

Prevalence of Variant Endonyms & Preference of a Single Exonym (The Case Study of ‘Kurru’ & Their Indigenous Speech, ‘Kurru Vaaththaa’)

Dr. C. Maheswaran

Senior Fellow, ICSSR, Department of Linguistics, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

ABSTRACT

‘Ethnonymy’, the process of naming the ethnoses, encompasses both the aspects of ‘ethnonym’, viz., the ‘exonym’ (i.e., the call name addressed by the ‘outsiders’ towards other communities) and the ‘endonym’ (i.e., the self-claiming name preferred by the ‘insiders’ of ethnic communities). Of these, usually the former is ‘multiple’ in existence and the latter is ‘single’ in occurrence.

The ‘Kurru’, an indigenous ethnos under focus, is identified to possess multiple exonyms, namely, ‘Malakkuravan’, ‘Kuravan / Siddhanar’, ‘Koravar’ (with 26 subgroups), ‘Yerukala / Yerukula’ & ‘Koraga’ in Tamil Nadu; ‘Malakkuravan’, ‘Kuravan/Siddhanar’, ‘Koravar’, ‘Koraga’ & ‘Kakkalan’ in Kerala; Yerukala / Yerukula’ in Andhra Pradesh and Telengana; ‘Koraga’, ‘Korama’ & ‘Koracha’ in Karnataka; ‘Korvi’, ‘Paamloar Korvi’ & ‘Kulu / Kaikedi’ in Maharashtra; ‘Keer’ in Rajasthan; ‘Korava’ in Chhattishgarh and ‘Korwa’ in Jharkhand.

In contradistinction to the normal tendency of ethnoses in preferring a single endonym (against the existence of multiple exonyms), the ‘Kurru People’ are observed to refer themselves with a single exonym, by avoiding the use of their endonym ‘Kurru’ (or its allied variant endonyms, namely, ‘Kudru’ and ‘Kunru’). A stigma is attached with the ‘Kurru People’ due to the imposition of erstwhile ‘Criminal Tribes Act’ in India during the British Colonial rule and in its place the Habitual Offenders Act’ since Independence. However, this ethnic people usually derive ‘pride’ over their antiquarian status (of belonging to the Sangam Tamil Age) as the people of ‘Kurinji Landscape’ (, the traditional eco-zone comprising of hills and adjoining topography). Owing to the socio-political pressure exerted by the aforesaid ‘Legal Acts’, this ethnic group under discussion also refrains itself from speaking its indigenous speech, ‘Kurru Vaaththaa’ in the presence of outsiders. The sole aim of this tendency is to mask their ethnic identity, apart from non-revealing of their linguistic identity.

‘Kurru’, the ethnic people under study, contrary to the usual practice of preferring its endonyms over the multiple exonyms available, wishes to refer itself by an exonym (say ‘Kuravar’, ‘Kakkalan’, ‘Koraga’, ‘Korama’, ‘Koracha’, ‘Yerukala/Yerukula’, ‘Kulu/Kaikedi’ as the case may be). It is interesting to note that its endonym ‘Kurru’ is observed to vary as ‘Kudru’ among the Koracha of Karnataka and ‘Kunru’ amidst the ‘Yerukala / Yerukula’ of Andhra Pradesh and Telengana.

In this paper, an attempt is made to present the case study of ‘Kurru’ and their indigenous speech ‘Kurru Vaaththaa’ so as to highlight the prevalence of variant endonyms and the preference of a single exonym in their place, due to the socio – cultural and the socio-political pressures that have been exerting upon them.

KEYWORDS: Ethnonymy – Ethnonym – Exonym – Endonym – Kurru / Kundru / Kunru - Kurru Vaaththaa – Kurinji Landscape – Socio – cultural & Socio – political Pressures

‘Kuravar’, the indigenous people who once resided in the traditional eco-zone of ‘Kurinji Landscape’ (, one of the traditional eco-zones of ‘Ancient

Thamizhgam’) comprising of hills & their adjoining topography) are known variedly under different call names by the ‘outsiders’ despite the fact that they

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self-claim their name as 'Kurru'; And their indigenous speech is also identified erroneously as different speech varieties, on par with their variant exonyms. Interestingly, this particular ethnos 'Kuravar' is observed to have a uniform social structure of four clan system throughout India, viz., *sa:tpa:di*, *me:napa:di*, *ka:vadi*, *me:nrukutti/me:lu:ttan* (, reckoning their traditional hereditary rights in worshipping their deity), apart from a distinct speech of their own. And this prompts us to claim that the 'ethnic identity' and the 'linguistic identity' of 'Kurru People' need a thorough re-look.¹

I. The Antiquarian Status of Ethnos 'Kurru' in the Light of Sangam Tamil Age²:-

The 'Kurru People', as gleaned from the literary evidences of Sangam Tamil Age, are identified as the

- People of 'Kurinji Landscape', one of the traditional eco-zones of Ancient Tamils (i.e., "Hills & the adjoining topography");
- 'Kunrak Kuravar' wherein the menfolk are referred to as *Kuravar* while the womenfolk are mentioned as *Kurattiyar* whose main occupation is 'hunting-gathering' and 'soothsaying' respectively, besides engaged themselves in basketry and allied fibre-craft, collection of non-timber forest produce (NTFP) and ultimately in barter exchange with the people of other traditional eco-zones, namely, 'Mullai' (i.e., "Forest & adjoining forest lands"), 'Marudam' (i.e., "Paddy fields & adjoining topography"), 'Neydal' (i.e., "Sea & adjoining coastal area") & 'Pa:lai' (i.e., "Arid zone that gets drifted of from other (four) eco-zones;
- Worshippers of 'se:yo:n' (Cf. "se:yo:n me:ya maivarai ulagam" (Tolkappiyam-Paayiram) as he is associated with the cult figure of hilly terrain and construed as the adopted daughter 'Valli' of *Kurinji* Chieftain 'Nambira:jan');
- People who are also engaged in the cultivation of millet varieties from the dry (cultivable) lands ('*Eri Punam*'/*Thinai Punam*') which were prepared out of slash & burn activities in the hilly tract; and
- People who thrived on honey, wild tubers, yams, unripe fruits, fruits, etc., apart from the cereals cultivated and the flesh of wild games hunted.

II. The Socio-cultural Pressures exerted upon the 'Kurru People' & Its Effects:-

Such an ingenious indigenous ethnos (which once ruled that eco-zone as well (Cf. '*Na:njil Kuravar*' of the erstwhile *Na:njil Na:du*)³ gets displaced later from its traditional habitats by the migrant aggressors

of nearby plains (Cf. Maheswaran, C. 1980 & 2023 a.).

III. The Socio-political Pressures exerted on the 'Kurru People' & Its Aftermath:-

The British Colonial rule imposed the draconian 'Criminal Tribes Act' (, henceforth will be notified as the 'CT Act') in India upon the 'Kurru People' in order to suppress them and take away their salt trade in its fold.⁴

And even after the repeal of this CT Act after the Indian Independence, it has taken a variant form only in the disguise of 'Habitual Offenders Act'. The fate of one Mr. Rajakannu Kuravar (of Kammapuram, Cuddalore District, Tamil Nadu) who lost his life in the brutal hands of 'Police force' could be cited as a clinching evidence for this unjustful law.⁵

Due to such socio-political pressures exerted upon the 'Kurru People' their traditional councils are till date in the habit of instructing their members 'not to disclose both their significant identities', namely, the 'ethnic identity', 'Kurru' and the 'linguistic identity', 'Kurru Vaaththaa'. And thus came the claim of 'Kuravar', the prestigious antiquarian exonym or its allied call name(s) in the place of endonym 'Kurru' (or its allied variant form 'Kudru'⁶ / *Kunru*⁷). Subsequently, the other exonyms came into the fore front, masking both their 'ethnic identity' – 'Kurru' and their 'linguistic identity' – 'Kurru Vaaththaa'.

IV. Organizing the Programme of "Discussion on the Community Status of 'Kurru' 'Kudru' / 'Kunru' & Their Indigenous Speech":-

In order to test the hypothesis that "the ethnos 'Kurru' and their indigenous speech 'Kurru Vaaththaa' are possessing 'oneness' despite their attestations in different states of India" the author of this paper has convened a programme of "Discussion on the Community Status of 'Kurru' / 'Kudru' / 'Kunru' and Their Indigenous Speech 'Kurru Vaaththaa'" at Coimbatore, by inviting the 'Kurru People' from the States of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telengana and Maharashtra during 09th & 10th September, 2023.⁸

All the Deliberations that occurred on these two days (in the form of discussions, interviews, conversations) were documented by making use of electronic gadgets and stored in the retrieval system. The 'mutual intelligibility' of *Kurru Vaaththaa* among the various 'Kurru Language Consultants' have proved beyond any doubt that all these 'Kurru People' are related with one another both in terms of 'ethnic identity' and 'linguistic identity'.

It goes without saying that the claim of antiquarian status of 'Kurru People' of the 'People of Kurinji Landscape' is also gets proved from the variant endonyms 'Kurru', 'Kudru' and 'Kunru' that could be traced back to the proto-Dravidian root word *Kunru "hills".

V. Conclusion :-

The 'So-called repeal of CT Act' after the Indian Independence and the imposition of 'Habitual Offenders Act' in its place have paved the way for the preference of an exonym of one kind or the other and masking of prevalent endonym, viz., 'Kurru' / 'Kudru' / 'Kunru' by the 'Kurru People', besides masking their indigenous speech, 'Kurru Vaaththaa' in the public sphere. Consequently, unaware of these facts, the ethnographers and the linguists have so far studied one and the same ethnic group and its distinct indigenous speech variety respectively as the variant ethnoses and different native speeches, erroneously.

The production of such duplication of ethnographic accounts and or descriptive grammars is disheartening and should be avoided at least now, on realizing the empirical facts related to the oneness of 'ethnic identity' – 'Kurru' and 'linguistic identity' – 'Kurru Vaaththaa'.

Foot Notes

1. For more details on the existence of multiple exonyms also Cf. Maheswaran, C. 2023 b.
2. For a detailed ethno-cultural profile of 'Kurru' Cf. Maheswaran, C. 2012 a. & 2012 b.

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kzp Nfh.

kNfRtud;> rp. 2023. 'nkhopapay; Ma;tpy; ,,,df;FO milahsk;... kw;Wk; ,nkhopapay; milahsk;...
ngWk; Kfhik". jQ;rhT+h; : nkhopapay; Ma;T muq;fk; : jkpo;g; gy;fiyf;fofk;.

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3. For further details of *Na:njil Kuravar* Cf. Maheswaran, C. 2023 a.
4. For a detailed account of the erstwhile 'Criminal Tribes Act' imposed on the 'Kurru People' as the British Colonial Policy Cf. Radhakrishna, Meena 2001.
5. The details regarding the 'case of Rajakannu Kuravar' was gleaned from personal discussion that the author of this paper had with one Mr. A.V. Shanmugam, a 'Kurru' Social Activist who is residing at Villivakkam, Chennai, Tamil Nadu.
6. 'Kudru', the variant endonym of 'Kurru' was attested by Prof. (Dr.) H.R. Swamy, an emic researcher of 'Kurru' (, a Koracha) from Karnataka on 09.09.2023 while he was attending the programme, "Discussion on the Community Status of 'Kurru' / 'Kudru' / 'Kunru' & Their Indigenous Speech' 'Kurru Vaaththaa' organized and held at Coimbatore.
7. This other variant endonym of 'Kurru', was communicated to the author of this paper by Mr. M.S. Bharath Kumar, Linguist, M/s. Calnic Solutions LLP, Kerala; Interestingly, he could also identify the utterance of the endonym 'Kurru' in certain field centres by the Yerukala Language Vonsultants while he was engaged in the data elicitation related to his Ph.D., Study.
8. For a complete list of various ethnographic accounts and descriptive studies on 'Kurru' and 'Kurru Vaaththaa' respectively Cf. 'Select Bibliography' of this paper.

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Colophon :

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the ‘Kurru’ / ‘Kudru’ / ‘Kunru’ People from various states of India such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Maharashtra which enabled to establish that all the ‘Kurru’ / ‘Kudru’ / ‘Kunru’ People belong to a single ethnic stock with a uniform ethno-cultural profile and an indigenous speech of their own.

