it to the diversity of the state to dig a little deeper, don't we?

Not only is Karnataka's food highly evolved in terms of variety and taste, but it is also, like most cuisines with a history, deeply scientific in its ethos.

Chef Regi Mathew, who has been championing ethnic cuisines for many years now, says Karnataka's food habits are different every 100 km.

"Look at the local *oota* of the region — it will tell you everything about how multifaceted the state's heritage is."

Be it the *thatte idli* with coconut

chutney and Mysore *bonda* one relishes in South Karnataka, the *gassi* and *neer dosa* of coastal Karnataka, the millet *rottis* (both *jowar* and *sajje*) with *ennegai*



Holige or obbattu. PHOTO BY SK DINESH

in North Karnataka or the *kadamputtu* with *mudre kanni* of the Kodagu region, the delicacies are all deeply linked with the agricultural traditions of the particular region.



Millets rotti

Simply put, North Karnataka primarily cultivates *jowar*, the west rice, and the south *ragi*. From here have sprung the many delicacies of the state.

Evidently, when the foods are so deeply dependent on the agricultural produce of the region, they are essentially driven by seasons. The local eco-system, the climate of the region and the kind of soil — all make a difference to the food that is consumed. This is where science and nutrition blend into one. As the chef says, if we stick to season-specific food habits like our forefathers clearly did, we are automatically consuming fresh, natural produce that are good for our body (and soul). More crucially, by doing so, we are getting the "right nutrition for the right season".

Worldwide too, food trends are all about going local and seasonal. Nutritionists and dietitians are crying themselves hoarse that a prominent reason for our ills and deficiencies is our nonchalant ignoring of the scientific and cultural aspects of our foods, not to mention our consumption

of over-processed foods loaded with empty calories and sugar.

Sankranthi science

For instance, since *Makara Sankranthi* is round the corner, consider the traditional Karnataka delicacies prepared during this time.

"Each one of the foods that are eaten during *Sankranthi* has a purpose and meaning," says Neetha Pulakeshi, who has a small business of making *sambar* powders and pickles at home. The chef agrees.

"*Sankranthi* is a harvest festival; hence, there is abundance. This is why Kannadigas make *huggi* (sweet pongal), which symbolises the overflowing of both food and happiness," he says. However, *Sankranthi* is not just about *huggi* in Karnataka — there is a veritable feast out there, if only one cares to look (and eat of course).

As it is still wintry when *Sankranthi* arrives, especially in the northern parts of the state, *bajra rotti* is made during the season. This is to be lapped up with *kaalu palyas* of many kinds; then there is the crunchy and delicious peanut *holige*, a 'warmth-providing' variety of the traditional sweet dish. Notice that all the ingredients used for these dishes are harvested during *Sankranthi*.

Even the very popular tradition of *ellu beerodu* has great scientific significance, explains the chef. "The platter exchanged between women and girls comprises sugarcane, a sesame and jaggery mixture, *sakkare acchu* (sugar candy), jujube, betel leaves, arecanut and bananas."

The beauty of the platter lies in its nutritional balance — while the bananas and sugarcane provide energy, sesame and jaggery are foods meant to generate warmth in the system to combat the chills

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Avarekai melas were once farmer's way of dealing with their surplus produce.

and flu, common during winters.

Nowadays, many also advocate preparing *huggi* (or *pongali*) using millets — a nutritionally powerful variant of the one made with wheat.

Avarekai versus sajje rotti!

No, we have not forgotten 'THE' bean of the state, Karnataka, especially southern Karnataka's love for the bean, is now legendary. Incidentally, Chef Mathew has an interesting anecdote about how the humble *avarekai* came to dominate the winters

in Karnataka. In the 1970-80s, there was a sudden and unexplained fall in demand for the crop. It was then that traders suggested to farmers to hold *avarekai melas* in and around Bengaluru to sell their surplus produce. Soon enough, this not only became a tradition, but also popularised the bean in the region to a great extent.

So much so that in some households, there is no escaping the green bean this season. *Avarekai* shows up its little face in every dish that is prepared — *uppitu*, *rottis*, *saaru*, and yes, even in *bisibelebath*!

While the bean rules in the southern states, *Sankranthi* is *sajje* season in the north. *Sajje* is a millet variety and is grown during this period.

The preparation of these *rottis* though is a fine art by itself and will take a while to master. But once prepared, they go very well with several accompaniments — from powders (*pudi*) such as *shenga pudu*, *agasi pudu* and *uchchal pudu* to fresh greens (like *methi*) and the aforementioned *kaalu palyas*.

There's more

If you have not yet run to the kitchen hungry, there are a few more *Sankranthi*-specific foods waiting to be explored. For instance, there is the *til chikki* and the *til laddoo*, both prepared with sesame (another seasonal queen), jaggery, peanuts and dollops of ghee. Not to forget the traditional *chakkara pongal* or *sakkre pongal*, prepared with coconut, rice, jaggery, milk, *chana dal* and a generous helping of all the dry fruits you can lay your hands on!

While it is true that we don't often pause to wonder about the food we eat, there is certainly a resurgence of interest in local food and a growing awareness of the nutritional benefits of eating fresh and seasonal produce.

The many delights that Karnataka cuisine has to offer in this season of abundance and harvest will make that journey back to one's roots only that much easier.

LANGUAGES

Dialects bloomed in Tulu Nadu due to geographical boundaries and caste divisions, writes *Karthik Malli*

In addition to rich linguistic diversity, Indian languages — like any other languages — show considerable internal variation, in the form of myriad dialects. These dialects offer linguists a wealth of insights.

Tulu, a Dravidian language spoken by around 1.85 million people primarily along the southern coast of Karnataka, is no different when it comes to variation.

Tulu is primarily an unwritten language, known for its oral traditions. It is also the non-literary Dravidian language that has attracted the most attention from linguists.

As is the case with languages in general, dialectal variation in Tulu exists along two primary axes — social and regional.

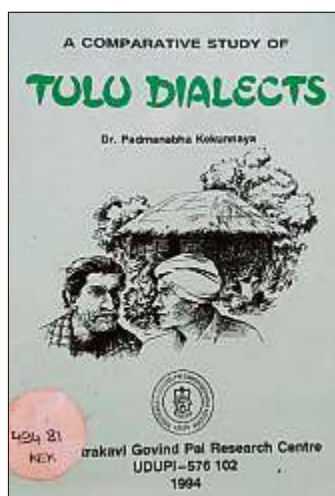
Mapping the language

To visualise Tulu linguistic variation, it's important to understand the cultural geography in which it is spoken, a region commonly termed Tulu Nadu.

According to the linguist DNS Bhat, Tulu Nadu is "geographically and sociolinguistically compact," and is defined by a set of natural borders — from the Suvarna river in the north to the Chandragiri river in the south (roughly from Udupi to Kasaragod), and west of the Western Ghats.

The mighty Netravati river divides the region into two almost equal halves, each half also featuring its own regional dialect — North Tulu, and South Tulu.

Mangaluru (Kudla in Tulu) is the largest city in northern Tulu Nadu, and in the entire region as a whole; Puttur, a significantly smaller town, is the largest urban centre in its south.



Linguists have divided Tulu into four dialects, based on its divisions — North Common, North Brahmin, South Common, South Brahmin. There are further regional and social subdivisions, with less variation.

Up until modern times, the caste system restricted mixing between different caste groups, and as a result, different communities evolved their own linguistic mannerisms.

Social-linguistic variations are most pronounced along Brahmin and non-Brahmin lines, with Dalit and *adivasi* dialects forming a smaller but prominent group within the broader non-Brahmin dialect, called the Common dialect in literature.

The usage of Standard Kannada as a formal written language is superimposed on this usage of Tulu and other local languages like Byari and Konkani; Tulu Nadu's bilingualism is a key part of its identity — Kannada has influenced its languages for centuries.

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The book *A Comparative Study Of Tulu Dialects*, written by the linguist Padmanabha Kekunnaya and published in 1994 by the Rashtrakavi Govinda Pai Research Centre (RGPRC), is a landmark work in Tulu linguistics highlighting various phonological, grammatical, and lexical differences between these four broad dialects — many along social lines, many others regional.

A conspicuous difference between both regional varieties of Tulu is that the *-a* sound at the end of nouns in North Tulu corresponds to *-o* in South Tulu. The title of the Tulu epic, *Sri Bhagavato*, reflects its origins in modern Kasaragod district.

Of vernacular variety



Bhutakola, a folk ritual, has recitals characterised by Common dialects.

Dialect variation

SOUTH BRAHMIN	SOUTH COMMON	NORTH BRAHMIN	NORTH COMMON	GLOSS
Amberpu	Amberpu	Ambarappu	Ambarappu	Hurry
Anumaano	Almaano	Anumaana	Almaana	Suspicion
Abjaali	Abjaali	---	---	Vagabond
Apaka	Apaga	Apaga	Adaga	Then

The Tulu Lexicon Project, undertaken by the RGPRC, incorporates Tulu's rich dialectal variation. Each entry is identified with the dialect(s) in which it appears, with its corresponding forms in the other dialects listed as well. Brahmin dialects show a higher percentage of Sanskrit words. Southern dialects, especially in the west, feature more Malayalam borrowings. The data for the project was taken from various

paddana (the primary genre of Tulu folk songs) and proverbs, as well as Classical Tulu literature. Classical Tulu literature, including the two epic poems *Sri Bhagavato* and *Kaveri*, was written in Brahmin dialects, as works of literature composed by the elites. On the other hand, *paddana* uses Common dialects, since these songs were composed and sung by the masses. According to DNS Bhat, the

North Common dialect is the most linguistically innovative form of Tulu, while the South Brahmin dialect is its most linguistically conservative form.

The North Common dialect, the chief language variety spoken in Mangaluru city, has emerged as a de facto standard form by virtue of the city's status as Tulu Nadu's economic and cultural hub.

A striking feature of this dialect, not shared by other varieties of

Tulu, is the loss of the retroflex or hard 'l' and 'n' sounds, such as in words like *kannu* (eye) and *puli* (tamarind).

Given the general neglect of non-literary languages in Indian language discourse in general, it's refreshing to see linguistic variation in Tulu documented and studied in such depth.

In addition, such research offers us a window into the various forces that have shaped the Tulu language throughout its long and storied history.

FEEDBACK

Send your ideas and comments to: spectrum@deccanherald.co.in or Spectrum, c/o Deccan Herald #75, M G Road, Bengaluru-560001