

## **Kurichiya Tribe of Kerala - A Phonological Study**

**Dr. Syam S. K., M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.**

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### **Abstract**

Kurichiyas are one of the most developed tribes in Wayanad district. They live in scattered homesteads with a self-contained unit with its own hills and fields. They were said to be the first to settle in the Wayanad hills as farmers. Later in the revolt against the British and Muslims they were defeated by the British. The society of the Kurichiya tribes is complex as they maintain caste hierarchy. The Kurichiyas of Wayanad have a great martial tradition. They constituted the army of Pazhassi Raja who engaged the British forces in several battles. The descendants of those warriors are still expert archers. The excellence of Kurichiya archery has been exhibited recently at various centers. The main concern of this work is concentrated on the Language / Dialect spoken by this tribal Community. Hence the phonological analysis of this language has been done with the data elicited from the selected informants of the Kurichiya settlement in the Mananthavady Taluk of Wayanad District, Kerala State, India.

**Key words:** Kurichiya tribe, Kerala, kurichiya dialect phonology

### **1. Introduction**

Kurichiya is one of the major tribal communities of Kerala State in India. They are the first agricultural tribe to have settled in Wayanad district of Kerala. They migrated to Wayanad between the first and third century AD. They observe untouchability with other tribal communities in Wayanad and they claim to be the best among all other tribal groups in Kerala.

#### **1.1 Population**

According to the 1971 Census, there were 15700 members of the Kurichiya tribe, among them 7996 were males and 7704 were females. According to the 1981 Census, the Kurichiya population in Kerala was 22,215. According to 1991 Census, the Kurichiya population was 28287 and it became 32746 by 2001 Census. 2011 Census data of Kurichiya

shows a total of 35171 persons, with 17643 males and 17528 females. Thus, there is a progressive increase in the number of the members of the Kurichiya tribe in Kerala.

## 1.2 Settlement

Kurichiyas live in scattered homesteads in self-contained units with their own hills and fields. There is an open yard known as *mittom* which is plastered over with cow dung. Important ceremonies and important meetings are presided over by their headman *pittan* (*puuppan* or *kaaranavan*). Only *pittan* has the right to sell or lease the property. He discusses important issues with all members of the family. The *pittan*'s wife is known as *ammayi* or *odakkarathi*. Although she is not a member of the *mittom* she has to shoulder several responsibilities and she enjoys certain privileges. A single household of Kurichiya is occupied by five to twenty families sharing a common kitchen to cook and serve food.

## 1.3 Agriculture and Hunting

Kurichiyas mainly subsist on agriculture, but they are good hunters and archers also. The main implements for their hunting are bow and arrows which are made by them using bamboo and other creepers and plants. The main types of bows used by them are *kattiyampu* and *mottampu*. *Kattiyampu* is a long sharp edged arrow with great penetrative power. It is used for hunting wild animals and the *mottampu* is used for hunting birds and for games. Used bows and arrows are preserved in the family armory.

## 1.4 Worship

Kurichiyas believe in Hinduism and worship Hindu gods and goddesses in their premises, in addition to the worship of their own Kurichiya gods and goddess.

Kurichiyas have a tradition of herbal medicine and their treatment is preceded by astrological procedures and counseling.

## 1.5 Customs

When a girl attains puberty, she is directed to sit in the seclusion hut known as *erupura* for six days and the 7<sup>th</sup> day is the day of purification and is celebrated as *therattukalyaanam*, a marriage-like ceremony with great joy.

In the case of marriage, they prefer cross cousin marriages. Marriage takes place only after a girl attains her puberty and is decided by their headman and the function will be held at the residence of the girl. Divorce and widow marriage is allowed but a woman is not allowed to live with more than one husband.

The delivery of a woman is in a confinement hut known as *erukottupura* about 200 to 300 meters away from their main house. She stays there for sixty days after delivery under the care of a midwife known as *peetticci*. Purification bath of a delivered woman will be conducted on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> days.

In the case of death of an individual, Kurichiyas take no food till the dead body is cremated or buried. Every *mittom* has its own burial ground. Headman presides over the function. Ritual bath to mark the end of the pollution is on performed on the 16<sup>th</sup> day.

## 2. Phonology

In Kurichiya language, 27 phonemes are identified. Total vowels identified are 5 and there are 22 consonants.

### 2.1 Vowels

Vowels are sounds in the production of which there is no obstruction to the flow of air as it passes from larynx to lips.

### 2.2 Short Vowels

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		u
Mild	e		o
Low		a	ə

#### 2.2.1 Distributions of Short Vowels

#### 2.2.2 Short Vowels in Word initial position

/ i e a u o /

Examples:

/i/	/ippo/	‘now’
/e/	/eppo/	‘when’
/a/	/appo/	‘then’
/u/	/uppu/	‘salt’
/o/	/okka/	‘all’

### 2.2.3 Short Vowels in word medial positions

/i/	kiññi/	‘small’
/e/	/cera/	‘pond’
/a/	/paṭṭi/	‘dog’
/u/	/tumpa/	‘Aromatic medicinal plant’

### 2.2.4 Short Vowels in Word Final Position

/i/	kuṭṭi/	‘child’
/e/	/kere/	‘cough’
/a/	/icca/	‘noon’
/u/	/up:u/	‘salt’
/o/	/appo/	‘then’

## 2.3 Long Vowels

	Front	Central	Back
High	ī		ū
Mild	ē		ō
Low		ā	ô

### 2.3.1 Distribution of Long Vowels

### 2.3.2 Long Vowels in Word Initial Position

/ī/	/iiccaran/	‘god’
/ē/	/ēla/	‘cardamom’
/ā/	/āru/	‘who’
/ū/	/ūru/	‘settlement’

/ō/ /ōru/ 'they'

### 2.3.3 Long Vowels in Word Medial Positions

/ī/ /kiiyu/ 'to step down'

/ē/ /pēya/ 'river'

/ā/ /kāl/ 'leg'

/ū/ /kūman/ 'owl'

/ō/ /kōṇi/ 'steps'

### 2.3.4 Long Vowels in Word Final Position

/ī/ Nil

/ē/ Nil

/ā/ Nil

/ū/ Nil

/ō/ Nil

## 2.4 Consonants

Consonants are speech sounds during the articulation of which there is an obstruction. That is, Consonants can be defined phonetically as sounds made by closure or narrowing in the vocal tract so that the airflow is either completely blocked or so restricted that the audible friction is produced. It also occurs in word initial, medial and final positions.

	Bilabial vl vd	labiodenta l Vd	Dental Vl Vd	Alveolar Vl Vd	Retroflex Vl Vd	Palatal Vl Vd	Velar Vl Vd
Stops/Plosives	P b		t d	ɾ	ʈ ɖ	c j	K g
Nasals	m		ɳ	n	ɳ	ɲ	ŋ
Laterals				l	!		
Flaps				r			
Continuant		V				y	

### 2.4.1 Distribution of Consonants

Among the consonants, / p, t, c, k / and / m, n/ occur frequently; occurrence of / b, v/ is less, and others least.

### 2.4.2 Bilabial Stops

/p/ is a bilabial voiceless stop identified in this language. It occurs word initially and medially.

/b/ is a bilabial voiced stop occurs word initially and medially.

Examples:

/pa!attu/	below
/kaṭṭupiri/	joined eyebrow
/balya/	‘big’
/karumbu/	‘sugar cane’

### 2.4.3 Dental Stops

/t/ is Dental voiceless stop. It occurs initially and medially

/d/ is Dental voiced stop. It occurs word initially and medially.

Examples:

/tala/	‘Head’
/tuṛti/	‘Sparrow’
/daśapu/	‘thickness’
/tāṇdakuttu/	‘surrender’

### 2.4.4 Alveolar Stops

/ṛ/ is the alveolar stop. It occurs only word medially.

/ēru/	‘ox’
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### 2.4.5 Retroflex Stop

/ṭ/ is the voiceless retroflex stop identified in this language. It occurs word medially.

/ḍ/ is the voiced retroflex stop . It occurs word medially.

/pōṭi/	‘fear’
/na ḍu/	‘middle’

#### 2.4.6 Palatal Stops

/c/ is the voiceless palatal stop which occurs initially and medially.

/j/ is the voiced palatal stop which occurs initially

/ciri/	‘laugh’
/ṭccan/	‘god’
/janal/	‘window’
/jāti/	‘caste’

#### 2.4.7 Velar Stop

/k/ is voiceless velar stop which occurs word initially and medially

/g/ is the voiced velar stop which occurs word initially and medially.

/kā/	‘leg’
/uṇakka/	‘dried’
/garappam/	‘pregnancy’
/nagem/	‘nail’

#### 2.4.8 Nasals

There are six nasal phonemes identified in this language.

/m/ is the bilabial nasal, which occurs word initially, medially and finally.

/mācci/	‘dirt’
/kūman/	‘owl’
/kiyāṭṭam/	‘foundations’

/n/ is the alveolar nasal, which occurs word initially, medially and finally.

/nāykuṭṭi/	‘dog’
/pani/	‘fever’

/tēn/            ‘honey’

/ n / is the dental nasal, which occurs word initially and medially.

/ nāṇam/            ‘shame’

/kū nnu/            ‘part of jack fruit’

/ŋ/ is the retroflex nasal which occurs word medially only.

/paŋi/            ‘work’

/ñ/ is dental nasal which occurs word initially and medially.

/ñāma/            ‘tortoise’

/maññu/            ‘snow’

/ŋ/ is velar nasal which occurs word medially.

/peññal/            ‘sister’

#### 2.4.9 Laterals

/l/ and /!/ are two lateral sounds identified in this language.

/l/ is alveolar lateral which occurs word medially.

/!/ is retroflex lateral which occurs word medially.

/mela/            ‘breast’

/mē!u/            ‘pepper’

#### 2.4.10 Flaps

/ɾ/ is a flap sound identified in this language. Which occurs word medially.

/pera/            ‘hut’

#### 2.4.11 Continuants

/v/ and /y/ are two continuant phones identified in this language.

/v/ is a labiodental continuant which occurs word initially and medially

/y/ is palatal continuant which occurs word medially.



/veṭṭm/	‘light’
/dovasam/	‘day’
/āyam/	‘depth’

## 2.5 Clusters

*Cluster* is a term used in connected speech to refer to any sequence of adjacent consonants occurring initially or finally in a syllable.

### 2.5.1 Consonant Clusters

When two or more consonants occur together, they are called a consonant cluster.

*Cluster* means group.

/nt/	/anti/	‘evening’
/ṇ d/	/āṇḍōyi/	‘dipped’
/ṭk/	/aṭka/	‘near’
/ny/	/canyāsi/	‘nun’
/p!/	/kup!a/	‘Dirty thing’
/ly/	/belya/	‘big’
/yp/	/aypu/	‘half’

### 2.5.2 Gemination or Identical Consonant Clusters

Gemination is nothing but the long consonants.

/kk/	/cekkān/	‘boy’
/yy/	/kiyyi/	‘hole’
/cc/	/accān/	‘father’
/ṇṇ/	/peṇṇu /	‘lady’
/ṅṅ/	/kiṅṅi/	‘small’
/ṇṇ/	/aṇṇa/	‘brother’
/mm/	/amma/	‘mother’
/!!/	/mu!!u /	‘thorn’
/ll/	/ellu/	‘bone’
/tt/	/cūtta/	‘a medicinal plant’

/pp/ /appaviral/ 'thumb'

## 2.6 Syllable

In a linguistic system the smallest distinctive sound unit is the phoneme. Phonemes combine to form the next higher unit of expression called syllable. A syllable consists of one or more phonemes and a word is made up of one or more syllable.

A syllable is a unit consisting of one vowel or syllabic consonants, which may be preceded or followed by a consonant or consonants. Syllables are generally classified into Open syllable and Closed syllable.

### 2.6.1 Open Syllable

If a syllable ends in a vowel, it is known as Open Syllable.

/mācci/ 'dirt'

### 2.6.2 Closed Syllable

If a syllable ends in a consonant it is known as Closed Syllable.

/pūppan/ 'Headman'

### 2.6.3 Syllabification or Syllabic Structures

*Syllabification* is the term which refers to the division of a word into syllables. A word containing a single syllable is called monosyllabic word and if it contains two syllables, it is called disyllabic word. When it contains three syllables it is called trisyllabic word. Generally, a word with more than one syllable is called a polysyllabic word.

### 2.6.4 Monosyllabic Words

V /ā/ 'that'

CVV /nī/ you

VVC /on/ 'he'

### 2.6.5 Disyllabic Words

CVVCV /kōṇi/ ‘steps’

### 2.6.6 Tri syllabic words

CVCCVVCVC /kiyāṭṭam/ ‘foundation’

## 2.7 Conclusion

This paper focuses on the language spoken by the Kurichiya tribe. This paper is on the phonology of Kurichiya language. From the analysis it is found that this language has many similarities with the dialects of Malayalam. More details will be presented in subsequent articles.

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Dr. Syam S.K., M.A., MPhil., Ph.D.  
Linguistic Cell  
Department of Developmental Studies  
Directorate of Kirtads  
Chevayur PO  
Calicut -17  
Kerala  
India  
[syamsivan@yahoo.co.in](mailto:syamsivan@yahoo.co.in)