

Jēnu Kurumba: First Report on a Tribal Language of the Nilgiri Area

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Jēnu Kurumba
First Report on a Tribal Language of the Nilgiri Area
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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 Kurumba informants at Teppakāḍu, Mudumalai Wild Life Sanctuary (Gudalur Taluk, Nilgiri District).

1. There is a very meagre ethnographic literature on the Jēnu Kurumbas alias Kāḍu Nāyikas¹⁾ 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 Kannaḍa.²⁾ Early ethnographers were not even aware that the Jēnu Kurumbas and the Kāḍu Nāyikas³⁾ were in fact one and the same tribe, going under several designations⁴⁾. All my Kāḍu Nāyika informants were adamant in their assertion that they were indeed Jēnu Kurumbas. They considered as ridiculous the suggestion that Jēnu Kurumbas and Kāḍu Nāyikas were two different communities. The identity of Jēnu Kurumbas and Kāḍu Nāyikas as being one tribal group was confirmed independently by Paṇiyan and Shōlega informants⁵⁾.

The Kāḍu Nāyikas (=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 Kāḍu Nāyikas. Hence, the total population of the tribe may be 5300 in 1980.

Nowadays, Kāḍu Nāyikas 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. Kāḍu Nāyikas

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.)⁶⁾ naṇa ma·tu 'our speech'.⁷⁾ It is an independent South Dravidian tribal language, possibly closely related to Ālu and Pālu Kurumba, rather Kannaḍa-like, but less 'Kannaḍoid' than Shōlega.

2.1. The phonological features of JKu. manifest a few specific developments, but on the whole characterize the language rather as Kannaḍa-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', kā·riyā·wu 'a kind of snake', giṇan 'parrot', ciṇṇa 'small', enṇu 'woman', kēre 'pond, tank', bē·re 'different', pūli 'panther', iḱkūṭṭi 'hiccough', gōlu 'roof/ceiling'.

In a few items, JKu. has nasalized \tilde{a} and $\tilde{ā}$, always in the neighbourhood of -w-, cf. $\tilde{ā}$ ·we 'tor-toise', mā·wumara 'mango-tree', ji·wa 'life, soul' (for -w-, see below).

Kannaḍa-like is the development of v-> b- which JKu. shares with Shōlega, Kannaḍa, Koḍagu and Tulu: cf. bara 'coming, next', bale 'net', ba·le 'plantain', biculu 'heat', billu 'blow', belluḷi 'garlic', bē·ṭṭe 'hunting', bē·re 'different'.

Kannaḍa 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 Kannaḍa 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', haḷe 'old', huy-d- 'to rain', hoḷe 'river'.

*p-> *h-> Ø-: asu 'cow', aṇa 'money', ani 'sew', alli 'house-lizard', uḷu 'worm', uṭṭu 'ant nest', o- 'to go'.

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

In some items, h- reappears in emphatic or care-

ful pronunciation: a typical instance is *ennu* 'female', pronounced emphatically as [y^hennu] or [h^hennu].

Original *k- before front vowels is preserved, cf. *kennay* 'red dog (*Canis dukhinensis*)' (8) and *kemmalu* 'coughing, cough'. This feature points rather in the Kannaḍa (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 demivoiced, and occurs with nasalized *ā*, *ā̃*; it is a sound 'between' half-voiced [m] and [w], resulting from various developments;

b. the replacement of *-ḍ- by -r-.

For a), cf. *pāmpu, Ka. pāvu, hāvu: JKu. *ā̃.wu* 'snake'; *māmara or *māvumara: JKu. *mā̃.wumara* 'mango-tree'; *yāmay, Ka. āme, āve, ēve: JKu. *ā̃.we* 'tortoise'; *nām, Ka. nāvu: JKu. *nā̃.wu* 'we (incl.)'; IA *jīva-: JKu. *ji.wā̃* 'life, soul'.

b) The development of *-t->*-ḍ->-r-: *nōt- (Ko. *no.t-*, To. *nwi.t-*, Ta. *nōtṭ-*, Ka. *nōḍ-*): JKu. *no.r-* 'to see' (e.g. *no.rḍenu* 'I see/saw'); Ko. *go.r-*, Ka. *go.ḍe*: JKu. *go.re* 'wall'. Not all -ḍ->-r-, cf. *mo.ḍa* 'cloud, sky'.

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

-ḍ-, -dd- and -nn- are strongly palatalized when followed by front vowels: *o.ḍenu* [w^hḍ^henu] or [w^hḍ^henu] 'I go/went'; *no.rḍenu* [no.rḍ^henu] or [no.rḍ^henu] 'I see/saw'; *leddi* [ledḍ^hḍi] 'elephant-dung'; *bannenu* [banṇ^henu] or [banṇ^henu] 'I come/came'.

2.2. In the sphere of derivational morphology the most striking feature is the highly productive derivational suffix -an, phonetically [-an] or [-ən] forming substantives from noun-stems: *akkan* 'elder sister'¹¹⁾, *tamman* 'younger brother'¹²⁾, *ku.ran* 'mouse-deer' (cf. Ma. *kūran* 'hog-deer'), *giṇan* 'parrot' (DED 1318), *ca.regan* 'roe, gazelle', *noṇan* '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.ḍupu.cce* 'wild cat', *ha.ḍu hēṇḍi* 'wild boar', *ka.ḍuna.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:

Sg.	Pl.
1. na·nu	1. incl. nã·wu, obq. naña-
2. ni·nu	excl. na·nga, obq. eña-
3.m. avanu/avan	2. ni·nga
f. ava	3. m. + f. avaru
n. adu	n. (adu)

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 avalu; this form was vehemently denied by JKU. informants). More striking is the plural. JKU. manifests the inclusive: exclusive dichotomy. The incl. pl. is quite obviously related to Ka. (JKU. nã·wu : Ka. nāvu, OKa. nām)¹³), whereas the excl. pl. is identical with the spoken Ta. 1.p.pl.excl. (JKU. na·nga : Spoken Ta. nānga, Lit.Ta. nāṅkaḷ). We would expect 2.p.pl. *nīmu or *nīvu (cf. Ka. nīm, nīvu, Ir. nī·mu), but instead we again have full agreement with Spoken Ta. (JKU. ni·nga : Spoken Ta. nīnga, Lit.Ta. nīṅkaḷ). 3.p.pl.m.f. corresponds to Ka. avaru.

The case-terminations manifest a similar situation. Accusative, like in Irula, has two allomorphs, -e and -ne, cf. ku·ran-e no·rdenu 'I see a mouse-deer', a·ne-ne no·rdenu 'I see an elephant'. Dative -gu and -ku (e.g. ka·ḍugu 'to the forest', u·ṭiku 'to Ooty') is again rather like Ta.-Ma. (Ka. has -ge/-ke). Loc. -(i)le is like Spoken Ta. (JKU. ka·ḍile 'in the forest'). However, ablative is formed like the Ka. ablative-instrumental in* -iṇda, cf. JKU. ka·ḍinda 'from the forest', maneyinda/maninda 'from the house' with Ka. maneyinda 'from the house'. The absence of a separate gen.-obq. form in JKU. is shared with Ir., cf. JKU. ka·ḍile 'in the forest', Ir. ka·ḍili 'in the forest-garden' (in contrast to Ta. kāṭṭil-ē 'in the jungle').

It is of course impossible to offer a more precise characterization of JKU. grammatical structure without a thorough study of many more data. However, it seems to me that the basic grammatical structure is about midway between Kannaḍa and Tamil, perhaps with a slant towards Kannaḍa. Even when there is Tamil-like construction the phonology is more Kannaḍa-like, e.g. o·da va·ra u·ṭik' o·y ban-nenu 'last week I went to Ooty', na·nu ninag' aṇa koḍtenu 'I will give you money'. This last example shows the most striking feature of JKU. verbal morphology: the past-stem¹⁴ was extended so as to form the bases for both the past tense and the non-past tense. In this important matter JKU. agrees

with Toda and Kota. Is the extension of this S² 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·r- 'to see' : stem no·r-d-; o·- 'to go' : stem o·-d-; koḍ- 'to give' : stem koḍ-t-; ba-/ba·- 'to come' : stem ba-nd-/ba-nn-; ir- 'to be' : stem idd- (iddenu 'I am/was'). Cf. nenne na·n' ninag' aṇa koḍtenu 'I gave you-sg. money yesterday' : na·' naḷega ninag' aṇa koḍtenu '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·nondadu 'I have pains right now'; na·n' kaṇḍiṇa bannenu 'I will certainly come'. These instances were checked and rechecked and glossed in Tamil, Baḍaga and Kannaḍa.

The extension of the 'past stem' S² 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.: bannewu 'we-incl. come/will come, came' : bannemu 'we-excl. come/will come, came'.¹⁵⁾

A thorough investigation and description of the JKu. language of Kāḍu 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 Kannaḍa.

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

1. arcanaṇara s.cpd. 'yellow/orange colour'. Cf. Ka. arisiṇa/Skt. haridrā- etc. + DED 3047 Ta.Ma. nīram, Ko. nerm.

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

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

4. i·ga adv. 'now'. DED 351(a) Ka. iḡa.

5. i·ruḷi s. 'onion (Allium cepa)'. Cf. Shōl. iruḷi, Ta. Ma. īrulli, Ka. īrulli, Tu. nīrulli, prob. DED 3057 + 605.

6. ulu s. 'worm'. DED 3537 Ta. pulu etc., Koḍ. pulu.
7. uttu (t=alveolar occlusive) s. 'white-anthill' DED 3556 Ta. purru etc., Ka. puttu, hutu, uttu.
8. ettanu s. 'grand-father'. Cf. Ir. ettappan etc., AKu. ettappa (DBK), Ka. hettappa, hetappa 'grand-father'.
9. ouve s. 'mother'. Cf. Ir. (different dialects) auve, avve, agve, oggwe, 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. olle 'goodness'.
12. akki s. 'paddy'. DED 178 Ta. ari, Ko. aky, Ka. akki id.
13. ikki s. 'bird'. Prob. DBIA 233 b Skt. pakṣin-, Pa. pakkhin-, Pkt. pakkhi-. Cf. Ka. pakki, hakki, Ko. paky, Ma. pakṣi, pakki, Ta. pakṣi, paṭci, pakki.
14. eru s. 'ant'. Cf. Ir. urumbu. DED 734 Ta. erumbu, Ko. irb, To. irb, Ka. irumpu etc.
15. endru s. 'wife'. Cf. OTa. penṭir, OKa. pen-dir, Ir. poṇḍiru 'women', Bad. en 'female'. DED 3608(a).
16. endrugandaru s. cpd. 'husband and wife'. DED 3608(a) + 986 Ta. kaṇṭan 'warrior; husband', Ka. gaṇḍa 'husband' Ko. gaṇḍ 'male'.
17. ennu, pl. ennumakka s. 'female, woman'. DED 3608(a) Ta. Ka. peṇ, Mod.Ka. henṇu, Bad. eṇ.
18. kaṇṇa s. 'water-well'. DED 1663 Ta. kiṇaru, Ma. kiṇaru id.
19. katte s. 'ass'. DED 1149 Ta. kaḷutai, 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. kāṇ etc.
21. kurkan s. 'jackal'. Cf. DED 1496 Ta. kurai 'to bark'; kukkal, kukkan 'dog'/Skt. kurkura- etc. 'dog'.
22. koḷalu s. 'oboe'. DED 1511 Ta. kuḷal 'flute, pipe', Ko. koḷ 'clarinet, Ka. koḷal 'flute' etc.
23. ko·dan s. 'large white-faced monkey'. Cf. Ir. ko·ḍa, ku·ḍag. DED 1820 Ta. kōṭaram 'monkey', Ko. ko·ṇ 'small monkey', To. kw·ṇ 'monkey', Ka. kōḍaga 'monkey, ape', Kod. ko·ḍe 'monkey'.
24. kere s. 'pond, tank'. Cf. Ir. kere, AKu. kere (DBK). DED 1648 Ko. ker, Ka. kere, Koḍ. kere, 'tank'.
25. gaṇucu s. 'root, tuber'. DED 1314 Ta. ki-laṅku, Ka. geṇasu, geṇisu etc.
26. cōlle s. 'mosquito'. Cf. DED 2296 Ta. cellu

'flea, tick' etc., To. ~~to~~ 'flea'.

27. ~~tin~~nu (tind-, tinbade) v. 'to eat'. DED 2670(a) Ta. tin.

28. danamari 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.

30. nenne adv. 'yesterday'. Cf. AKu. nenne (DBK). DED 3109 Ta. nerunal etc., Ka. ninne.

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

32. no·r- (no·rd-) v. 'to see'. Cf. AKu. no·d- (DBK). DED 3144 Ta. nōkku, Ko. no·t-, To. nwī·t-, Ka. nōdu 'to look, look at'.

33. podice, podce s. 'bush'. Cf. AKu. pode (DBK). DED 3686 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·du s. 'meat'. DED 4380 Ka. ba·du 'flesh', Ta. vāṭṭu 'roasted or fried flesh or vegetable'.

36. bīnki s. 'fire'. No etymology ?Ka. beṇki.

37. be·li s. 'fence'. DED 4556 Ka. bēli id.

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

39. maḷe s. 'rain'. DED 3893 Ka. maḷe, maḷe 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. haṇḍi s. 'pig'. DED 3326 Ta. paṇri etc., Ka. pandi, handi.

43. huy-(huyd-) v. 'to rain'; maḷe 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 Kāḍu Nayikas. Further bibliography: Irudaynath, Philo, 'Kāṭṭunāyakkar' (in Tamil), in: Palāṅkuṭimakkal, Madras 1965, 34-43; Luiz, A.A.D., 'Kāṭṭunāyakan', 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'

- (in Tamil), in: *Tamiḷaṇaṅku*, Pondicherry 1971, 10-14.
- 2) Upadhyaya, U.P. 'The Jenu Kurumba Dialect of Kan-nada', *Linguistic Survey Bulletin* 4, Poona 1968. However, Upadhyaya's Jenu Kurumbas live in the "forest ranges of the hilly district of Coorg".
- 3) Alternative forms: Jēnu Kurubas, Jēnu Kurumas, Tēnu Kurumbas, Jain Kurumbers; Kāṭṭu Nāyakkār, 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 Nayakans' (=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 Ānegāṭṭi, called also Shōlegas; and the Kāṭṭunāyakkas who live at Teppa-kāḍu, 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. JKU. is one of them. Hence the preference for the designation of the language as JKU.
- 7) Cf. DED 3960 To. mo-t 'words, speech (in songs)', Ka. mātu 'word, language', Te. māṭa.
- 8) DED 1607 To. keno-y, Ta. cennāy.
- 9) DED 1634 Ka. kemmu, Ta. cerumu.
- 10) Cf. Ālu Kurumba maṇā 'son' (DBK), Irula muṇe [muṇɛ] 'son' (KVZ, IL II, Index 505, and p.23).
- 11) Cf. DED 24 Old Ta. akkaṇ, To. okn.
- 12) DED 2513 Ka. tamma, Koḍ. tammanṣ.
- 13) Does the JKU. nasalized \tilde{a} 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?
- 14) Or should we rather say the S² stem in agreement with M.B. Emeneau? Cf. his 'Toda, a Dravidian language', TPS 1957, 15-66, and especially 'The South Dravidian Languages', JAOS 87, 4, 1967, pp. 366-7.
- 15) When our tape-recording session was over, one of my informants said to me: na-ṅga tṭnbade oḍemu 'we-excl. are going to eat', indicating that I was 'excluded' from the lunch and that he meant only himself and his Kāḍu Nāyika companion. At the same time, the utterance shows the extension of

S2 (o.d-) to the 'future' (i.e. non-past + definite) tense-aspect.

Abbreviations

AKu.	-	Ālu Kurumba.
Bad.	-	Badugu (Badaga).
CDIAL	-	(Sir) R.L. Turner, A Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan Languages, London, 1962-6.
DBIA	-	M.B. Emeneau and T. Burrow, Dravidian Borrowings from Indo-Aryan, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962.
DBK	-	Ālu Kurumba data provided by D.B. Kapp.
DED	-	T. Burrow and M.B. Emeneau, A Dravidian Etymological Dictionary, Oxford, 1961.
DEDS	-	T. Burrow and M.B. Emeneau, A Dravidian Etymological Dictionary - Supplement, Oxford, 1968.
IA	-	Indo-Aryan.
Ir.	-	Irula.
JKu.	-	Jēnu Kurumba.
Ka.	-	Kannāḍa.
Ko.	-	Kota.
Kod.	-	Koḍagu.
KVZ, IL II	-	Kamil V. Zvelebil, The Irula (Ērla) Language, Part II, Wiesbaden, 1979.
Lit.Ta.	-	Literary Tamil.
Ma.	-	Malayalam.
OKa.	-	Old Kannāḍa.
OTa.	-	Old Tamil.
Pa.	-	Pali.
Pkt.	-	Prakrit.
SDr.	-	South Dravidian.
Shol.	-	Shōlega.
Skt.	-	Sanskrit.
Ta.	-	Tamil.
To.	-	Toda.
Tu.	-	Tuḷu.

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