



# DLA NEWS

ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF  
DRAVIDIAN TRIBES  
Vol. I Thematic Introduction  
pp. 425, Rs. 950/-  
Vol. II Ethnological Reports  
pp. 405, Rs. 960/-  
Vol. III Cis-Vindhyan Tribes  
pp. 359, Rs. 870/-  
IJDL Vol. 41 No. 2  
Annual Subscription: Rs. 600/-

Vol. 36 No. 8

Website: [www.ijdl.org](http://www.ijdl.org)

E-mail: [ijdlisdl@gmail.com](mailto:ijdlisdl@gmail.com)

AUGUST 2012

A MONTHLY OF DRAVIDIAN LINGUISTICS ASSOCIATION OF INDIA

## ECONOMICALLY POWERFUL LANGUAGES WILL EDGE OUT OTHERS



The world's languages are disappearing at an alarming rate, say linguists, and point to statistical models which predict that over half our languages will disappear by the end of this century. Internet giant Google Inc. appears to have been listening and recently announced the creation of the Endangered Languages Project, *An Online Collaborative Effort to protect Global Linguistic Diversity*. Google has steered the development, funding and launch of this project,

[Cont'd on p. 2]

### CONTENTS

Economically Powerful Languages will edge out Others	1
Bhadriraju Krishnamurti - Obituary	1
Archaeological Discoveries in Idukki District, Kerala	3
IndoWordNet Workshop	4
The Earliest Inscription in Malayalam	5
George Miller passes away	6

### OBITUARY

#### BHADRIRAJU KRISHNAMURTI

Prof. Bhadriraju Krishnamurti passed away on 11th August 2012.

Krishnamurti is considered to be among the first to apply the rigour of modern comparative linguistic theory to further the study of Dravidian languages. His thesis *Telugu Verbal Bases* (1961) is the first comprehensive account of comparative Dravidian phonology and derivational morphology of verbal bases in Dravidian from the standpoint of Telugu. His comprehensive grammar on *komḍa* or *Kūbi* is a monumental work in the area of non-literary Dravidian languages. His research was devoted to the central problems of phonology and morphology/syntax of Dravidian, and he made significant contributions in advancing the then nascent field of comparative and historical Dravidian studies in the second half of the twentieth century. His *Comparative Dravidian Linguistics: Current Perspectives* is a collection of twenty-one important articles published during the period 1955-1998, which attempts to provide solutions to many outstanding problems of Dravidian linguistics. His recent work *The Dravidian Languages* published by Cambridge University Press (2003) is a culmination of the scholarly research carried out by him in the last fifty years.



Prof. Krishnamurti was an elected Honorary Member of the *Linguistic Society of America* in 1985. He was elected Corresponding Fellow of the prestigious *Royal Society of Edinburgh*, UK in 2004. He had been an executive member of *Sahitya Akademi*, New Delhi, 1990-2002. He was conferred an honorary doctorate in literature by *Sri Venkateswara University* in 1998, and by *Dravidian University* in 2007. He was elected Fellow of *Sahitya Akademi*, New Delhi in 2004. He received the *Gidugu Ramamurti Award* at the 15th TANA (Telugu Association of North America), Detroit, July 2005. He was the first recipient of the *Telugu Bhaarati Award* instituted by C.P. Brown Academy, Hyderabad (2008). He also received the *Lifetime Achievement Award* at the 10th ATA (American Telugu Association), New Jersey, for significant contributions to Telugu and Dravidian linguistics, July 3-5, 2008. He was presented *Indian Linguistics*, Vol. 70, as *Festschrift* by the *Linguistic Society of India*, on the occasion of his 80th birth year in 2009.

which promises to be a game-changer, and says that it will hand over further management to experts. Panchanan Mohanty, a Hyderabad-based linguist who teaches at the University of Hyderabad and is on the project's advisory committee, talks to TOI-Crest.

### **What does the world lose when a language is lost?**

A language embodies a culture, an entire knowledge system. Both are lost when a language vanishes off the face of the earth, which has been the case with many tribal societies, for instance. Many elements of their traditional knowledge - like their ethno-botanical knowledge and their ethno-medicine - are lost forever. Such deserved attention is focussed on saving our biodiversity but the Earth's mental health - its languages, cultures and knowledge systems - is also hugely important.

**It is widely reported that half the world's approximately 7,000 languages are at risk of disappearing this century. Some reports say that a language will go extinct every two weeks. Is this a grave situation?**

Well yes, the situation requires urgent attention, but might be somewhat exaggerated by predominantly Western perceptions. A lot of research into language extinction has studied Native American and aboriginal languages in the US and Australia. These societies have been the victims of old genocides and are indeed in grave danger of their languages dying out. It is quite different in India, where such historical violence did not take place in most instances. Some tribal languages, like Toda, spoken in the Nilgiris, are even seen as doing relatively well. Pali is still around in some ways. But yes, many others are in danger of dying out very soon.

Major reasons for the accelerated rate of language extinction today are the forces of so-called globalisation and liberalisation. As everyone wants to become richer, some languages that are more economically powerful will edge out others. Like English at the international level and Hindi at the national level - everyone wants to learn them, to get jobs and to gain 'prestige'. Children will be taught the more powerful language and, more importantly, people will start speaking it at home to familiarise children.

At one level, even Hindi is losing ground in India. Look at some indicators. Even in the Hindi heartland, you would see many road signs in English, and this is increasing. Reading and writing competencies are being lost.

### **Are poverty and underdevelopment key factors in driving a language to extinction?**

Certainly, and migration due to these factors is also a major factor. For example, most cooks in eateries in Hyderabad, where I live, are Oriya. They speak Hindi here, not Telugu, and cannot use Oriya. Their children here speak only Hindi. Oriya is no longer 'a prestige language' for them.

So you can imagine what it would be like for more marginal and tribal languages. Take Santhali - it is spoken across four states (Bihar, Jharkhand, Bengal, Odisha) but is still threatened by underdevelopment.

### **Some prominent examples of highly endangered Indian languages?**

Based on my research, I would list five tribal languages spoken in southern Odisha as critically endangered. Three belong to the Munda (also known as Austro-Asiatic) family: Gorum or Parengi, Remo or Bonda and Gata or Didayi. (Many such languages have two names: those used by speakers, and those given by outsiders.) Two more endangered languages I would list belong to the Dravidian family: Manda and Pengo. *Ethnologue*, the most comprehensive global index of languages, lists 5,000 speakers for Gorum/Parengi near Koraput, but I have seen only about 25 to 30 speakers. There is a 'community' of 5,000, but they all speak Oriya. These few Gorum speakers are all over 70 years of age and only meet 3-4 times a week, during which they speak the language for just 5 to 10 minutes.

### **Can a dying language be saved?**

If a language is on the verge of extinction, in many cases we can only record what we are about to lose. But if great efforts are made, especially by the state, languages in which people have a 'passive competency' (where the language is understood but not widely spoken) can be revived. Primers may be prepared and the language may be taught to children. This is what happened with Hebrew in Israel. Religion and rituals kept the language alive. Sanskrit's case, however, is very different; most priests do not understand what they are saying or chanting, or most people.

**Google, with its technological heft and financial muscle, has helped set up the global Endangered Languages Project (ELP). Could this make a big difference?**

Technology is a huge enabler. Take the Gorum/Parengi example. If we started a small community radio

service and began writing and broadcasting in the language, it would make an appreciable difference. Primers could be prepared in the Oriya script (most of Europe speaks different languages but uses the same script) and disseminated. Look at how the Welsh language in the Roman script is promoted in the UK.

The Google-backed effort has just been announced; it is still early days but it is certainly a big step forward. It has three big factors working in its favour. People who understand the problem, who have worked on it, have been brought together in such a way for the first time, with funds. Two, technology will help us better collaborate and store research. I have been asked to record samples and upload them, for instance. And three, this project will now better allow non-specialists and experts from other fields - like anthropologists and documentation experts - to come together with linguists. Online tools will be a great help.

### Are there any India-specific challenges?

Our misfortune is that we have government planning of every sort but no language planning. We do not seem to realise the need at all, and appear resigned to letting nature take its course. Some states take great pride in their language and do some things in this regard, like Tamil Nadu, which had a language ministry. But many others do not do anything. There are incentives to study Hindi, but very little for other languages. Umpteen studies have shown multilingual people tend to be smarter, yet the basis of multilingualism, in an inherently multilingual country like ours, is preserving the mother tongue.

[Courtesy: *Times of India*, 7th July 2012]

---

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES IN IDUKKI DISTRICT, KERALA

[Continued from last issue]

---

The temple is one believed to have been built in memory of Kannaki (Mangaladevi), the heroine of *Cilappathikaram* who after the burning of Pandyan capital Madurai, walked along the course of river Vaigai for fourteen days with the intention of reaching the Chera country, climbed the mountain and stood under a Kino tree. The hill Kuravas erected a temple for her. Devotees arrive at the premises of the temple to offer worship on the day of Chithrapournami as per the Tamil Calendar. Villellas, a tribe settled in Anjunad valley, believe that their tribe migrated from Madurai to Anjunad valley due to disturbances in Madurai caused by the burning of that city by Kannaki, the heroine of *Cilappathikaram*.

Anjunad valley in Idukki district consists of Marayur Kandalur, Kizhanthalloor, Vattanad and Karayar. Prehistoric cave paintings of nomadic hunters dating back to 6000 B.C. were discovered (1974) in Marayur, Chenbakkad and Pallanad. Parts of Anjunad valley seem to be geographically a part of Kongunadu. A prehistoric site with a series of paintings shaped like a human palm, besides several Megalithic sites, were discovered in Vaimalaigugai in Marayur panchayat in 2008.

A tributary of river Kaveri by name Pambar originates from Devikulam Taluk. The river is known by the name Thalayar in the upper reaches. During its flow through hilly terrain, it is joined by numerous streams, the important among them being the Iravikulam, the Mylady, the Thirthmala and the Chengalar. From Kovilkadavu, the bed of the river falls steeply at its 30th km.; it crosses to Tamil Nadu. Another stream, the Thenar, known as the Vattavada river in Kerala state, also rises within Kerala at an altitude of 1920 + flows northwards for a distance of 30 km., then turns northwards and enters Tamil Nadu. This stream joins the Pambar in Tamil Nadu to form the Amaravathy river (Government of Kerala, *Water Resources of Kerala*, P.W.D., June 1974). Both Periyar and Pambar originate from the same mountain and when Periyar was known by the name Pornai, the east flowing river was known by the name of Anpornai. The river Anpornai acquired the name of Amaravathy due to subsequent Buddhist influence in the region.

The ancient Cheras who had their capital in the west coast near the port of Muzris were interested in colonising and occupying that part of Kongunadu adjacent to their kingdom, as this region contained several industrial centres such as Kodumanal and Vallalur, providing hinterland to the Chera ports and safe trade routes. The first three centuries of the Christian era were a period of direct Roman trade and every year about 200 Roman ships called at the Chera ports of Noura, Tandy and Muzris. The Chera king Palayani Chelkuzhu Kuttuvan, the son of Udiyancheralathan, is praised by poet Palai Gothmanar in the Third Ten of *Patirrupathu*, the Tamil Sangam classic. He is said to be the owner of Ayira Mala, a chain of mountains with high peaks and reservoirs which also provide a natural barrier against enemies. It is only in his country that rivers are full during dry seasons. Such perennial flow of water in this region is the characteristic of west-flowing rivers which have the benefit of south-west (*edavapati*) and north-east (*tulavarsham*) monsoons. According to the poem, he attacked Kongunadu and annexed it to his kingdom. In this process, he destroyed fortified cities and laid waste

fertile paddy fields. Kongunadu is described as a country where rocks have to be blasted to find source of water and from such low depths water has to be drawn up for the waiting cattle to drink. Another Chera king praised by Palai Kappiattu Kappianar in the Fourth Ten of *Patirrupathu* is Kalangaikanni Narmudi Cheralathan. His country is described as one which holds a row of mountains one after the other on one side and wears waves of the sea as the garment on the other. This would mean that his kingdom is situated between the mountain and the sea. He is also the owner of Nerimala (near Kothamangalam) where small streams flow. This king is said to have defeated Nedumidalanji, a king of the Kongu region belonging to the family of Athiyaman Nedumanji (Sathyaputha of Asoka inscription).

Several trade routes from east converged in Kothamangam (Tirukarur), which were connected to Muzris on the western seacoast. These were from Udumalpet in the Kongu region and from Madurai, the Pandyan capital. There are reports of Roman coins having been found from Vandanmedu, Anakkara and Kochara but none of the coins reached museums. As per a report, a hoard of coins belonging to 1st-3rd century A.D. discovered from a compound in Kochera is kept in the Archaeological Museum, Kozhikode. (Rajesh, T. *Op. Cit.* P. 21.)

A great civilisation flourished in the regions now forming part of the Ernakulam and Idukki districts of Kerala. The ancient Chera kings had their capital on the banks of river Periyar which was known by names Vanchi or Karur. They protected the port of Muzris and also the vessels arriving at the port from sea piracy. The ownership of the port of Muzris made the Cheras prosperous and strong. The ancient Chera kings were known as Porayans. The Athan branch of the Porayans ruled from the west coast and started annexing territories in the Kongu region. There is every possibility that some of the attacks on Kongunadu were made through the mountain passes of Idukki District. Consolidation of the acquired territories in the Kongu region was made by the Irumporai branch of the Cheras who captured a prosperous town on the banks of river Anpornai, established their second capital and gave the name of their ancient capital Karur-Vanchi to their new capital. According to historian M. Arokiasamy, "the capture of Karur in the modern district of Tiruchirapally here, celebrated as the great victory of Olval Perumcheral Irumporai (second in the line), must have been in the nature of founding the capital of the Cera viceroy" (Arokiasamy, M. *The Kongu Country*. P. 64).

K. Ravindran

A workshop on *IndoWordNet* was held in the University of Hyderabad from 23rd to 25th July 2012. The following three WordNet project groups participated in the workshop:

1. Development of *NE Wordnet*: An Integrated WordNet for North East Languages: Assamese, Bodo, Manipuri and Nepali.
2. Development of *Indradhanush*: An Integrated WordNet for Bengali, Gujarati, Kashmiri, Konkani, Oriya, Punjabi and Urdu.
3. Development of *Dravidian WordNet*: An Integrated WordNet for Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam.

The workshop began on 23rd July afternoon. The first session was addressed by Prof. Panchanan Mohanty who gave a brief introduction about the objectives of the workshop. The next session was addressed by Prof. Pushpak Bhattacharyya who elaborated on the aims and objectives and the achievements of the three WordNet projects. These were followed by the presentation of Wordnet websites by all language groups (in alphabetical order). Mr. Ramdas Karmali, Mr. Venkatesh Prabhu and Mr. Parteek Bhatia chaired the session. After tea break, preparations for the next day PRSG meeting were discussed which included the discussions on administrative and technical challenges faced and the proposal for Phase 2 for *Indradhanush* and NE WordNets. The session was chaired by Prof. Pushpak Bhattacharyya.

The next day (24th July) was devoted for the PRSG meeting. The expert committee headed by Prof. K. Narayanamurthy reviewed and evaluated the progress of the WordNet projects.

The third day again was devoted for various issues on WordNet development. There were presentations on *Experiences and Challenges faced during Synset Linking and Sense Marking* by all language groups (in alphabetical order). The session was chaired by Mr. Brijesh Bhat and Mrs. Laxmi Kashyap. This was followed by a talk by Prof. Pushpak Bhattacharyya on the topics *WN Linker Interface* and *WSD Interface*. After tea break, there was a demonstration and feedback on the *LSS Creation Tool*. Prof. C.K. Bhensdadia chaired the session. The workshop ended with a presentation on *Tolls and APIs*.

S. Rajendran

## THE EARLIEST INSCRIPTION IN MALAYALAM



Picture 1

A tall anthropomorphic figure found in the prehistoric rock engraving found at Edakal cave, Kerala. The Tamil-Brahmi Malayalam inscription (Edakal-5) is engraved just below and to the left of the anthropomorphic figure.



Picture 2

A computer-enhanced image of the Malayalam inscription found at Edakal cave, Kerala.

Eminent epigraphist Iravatham Mahadevan contends that Edakal-5 provides important evidence that the common people of Kerala were already expressing themselves in Malayalam at about the end of the 4th century c.e.

One more Tamil-Brahmi inscription has been discovered recently at the Edakal cave, Wayanad by M.R.

Raghava Varier (*The Hindu*, 9 February 2012). This is the fifth in the series of similar inscriptions found in the cave. The four earlier inscriptions have been included in my book *Early Tamil Epigraphy*, 2003.

The inscription (Edakal-5) is engraved just below and to the left of a tall, imposing anthropomorphic figure which is part of the much earlier prehistoric engravings covering the rock walls of the cave (Picture 1). It appears that Edakal-5 is a label inscription engraved by a casual visitor to the cave recording his impression of the anthropomorphic figure he saw there.

A study of the computer-enhanced photograph of Edakal-5 was undertaken by M.V. Bhaskar, Project Co-ordinator, Central Institute of Classical Tamil Photographic Survey. The study revealed finer details not visible in the rather 'flat' ink impression (estampage) published with the earlier report in *The Hindu*. The sharper delineation of Edakal-5 made from the computer-enhanced image is reproduced along with the revised reading and interpretation proposed by me (Picture 2). The brief but complete two-word inscription tells it all: *i pazhama* ('this (is) ancient'); 'this' refers to the anthropomorphic figure described by the visitor as 'ancient'.

A striking parallel is found in the Perumukkal cave near Tindivanam in Tamil Nadu. The rock walls of this cave are also covered with prehistoric carvings, probably belonging to a somewhat later period than at Edakal. A casual visitor to the cave in about the 5th century c.e. engraved a brief label inscription in early Vatteluttu script reading *iraasar* ('the kings') under a much older rock carving of a personage seated in a covered vehicle.

The language of Edakal-5 is Malayalam. This becomes clear from the first word *i* ('this'), which is a pronoun in Malayalam standing for someone or something nearer the speaker. In Tamil, *i* has the same meaning but does not occur as an independent word unlike in Malayalam. That the language of the inscription is indeed Malayalam is made clear by the second word *pazhama* which corresponds to *pazhamai* in Tamil, meaning "that which is ancient or old". The text in Malayalam and its nearest rendering in Tamil are juxtaposed below to bring out the distinction.

<i>i pazhama</i>	Malayalam
<i>idu pazhamai</i>	Tamil
'this (is) ancient'	translation

The most important result from the revised reading is that Edakal-5 is by far the earliest inscription in Malayalam and the only one in Brahmi. It may be assigned to late 4th or early 5th century c.e. on palaeographic evidence discussed below.

The next earliest inscriptions in Malayalam occur much later from about the beginning of the 9th century c.e. and are in the Vatteluttu script.

The palaeography of Edakal-5 is also unique. It is written in a mixture of Southern Brahmi and Tamil-Brahmi scripts. In fact, only one letter, *zha*, is in Tamil-Brahmi; the other three letters are in the Southern Brahmi script.

The first letter *i* resembling the Arabic numeral 3 was later inherited by the Tamil script where it survived almost up to the modern times. The last letter *ma* passed into the later Pallava-Grantha script and still later into the Malayalam script.

The mixing of scripts at Edakal is not surprising as it sits astride the tri-junction of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. However, it does pose a problem in fixing the date of the inscription. The best estimate is that Edakal-5 may be placed at the end of the 4th or the beginning of the 5th century c.e.

Edakal-5 provides important evidence that the common people of Kerala were already expressing themselves in Malayalam at about the end of the 4th century c.e. However, Tamil was also retained by the elite as the literary idiom in which great works like *Silappadikaram* were composed.

Eventually, of course, the people's language prevailed in the region and Malayalam became the medium of communication for all purposes from about the beginning of the Kollam Era (early 9th century c.e.).

*Iravatham Mahadevan*

## GEORGE MILLER PASSES AWAY

George Miller, Princeton's James S. McDonnell Distinguished University Professor of Psychology and Linguistics Emeritus and a pioneer in cognitive science, died of natural causes Sunday, July 22, at his home in Plainsboro, N.J. He was 92 years old.

George Miller was the founder of WordNet, a linguistic knowledgebase that maps the way the mind stores and uses language. Development began in 1985 and the project has received about \$3 million of funding, mainly from government agencies interested in machine translation. He spent the later part of his career building and expanding this database. He also worked on a number of commercial applications based on WordNet, most notably, *Simpli*. *Simpli* was an early Internet search and marketing engine created by George Miller and a number of Professors and graduate students at Brown University, including Jeff Stibel, James A. Anderson and Steve Reiss. *Simpli* utilized WordNet to "read" search queries and disambiguate them. It was also used to read web pages and derive representative keywords so that advertising could be presented. *Applied Semantics*, a competing search engine that was eventually acquired by Google and evolved into *Google AdSense*, was based on the WordNet lexicon, as well. Miller, together with Jerome Bruner and Noam Chomsky, led the "cognitive revolution" that replaced behaviourism as the leading psychological approach to understanding the mind in the 1950s.

*Editor*

### Contribution to Prof. V.I. Subramoniam Endowment Fund

TOTAL AS OF LAST MONTH	Rs. 3,89,120.00
CURRENT TOTAL (Including FD)	Rs. 3,89,120.00

### DLA News Endowment Fund

TOTAL AS OF LAST MONTH	Rs. 1,77,377.10
CURRENT TOTAL	Rs. 1,77,377.10