Jēnu Kurumba: First Report on a Tribal Language of the Nilgiri Area
Author(s): Kamil V. Zvelebil

Please see “How to cite” in the online sidebar for full citation information.

Please contact BLS regarding any further use of this work. BLS retains copyright for both print and screen forms of the publication. BLS may be contacted via http://linguistics.berkeley.edu/bls/.

The Annual Proceedings of the Berkeley Linguistics Society is published online via eLanguage, the Linguistic Society of America's digital publishing platform.
Jēnu Kurumbā
First Report on a Tribal Language of the Nilgiri Area
Kamil V. Zvelebil, University of Utrecht

During my recent field-work on the Irula language (the Nilgiris, South India), I had the opportunity, in March 1978, to interview a couple of Jēnu Kurumbā informants at Teppakādu, Mudumalai Wild Life Sanctuary (Gudalur Taluk, Nilgiri District).

1. There is a very meagre ethnographic literature on the Jēnu Kurumbas alias Kādu Nayikas and nothing at all has been published on their language, with the possible exception of a few notes by U.P. Upadhyaya who incorrectly regards "Jenu Kurumba" as a dialect of Kannada. Early ethnographers were not even aware that the Jēnu Kurumbas and the Kādu Nayikas were in fact one and the same tribe, going under several designations. All my Kādu Nayika informants were adamant in their assertion that they were indeed Jēnu Kurumbas. They considered as ridiculous the suggestion that Jēnu Kurumbas and Kādu Nayikas were two different communities. The identity of Jēnu Kurumbas and Kādu Nayikas as being one tribal group was confirmed independently by Paniyan and Shōleqa informants.

The Kādu Nayikas (=Jēnu Kurumbas) of the larger Nilgiri area were enumerated in 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931 and 1941 as 1418, 1085, 2486, 2475, 4017, 1581 and 1520 souls respectively. The 1961 Census mentions the surprisingly low figure of 612. A rough present estimate for the Gudalur Taluk of the Nilgiri District is about 1300. In Kerala State, there may be about 4000 Kādu Nayikas. Hence, the total population of the tribe may be 5300 in 1980.

Nowadays, Kādu Nayikas live in small, rather isolated settlements in the Gudalur Taluk. A few cultivate small plots of land assigned to them by the government. Some of them work as farm labourers. A number of their men work as forest guards and elephant mahouts in the Mudumalai Wild Life Sanctuary. Hunting of small and bigger game (wild boar) and collecting forest produce (honey, bulbous roots) is still practiced. The women possess basket-making skills. There is limited rearing of poultry, pigs and goats.

Their huts, some of them still very simple, and deep in the forest, are long, low, the floor level with the ground, walls made of flattened bamboo, roof covered with grass or straw. Kādu Nayikas
belong to the tall, long-armed, dark to very dark-skinned among the Wynaad tribes. The hair is curly or wavy. Both sexes wear earrings. The females wear long cloth of dark colours (red, indigo, green) and knot it over their right shoulder.

My informants who were professional elephant mahouts at Teppakāḍu were friendly and communicative but possessing a certain amount of dignity, pride and reticence which I did not find with the Kasabas or most Irulas.

2. Kāḍu Nāyikas call their language which I prefer to designate Jēnu Kurumba (JKu.) naḍa ma’tu 'our speech'. It is an independent South Dravidian tribal language, possibly closely related to Ālu and Pālu Kurumba, rather Kannada-like, but less 'Kannadaoid' than Shōlega.

2.1. The phonological features of JKu. manifest a few specific developments, but on the whole characterize the language rather as Kannada-like with some typical Nilgiri areal traits. Among these traits, the most prominent is strong contrastive (phonemic) centralization of vowels which JKu. shares with Irula, e.g. ākki 'paddy', kāriyā-wu 'a kind of snake', giṇan 'parrot', ciṇṇa 'small', ṣṟṇu 'woman', kēre 'pond, tank', bēre 'different', pēli 'panther', fikkūṭti 'hiccough', guḷu 'roof/ceiling'.

In a few items, JKu. has nasalized ā and ā’, always in the neighbourhood of -w-, cf. ā-we 'tortoise', mā-wumara 'mango-tree', ji-wa 'life, soul' (for -w-, see below).

Kannada-like is the development of v→b- which JKu. shares with Shōlega, Kannada, Kodagu and Tulu: cf. bara 'coming, next', bale 'net', ba-če 'plantain', biculù 'heat', bīllulù 'garlic', bē-ṭṭē 'hunting', bēre 'different'.

Kannada is alone among the larger SDr. languages in its development of *p- to h-; in this feature, JKu. agrees in many items (certainly not borrowings) with Kannada and Badaga; in almost an equal number of items, h- has disappeared altogether; however, there is also a number of words in which p- has remained.

*p- > h- : haji 'hunger', hani 'drizzling rain', hałe 'old', huy-d- 'to rain', hōle 'river'.
*p- > *h- > ṭ: asu 'cow', āna 'money', ani 'sew', allī 'house-lizard', ụḷu 'worm', uṭṭu 'ant nest', o- 'to go'.

p- remains e.g. in pa-ne 'clay-pot', pēli 'panther', pu-cce 'cat', podice 'bush'.

In some items, h- reappears in emphatic or care-
ful pronunciation: a typical instance is ẓənu 'female', pronounced emphatically as [ʔənu] or [hənu].

Original *k- before front vowels is preserved, cf. kennay 'red dog (Canis dakhinensis)'8) and kemmalu 'coughing, cough'. This feature points rather in the Kannada (and Toda) direction than to Ta.-Ma.

Very interesting and, as far as I can say, specifically JKu. phonological features are:

a. the existence of a bilabial nasalized fricative semivowel which is demivoced, and occurs with nasalized ā, ā'.; it is a sound 'between' half-voiced [m] and [w], resulting from various developments;

b. the replacement of *-q- by -ɾ-.

For a), *pām̥pu, Ka. pāvu, hāvu: JKu. ā-'wu 'snake'; *māmara or *mārumara: JKu. mā′wumara 'mango-tree'; *yāmay, Ka. āme, ēve, ēve: JKu. ā′we 'tortoise'; *nām, Ka. nāvu: JKu. nā′wu 'we (incl.)'; IA *jīva-: JKu. ji′wa 'life, soul'.

b) The development of *-t->*-q->-ɾ-; *nōt- (Ko. no′t-, To. nw̢′t-, Ta. nōtt-, Ka. nōd-): JKu. no′ɾ- 'to see' (e.g. no′ɾd̥enu 'I see/saw'); Ko. go′ɾ, Ka. go′ɾe: JKu. go′ɾe 'wall'. Not all *-q->-ɾ-, cf. mo′da 'cloud, sky'.

-ã is phonemic at least in one item: mañan/ mañamu 'son'. JKu. shares this form with some other Kurumba languages and with Irula.10

-∂-, -dd- and -nn- are strongly palatalized when followed by front vowels: o′ɾd̥enu [o′ɾd̥enu] or [o′ɾd̥enu] 'I go/went'; no′ɾd̥enu [no′ɾd̥enu] or [no′ɾd̥enu] 'I see/saw'; leddī [leddī] 'elephant-dung'; 'tambēnu [tambēnu] or [tambēnu] 'I come/came'.

2.2 In the sphere of derivational morphology the most striking feature is the highly productive derivational suffix -an, phonetically [-a] or [-a] forming substantives from noun-stems: akkan 'elder sister', tamman 'younger brother', ku′ran 'mouse-deer' (cf. Ma. kūran 'hog-deer'), giɣan 'parrot' (DED 1316), ca′ regan 'roe, gazelle', noŋan 'kind of fly', muccan 'black-faced monkey'. None of these items is apparently borrowed.

Composition, too, is interesting. It is characteristic for some Nilgiri languages (e.g. Irula) that the first member of the compound remains unchanged (unlike in Tamil); JKu. follows this model, cf. ka′d̥upu′cece 'wild cat', ha′d̥u heŋdi 'wild boar' ka′d̥una′yika 'name of a people'.

2.3 In inflectional morphology, JKu. manifests some highly interesting features, and stands about midway between Ta.-Ma. and Ka. This is the pronominal system:
Among the pronouns, 1.p.sg., 2.p.sg., 3.p.sg.m. and n. are identical with the pronouns of mod. Lit. Ka. (nānu, nīnu, avaru, adu); however, the fem. ava is like Irula or Spoken Tamil (whereas Ka. has avaru; this form was vehemently denied by J Ku. informants).

More striking is the plural. J Ku. manifests the inclusive: exclusive dichotomy. The incl. pl. is quite obviously related to Ka. (J Ku. nāwu : Ka. nānu, O Ka. nām)\(^\text{13}\), whereas the excl. pl. is identical with the spoken Ta. 1.p.pl.excl. (J Ku. nānga : Spoken Ta. nānga, Lit. Ta. nāṅkāl). We would expect 2.p.pl. *nīmu or *nīvu (cf. Ka. nīm, nīvu, Ir. ni·mu), but instead we again have full agreement with Spoken Ta. (J Ku. ni·nga : Spoken Ta. niṅga, Lit. Ta. niṅkāl). 3.p.pl.m.f. corresponds to Ka. avaru.

The case-terminations manifest a similar situation. Accusative, like in Irula, has two allo-morphs, -e and -ne, cf. ku·ran·e no·rđenu 'I see a mouse-deer', a·ne·ne no·rđenu 'I see an elephant'. Dative -gu and -ku (e.g. ka·dugu 'to the forest', u·tiku 'to Ooty') is again rather like Ta. -Ma. (Ka. has -ge/-ke). Loc. -(i)le is like Spoken Ta. (J Ku. ka·dile 'in the forest'). However, ablative is formed like the Ka. ablative-instrumental in* -iṁda, cf. J Ku. ka·dinda 'from the forest', maneyinda/maninda 'from the house' with Ka. maneyinda 'from the house'. The absence of a separate gen.-obq. form in J Ku. is shared with Ir., cf. J Ku. ka·dile 'in the forest', Ir. ka·dili 'in the forest-garden' (in contrast to Ta. kāṭṭil-ś 'in the jungle').

It is of course impossible to offer a more precise characterization of J Ku. grammatical structure without a thorough study of many more data. However, it seems to me that the basic grammatical structure is about midway between Kannada and Tamil, perhaps with a slant towards Kannada. Even when there is Tamil-like construction the phonology is more Kannada-like, e.g. o·da va·ra u·tik' o·y ban·nenu 'last week I went to Ooty', na·nu ninag' anag koṭtunu 'I will give you money'. This last example shows the most striking feature of J Ku. verbal morphology: the past-stem\(^\text{14}\) was extended so as to form the bases for both the past tense and the non-past tense. In this important matter J Ku. agrees
with Toda and Kota. Is the extension of this $S^2$ as basis for the past and non-past tenses a typical innovation of a group of Nilgiri languages, and hence a Nilgiri areal feature—or, perhaps, to be more precise, a feature manifested in the 'autochthonous, aboriginal' Nilgiri languages (Toda, Kota, Kurumba)? Examples: no’a- 'to see'; stem no’r-; o’- 'to go'; stem o’-d-; koq- 'to give'; stem koq-t-; ba-/ba- 'to come'; stem ba-a-nd-/ba-nn-; ir- 'to be'; stem idd- (iddenu 'I am/was'). Cf. nenne na’-n’ ninag’ ana koqtenu 'I gave you-sg. money yesterday'; na’ na’lega ninag’ ana koqtenu 'I'll give you money tomorrow'; bara va’ra u’rugu o’denu 'I'll go home coming week'; o’da va’ra u’rugu o’denu 'I went home last week'; nanagu i’ga ta’ nonda’u 'I have pains right now'; na’-n’ kandipa bannenu 'I will certainly come'. These instances were checked and rechecked and glossed in Tamil, Badaga and Kannada.

The extension of the 'past stem' $S^2$ to both past and non-past tenses in JKu. cannot be doubted; it is a striking feature, but, as manifested by Toda and Kota, not an isolated phenomenon.

Another important feature is the inclusive: exclusive distinction in the suffixes of l.p.pl.: bannenu 'we-incl. come/will come, came' : bannenu 'we-excl. come/will come, came'.

A thorough investigation and description of the JKu. language of Kāchu Nāyikas must only begin.

However, even a brief sketch like the foregoing shows that it is a tribal speech of independent status, and that its investigation may play an important role in Nilgiri areal linguistics as well as in the historical-comparative study of Tamil and Kannada.

In conclusion, I give a sample word-list of JKu. lexical items selected from several hundred entries gathered during my brief field-work.

1. arcapanara s.cp'd. 'yellow/orange colour'. Cf. Ka. arisina/Skt. haridriā- etc. + DED 3047 Ta'Ma. niram, Ko. nerm.

2. ariyan, aliyan s. 'son-in-law'. Cf. AKu. aliya (DBK) 'son-in-law etc.', Shōl. aliya id. DED 256 Ma. aliyan 'brother-in-law', Ko. ayl 'brother-in-law, male cross-cousin', Ka. aliya 'son-in-law'.

3. ā·we s. 'tortoise'. DED 4232 Ta. yāmai, āmai, Ka. āme, āve, ēve 'tortoise, turtle'.

4. i'ga adv. 'how'. DED 351(a) Ka. iga.

6. ụlu s. 'worm'. DED 3537 Ta. pułu etc., Kođ. pułu.
7. uṭtu (ᵗ=alveolar occlusive) s. 'white-anthill' DED 3556 Ta. puṟru etc., Ka. puttu, huttu, uṭtu.
8. ettanu s. 'grand-father'. Cf. Ir. ettapan etc., AKu. ettappa (DBK), Ka. hettappa, hetappa 'grand-father'.
9. ouve s. 'mother'. Cf. Ir. (different dialects) auve, avve, agve, ogge, AKu. avve (DBK) id. DED 232 Ta. avvai, Ko. av, Ka. avve, avva etc.
10. ojja adj. 'new'. DED 3511 Ta. putu etc., Ko. ock 'ritually new after purification', Ka. hosa etc. 'that which is new'.
11. olle adj. 'good'. DED 855 Ta. oli 'excellence', Ka. ołe 'goodness'.
12. ụkki s. 'paddy'. DED 178 Ta. ari, Ko. aky, Ka. aki id.
14. ụru s. 'ant'. Cf. Ir. urumbu. DED 734 Ta. erumbu, Ko. irb, To. ırb, Ka. īrumpu etc.
15. ọndru s. 'wife'. Cf. OTa. peṇṭir, OKa. pen- dir, Ir. 'poṇḍiru 'women', Bad. en 'female'. DED 3608(a).
16. ọndruganđaru s. cpd. 'husband and wife'. DED 3608(a) + 986 Ta. kaṇṭaṇ 'warrior; husband', Ka. ganda 'husband' Ko. gand 'male'.
17. ėnghu, pl. ėnnumakka s. 'female, woman'. DED 3608(a) Ta. Ka. peṇ, Mod.Ka. heṇnu, Bad. en.
18. kanara s. 'water-well'. DED 1663 Ta. kiṇaru, Ma. kiṇar id.
19. katte s. 'ass'. DED 1149 Ta. kālotai, Ka. karte, kate id.
20. ka'ne neg.v. 'is not'. Cf. Ir. ka'ne 'don't know, don't see; is not'. DED 1209 Ta. kān etc.
21. kurkan s. 'jackal'. Cf. DED 1496 Ta. kurai 'to bark'; kukkal, kukkan 'dog'/Skt. kurkura- etc. 'dog'.
22. koḷalu s. 'booe'. DED 1511 Ta. kuḷal 'flute, pipe', Ko. koḷ 'clarinet, Ka. koṣal 'flute' etc.
23. koḍan s. 'large white-faced monkey'. Cf. Ir. koḍa, kuḍag. DED 1820 Ta. kōṭaram 'monkey', Ko. koṛn 'small monkey', To. kwṭ-rn 'monkey', Ka. kōḍaga 'monkey, ape', Ko. koḍe 'monkey'.
24. kere s. 'pond, tank'. Cf. Ir. kere, AKu. kere (DBK). DED 1648 Ko. ker, Ka. kere, Kođ. kere, 'tank'.
25. gañucu s. 'root, tuber'. DED 1314 Ta. ki-laktu, Ka. genasu, genisu etc.
26. cölle s. 'mosquito'. Cf. DED 2296 Ta. cellu
'flea, tick' etc., To. to’k 'flea'.

27. tīnnu (tīnā-, tīnbāde) v. 'to eat'. DED 2670(a) Ta. tin.

28 danamāri s.cpd. 'calf': Skt. dhana- 'property, riches' > NIA 'herd, cattle'; Bad. dana 'cattle' (CDIAL 6717) + DED 3901 Ta. Ka. mari 'young of sheep etc.'

29. da'ri s. 'way, road'. DED 2589 Ta. tāri, Ka. dāri.


31. no- (nond-) v. 'to ache'. DED 3143 Ta. nō (nont-), Ka. nō (nond-).

32. no'ri (no'rd-) v. 'to see'. Cf. AKu. no'd- (DBK). DED 3144 Ta. nōkkku, Ko. no'č-, To. nūč-', Ka. nōdu 'to look, look at'.

33. podice, podce s. 'bush'. Cf. AKu. pode (DBK). DED 3664 Ta. putai 'to be covered etc.', putal, putar, potai 'bush', Ka. podisu 'to cover etc.', podar 'bush', Ko. pot 'bush'.

34. ba-/ba- (band-/bann-) v. 'to come'. DED 4311.

35. ba'ḍu s. 'meat'. DED 4380 Ka. ba'ḍu 'flesh', Ta. vāṭṭu 'roasted or fried flesh or vegetable'.

36. biṅki s. 'fire'. No etymology. Ka. beṅki.

37. be'lī s. 'fence'. DED 4556 Ka. bēli id.

38. mane s. 'house'. DED 3911 Ka. man id.

39. male s. 'rain'. DED 3893 Ka. māre, māle id.

40. mola s. 'hare'. DED 4071 Ka. mola, mala, Ko. molm id.

41. haji s. 'hunger'. Cf. DED 3165(a) Ta. paci etc.

42. hēndi s. 'pig'. DED 3326 Ta. pānri etc., Ka. pandi, handi.

43. huy-(huyd-) v. 'to rain'; male huydadu 'it rains'. Cf. DED 3610 Ta. pey-, Ko. 'oy-.

Notes

1) In the Draft Project Report for the Development of Primitive Tribes in the Nilgiris, Govt. of Tamilnadu Confidential Report, s.d. (but presumably 1977), there is passim some very superficial information on Kāṭṭunāyakkar. Further bibliography: Irudaynath, Philo, 'Kāṭṭunāyakkar' (in Tamil), in: Palaṅkutimakkal, Madras 1965, 34-43; Luiz, A.A.D., 'Kattunāyakan', in: Tribes of Kerala, New Delhi 1962, 86-90; Raghavan, M.D. 'Jain-Kurumbas - An Account of Their Life and Habits', Man in India 9, Ranchi 1929, 54-65; Sakthivel, S. 'Kāṭṭunāyakkar'
2) Upadhyaya, U.P. 'The Jenu Kurumba Dialect of Kannada', Linguistic Survey Bulletin 4, Poona 1968. However, Upadhyaya's Jenu Kurmbas live in the "forest ranges of the hilly district of Coorg".
3) Alternative forms: Jēnu Kurubas, Jēnu Kūrumas, Tēnu Kurumbas, Jain Kurumbas; Kāṭṭu Nāyakkar, Kattunaicker. The first name means "Honey-Kurumbas", the second "The Lords of the Forest" (eulogistic self-designation).
4) E. Thurston (1909, IV: 165) and A.A.D. Luiz (op. cit. p.86) identified the two correctly as one tribe, but, incorrectly, 'added' the 'Shola Naya-kans' (=Shōlegas) to them as the same ethnic group. The Shōlegas are an entirely different tribe.
5) My Paniyan informant Chemban told me on 20.3.1978: "There are two jātis known as Nāyakkas: the Shōlanāyakkas living e.g. at Ānegattī, called also Shōlegas; and the Kāṭṭunāyakkas who live at Teppa-kādū, and are also called Jēnu Kurumbas. These two are different communities. They speak two different languages, and I don't understand either of the two". My conversation with Chemban took place in Tamil.
6) There are at least six more or less different Kurumba languages known in the larger Nilgiri area. JKū is one of them. Hence the preference for the designation of the language as JKū.
7) Cf. DED 3960 To. mo't 'words, speech (in songs)', Ka. mātu 'word, language', Te. māta.
8) DED 1607 To. keno'y, Ta. cennāy.
9) DED 1634 Ka. kemmu, Ta. cerumu.
10) Cf. Ālu Kurumba mānj 'son' (DBK), Irula muñe [muŋʃ] 'son' (KVZ, IL II, Index 505, and p.23).
11) Cf. DED 24 Old Ta. akkaŋ, To. okn.
12) DED 2513 Ka. tamma, Kođ. tammanŋ.
13) Does the JKū nasalized ŋŋ in this item, followed by the semi-voiced bilabial nasalized fricative w preserve what might have been an intermediate stage between Old Ka. nām and mod. Ka. nāvu?
15) When our tape-recording session was over, one of my informants said to me: naŋga tīnbade o'demu 'we-excl. are going to eat', indicating that I was 'excluded' from the lunch and that he meant only himself and his Kādū Nāyika companion. At the same time, the utterance shows the extension of
$S_2$ (o·d-) to the 'future' (i.e. non-past + definite) tense-aspect.

Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AKu.</td>
<td>Álu Kurumba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad.</td>
<td>Badugu (Badaga)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DBK</td>
<td>Álu Kurumba data provided by D.B. Kapp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IA</td>
<td>Indo-Aryan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ir.</td>
<td>Irula.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JKu.</td>
<td>Jēnu Kurumba.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka.</td>
<td>Kannāḍa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ko.</td>
<td>Kota.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kod.</td>
<td>Kodagu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lit.Ta.</td>
<td>Literary Tamil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma.</td>
<td>Malayalam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OKa.</td>
<td>Old Kannāḍa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTa.</td>
<td>Old Tamil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pa.</td>
<td>Pali.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pkt.</td>
<td>Prakrit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDr.</td>
<td>South Dravidian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shol.</td>
<td>Shōlega.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skt.</td>
<td>Sanskrit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ta.</td>
<td>Tamil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To.</td>
<td>Toda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu.</td>
<td>Tuḷu.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My warm thanks are due to Mr. J.D. Rajiah, Deputy Tahsildar (Retd.), to Saskia C. Kersenboom, my student-assistant, to the authorities in Gudalur Taluk office, and to my informants, chief among them Bomman and Chemban of Teppakāḍu, for their ready and valuable help.