

THE SOURCES OF THE NAHALI VOCABULARY*

by

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When studying the origin of the Nahali words it will be useful to distinguish four different categories.

I. MUNDA WORDS, i.e. those words which, whether or not originating in Austro-Asiatic, are in common use in one or more of the branches of Munda. These words fall into two groups:

a. Words which Nahali has in common with Kurku. As a result of the close symbiosis between Nahals and Kurkus (which symbiosis apparently cannot be dated earlier than about 1800 A.D.), Nahali has adopted a high percentage of Kurku words, sometimes even completely with the Kurku morphemes (e.g. Nah. *aŋglu-ij'*, *bommo-ki*, etc.). It does not make any difference, in this respect, if these words belong to the ancient Munda vocabulary or have been borrowed from Dravidian, Indo-Aryan, or perhaps some other non-identified language. On the other hand, if an Indo-Aryan word occurs in Kurku and Nahali in

* The following article was originally conceived as a chapter of a comparative study on Nahali, which however was too long to be included as a whole and which, therefore, has been published elsewhere. [The publication meant is: "Nahali, A Comparative Study", *Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederl. Akademie v. Wetensch., Afd. Letterk.*, N.R. 25/5 (1962), pp. 239-352.] For an ample discussion of the etymology of the Nahali words the reader must be referred to that publication. Additional data about the Nimar dialect of Kurku as spoken in Dharni (DhKu.), for which the present writer has to thank most cordially Professor Norman H. Zide have been marked by NHZ. The Kurku words are deliberately reproduced here as they occur in printed texts, as it appeared impossible for the author to transpose these data, the only ones known to him, into a more realistic spelling without a personal knowledge of the spoken language. Sometimes, indeed, the data supplied by Prof. Zide, differ curiously from what might have been expected on comparative grounds. It would be unsafe, therefore, to attempt a phonetic reconstruction on the mere basis of the printed texts and comparative linguistics. For similar reasons the spelling of the *Encyclopaedia Mundarica* has been followed for Mundari words, in spite of its notorious deficiencies. In other respects I have stuck to the orthography introduced by Skrefsrud (e.g. *ñ* for *ñ*) pending an agreement among Mundologists as to a general transcription system for the Munda (and preferably also for the Dravidian) languages.

different forms, the Nahali word may be supposed to have been borrowed separately – as long as no similar form is found in some Kurku dialect. The fact must be stressed, indeed, that statistics based on an inevitably incomplete Kurku wordlist which contains only such words as occur in printed texts, cannot claim a high degree of exactness. Kurku equivalents to the Nahali words, though unknown from these sources, may actually be in use. This is particularly true of the Indo-Aryan loan-words, which may occur in different forms in the various dialects.

It should be noted in this connexion that James Forsyth, in his *Settlement Report* of 1870 (see “Nahali”, p. 5), stated that the Nahals speak Kurku. Possibly those with whom he had come into contact, or about whom he happened to have some information, really did so. However, as more than a third of the Nahali vocabulary must have been borrowed direct from Kurku, it is also quite conceivable that the large amount of Kurku words in Nahali has given rise to the false impression that Nahals and Kurkus spoke the same language. In any case, this statement was no solid base for Konow’s inference that in 1870 the Nahals “still” spoke Kurku, and that only after that date Nahali has adopted a large number of Dravidian, and still later of Aryan words. (See *LSI*, IV, 185). This picture of the historical development is certainly incorrect. It cannot reasonably be doubted that originally Nahali was quite different from Kurku, whose strong influence must have begun to make itself felt only after the extermination of the Nahal tribe, shortly after 1800 A.D. The fundamental difference between the basic vocabulary of Nahali and Kurku is too apparent to need circumstantial demonstration. Cf. e.g.:¹

eat	Ku. <i>jom</i>	Nah. <i>tē-</i>
drink	<i>nu</i>	<i>ḍelen-</i>
sit	<i>šubañ</i>	<i>peṭe-</i>
sing	<i>širiñ</i>	<i>bāro-</i>
fall	<i>boco</i>	<i>cerko-</i>
ascend	<i>perej</i>	<i>cakha-</i>
ask	<i>komara</i>	<i>bica-</i>
hear	<i>anjum</i>	<i>cikn-</i>

¹ The Kurku words are here given in the spelling of Rev. John Drake. The divergencies in DhKu. are mostly irrelevant in this respect, except for *mañum* “blood” for *pacna* [DhKu. *paçna*], which had not been recorded by any of the older authorities. As for *munda* : *kuwa* Prof. Zide remarks: DhKu. *mūdà* “to beat, strike” : *kuaq* “to spank (a child)”. For *kuwa*[*q*] beside *kuma*[*q*], *ma*[*q*] see *Orientalia Neerlandica*, 385. For *ganḍa* DhKu. has *poera*, which is also well-known in other dialects. The other DhKu. equivalents are *subañ*, *siriñ*, *añum*, *akhè*, *mhad*, *tithid*, *biñ*, *siñ*, *daq*, *sigel*, *sagin*, *tein* (= *tehiñ*), *dhega*.

be afraid	<i>higra</i>	<i>cāvgo-</i>
beat	<i>munda, kuwa</i>	<i>koṭṭo-</i>
kindle	<i>tiñ</i>	<i>uri-</i>
weep	<i>yam</i>	<i>āpa-</i>
axe	<i>ake</i>	<i>cakoṭo</i>
bamboo	<i>mad</i>	<i>jūḍ</i>
bee	<i>nili, etc.</i>	<i>maikko</i>
bird	<i>titid</i>	<i>poyye</i>
blood	<i>pacna</i>	<i>corṭo</i>
tooth	<i>tiriñ</i>	<i>meñge</i>
boy	<i>ganḍa</i>	<i>ejer</i>
louse	<i>siku</i>	<i>kepa</i>
snake	<i>biñ</i>	<i>kōgo</i>
stone	<i>dega</i>	<i>cago</i>
tree	<i>śiñ</i>	<i>adru</i>
water	<i>dā</i>	<i>joppo</i>
fire	<i>śiñgel</i>	<i>āpo</i>
to-day	<i>tēñ</i>	<i>bay</i>
far	<i>sañgin</i>	<i>dhava</i>

Since most of the Kurku words are common Munda words, whereas their Nahali equivalents are quite isolated, this aberrant vocabulary could possibly be explained by the theory that Nahali is essentially an argot, which has introduced a large number of substitutes for the original words, whatever the origin of these substitutes may be. However, such a theory would be inadequate to account for the far more interesting second group of words:

b. Munda words in Nahali, whose absence in Kurku cannot be explained by the deficiencies of our lexical materials or by the theory that they have gone out of use in Kurku. Not all words to be discussed here satisfy the last condition. These words are particularly important for our reconstruction of the historical development of Nahali in that they point to *the existence of Munda elements in Nahali, long before it came under the influence of Kurku*, while further suggesting the conclusion that these Munda elements cannot with certainty be connected with either the northern (Kherwari) group or with the central and southern (Sora-Gudba) groups of the Munda languages. The scanty materials on which we have to base our conclusions do not allow us, in the present state of these studies, to go beyond the ascertainment of possibilities. Only in passing, therefore, reference may be made to a theory, which

Verrier Elwin (*The Baiga*, p. 4) has put forward, of two different settlements of the Munda race, the first of which is represented by the Bhar, Bhuiya, Baiga, and kindred tribes, who have entirely lost their own languages. As far as I can see, linguistic research has not thus far produced any evidence suggestive of such a fundamental bipartition of the Munda family of speech. Attention must be drawn, therefore, to the possibly important implications of the Nah. word *biḍi* "one". Up till now, only forms with initial *b* but without a dental suffix have become known, whereas forms with initial *m* occur with and without that suffix (see Pinnow, 264). So the Nah. form represents a type of formation that is not found anywhere else. Other cases that are of special interest in this connexion are Nah. *ṭu-* "to embrace" : Ku. *katu*, id. (prefixed *ḍu/ru* in Kh. *karó'*, So. *kundu*; cf. Khasi *kynthup* : Sa. *ḥṛuṣ'*, Mu. *hambud'*) and Nah. *ṭē-* "to eat" : **tiñ* in Kherwari. Corresponding forms may have existed, or perhaps even exist, in other Munda languages, but in the present state of our knowledge these words are isolated and might possibly support the theory of a different branch of Munda now extinct but for the remnants in Nahali (See also Berger, *WZKSO*, III (1959), 79). Less important is Nah. *chama-ki*, if this should reflect a non-infixed form **sa-mah* beside **sanamah* in Ku. *samma-n*.² Attention may further be drawn to Nah. *honḍar* "rat", which very closely resembles the Proto-Munda form which has been borrowed into Sanskrit as *undara-*, but which can only indirectly be connected with So. *ondreñ* (further connexion with Ku. *kone* (sic!), etc. [Pinnow, *Versuch einer histor. Lautlehre*, 180, Berger, *WZKSO*, III, 57] is unacceptable); to Nah. *haru* "to bite", although Ho *hua*, id., indirectly proves the existence of **haru* at an earlier stage of Kherwari, and although we cannot rule out the possibility that Kurku has had a verb **haru* for *katra-tiñki* "to gnaw"; to Nah. *baṭam* "thirsty", if related to Ku. *ta-tañ*, and to *kakheyñ* "to comb the hair", if related to Ku. *akej*. See also below, p. 81, for Dhimal *ünkhū* "rice". Of the remaining instances of non-Kurku words of Munda origin the following may be mentioned:

A. More closely connected with Kherwari:

ara- "to see" : Sa. *arak' orok'* "staring"?

giṭa "younger brother" : Sa. *gidar gadar* "little children"?

ho-ṭ, ho-ṭe "not" : Sa. *ḡḡ*, id.

² As to Ku. *samma-n* (DhKu. *samma-èn*) Prof. Zide remarks that it "is certainly contaminated (if nothing more) by Hi. *sāmne* since both the *-mm-* and the use of the suffix *-èn* (with the syntax of the constructions in which it is found i.e. Ngen. *samma-èn*, like Hi. *ke N* (oblique) *mē* (e.g. Hi. *biic, bagal*, Ko. *biico-èn, bagal-èn*, etc.) are atypical of K. construction."