

A Note on the *-āre* person number marking suffix in Gundert's writing^{*}

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Hermann Gundert in his '*Kēraḷa paḷama*', which is a "History of Malabar" from AD 1496-1531, published in 1868 and reprinted with spelling corrections, provides finite verb endings in Malayalam. About 125 occurrences were listed and the nature of the endings is analyzed so that the disappearance of the PNG (person number and gender) suffixes in Malayalam finite verbs can be gauged.¹

The use of the suffix *-āre* in finite verbs is found mostly in this work which appears to be based on the diary of the Portuguese in Malabar. The following classes of occurrences are available in this text:

A) Subject epicene plural third person finite verb ending in *-āre*, third person epicene plural

(1) *avar ariyiccāre*

B) Subject third person singular while referring to the King or to a noble and the finite verb in third person epicene plural

(2) *avan (tāmudri) kalppiccāre*²

Incidentally the reference to a King with a third person singular pronoun is a practice found in the Sangam Classics and in their colophons. The Portuguese captains like Vasco da Gama, Albuquerque, etc., are included in this category.

C) Subject third person singular and finite verb with *-āre*.

(3) *Mukkuvan ariyiccāre* (mostly servants and low caste people)

In this example the masculine singular subject takes *-āre*, third epicene plural finite verb.

Pattern **A** is predominant (60 occ.), pattern **B** is less frequent (48 occ.) and **C** is the least frequent (8 occ.)

avar (respectful) and *avan* (third masculine singular ordinary) though less in frequency indicate the free use of *-āre* with singular subject leading finally, to its zeroing.

In finite verbal nouns like '*vannavar*' the reference to the subject with person number marking is found even today without any confusion in the

^{*} Paper presented in the 30th All India Conference of Dravidian Linguists at Dharwad, Karnataka, 11-13 November 2002.

¹ In a quote by T. Madhava Menon the suffix *-āre* is found which led me to scan the whole of *Kēraḷa paḷama* of Gundert. Now T.M. Menon is translating the book into English on my advice.

² The regular change of s>t in *sāmudri/tāmudri* ('the King of Calicut') will confirm my early statement on the change of s to t in late middle Malayalam. See V.I. Subramoniam [2003].

subject in modern Malayalam writing. In poetry, first and second person finite verbs with PNG are found infrequently. These are survivals of an earlier stage of finite verbs ending in PNG in Malayalam.³

Classical Tamil also at least has one finite verb ending in *-um* taking all person number and gender subjects.

- (4a) *avan* (he) / *avaḷ* (she) / *avar* (they) *varum* (come)
- (4b) *nī* (you) / *nīnkaḷ* (you all) "
- (4c) *nān* (I) / *nānkaḷ* (we) "

The other finite verbs will have PNG according to the subject. Modern Tamil mixes plural subject with the singular finite verb, which is not resented by hearers. Television or radio announcers say

- (5) *avai vantatu* "They (neuter-plural) came-it (neuter-singular)"

The sequences of disappearance of PNG in Malayalam may be:

- First Stage: subject and finite verbs have concord in PNG.
- Second Stage: no concord in PNG between subject and finite verb.
- Third Stage: dropping of finite verb PNG suffixes.

Bibliography

- Gundert, Hermann, *Kēraḷa paḷama, or the History of Malabar A.D. 1498-1631*, Mangalore 1868, 195 p.; 1869; Kottayam 1983; Kozhikode 1988 (with critical introduction by N.M. Namputiri); Paschimodayam 1847, Vol. 1, Nr. 1 ff.). HGS Vol II Kottayam 1992.⁴
- V. I. Subramoniam, 'A short note on c/s > t change', *International Journal of Dravidian Linguistics*, vol. xxxii, no. 2 (June 2003), pp. 185-6.

³ In colloquial Malayalam *nī vannēre* "You (singular) come" is heard in conversation. Reconstructed form will be *nīr vannīre* to *nī vānīrē*. Since *nīr* is replaced by **nīnkaḷ > nīnnaḷ* ("you pl.") and *nīr > nī* ("you singular"), the finite verb still retains *-ire* the plural PNG ending for a singular subject.

⁴ Item slightly adapted from the bibliography on p. 233 of the book *Dr Hermann Gundert and the Malayalam Language*. Hermann Gundert Series [= HGS]. Editors: Dr Albrecht Frenz & Dr Scaria Zacharia. 1993. ISBN 81-240-0075-1. The entry reads: *Kēraḷa paḷama, or the History of Malabar A.D. 1498-1631*, Mangalore 1868, 195 S.; 1869; Kottayam 1983; Kozhikode 1988 (with critical introduction by N.M. Namputiri); Paschimodayam 1847, Vol. 1, Nr. 1 ff.). HGS Vol II Kottayam 1992 (Editor's Note).