

“Cultivating a Forest Language: Development Ideas for Kani Tribal People of Tamil Nadu’s Kanniyakumari District”

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During his August 2004 visit to Chennai, India’s Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Dr. R. Anbumani, said that the Centre is committed to popularising Ayurveda, Siddha, and other Indian health systems involving medicinal plants. He noted that the Centre had started a Traditional Knowledge Digital Library to document the herbs and their uses, and that the Health Ministry’s Medicinal Plant Board will offer grants and subsidies to farmers to encourage them to grow medicinal plants. The States will have to forward the applications: the Ministry had not yet received any from Tamil Nadu (*The Hindu*, Aug. 10). It has also been announced that the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests will be working with the United Nations Development Programme on a medicinal plant project that is part of India’s National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (*The Hindu*, Aug. 14).

This paper presents a case study of a plant medicine production and marketing project conducted by two partners: a group of Kani tribal people of Kerala, and the Government of India. The paper then discusses ways in which this achievement could be built upon by Kani people of Tamil Nadu, by combining plant work with 1) language and other cultural preservation, and 2) educational and entertainment presentations for tourists. The paper concludes with some Kani sayings that compare human behaviour to forest elements and processes. It is hoped that these linguistic examples may begin to demonstrate that the dialect of Tamil spoken by Kani people of Tamil Nadu’s Kanniyakumari district is indeed a ‘forest language’, and that, as the Kani people’s language and plant knowledge are parts of an organic whole, these two aspects of Kani culture should be studied and developed together. It is also hoped that this paper might contribute to the process initiated by India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who said that India’s tribal peoples “should develop along the lines of their own genius” (that is, characters), and thus maintain their identities, which should become parts of India’s mainstream (Singh).

A Plant Medicine Production and Marketing Project

At the 2002 United Nations sponsored World Summit on Sustainable Development (also known as, the Earth Summit) in Johannesburg, South Africa, the UN's first annual Equator Initiative Prize (which included an award of approximately thirty-thousand USA dollars) was awarded to the Kerala Tribal Ethnomedicine Project. This project centred around the plant, *arogyapacha* (meaning "healthy green," or "the plant that can provide evergreen health").

The prize had not been an easy one to win. There are one-hundred-and-thirty countries in the equatorial belt. These countries contain the world's greatest wealth of biodiversity, and also the greatest amounts of poverty. Four-hundred-and-twenty projects had been nominated for the prize, from seventy-seven of these countries. The Kerala Tribal Ethnomedicine Project partners were represented at the Earth Summit by the tribal leader, Kuttumathan Kani; and by Dr. P. Pushpangadan, director, Tropical Botanical Garden and Research Institute, Palode, Trivandrum district, Kerala. Dr. Pushpangadan (who presently directs the National Botanical Research Institute, Lucknow) had originally learned of the *arogyapacha* plant from Kani people during his visit to the Western Ghats in 1987, when he had been the director of the All-India Coordinated Research Project on Ethnobiology. Over the following fifteen years, Dr. Pushpangadan had continued to work with *arogyapacha* and the Kani people.

Upon his return to India, Kuttumathan Kani said, "My trip to the Earth Summit was a great experience. I never knew that the rare plants we make herbal medicines with could make a difference globally. We are proud of our tribal heritage in India" (Iyype). "India has pioneered one of the first models of benefit-sharing [between a national government and tribal people living within its boundaries]," says Dr. R.A. Mashelkar, director general of the Govt. of India's Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, who had nominated the project for the prize (Khan).

Kani tribal people live in and around the southernmost section of the Western Ghats, a mountain range that is one of the world's twenty-five "hot-spots" of biodiversity -- the only other such "hotspot" in India is in the eastern Himalayas (Pushpangadan). In Kerala, Kani people mostly live in the eastern section of the Trivandrum district; in Tamil Nadu they mostly live in the western sections of the Kanniyakumari and -- to the north -- Tirunelveli districts. Of the total Kani population of approximately sixteen-thousand, most are living in the Kanniyakumari district.

The Kerala Tribal Ethnomedicine Project documents the ethnomedical knowledge of the Kani people. It addresses issues of, and provides a model for, research, recognition of tribal peoples' knowledge systems and intellectual property rights regarding biodiverse environments, sustainable utilisation, product development, patenting, licensing, and technology transfer. The case illustrates how a project featuring a multi-stakeholder framework can balance biological resource and conservation concerns. It is the world's first instance of benefit-sharing that implements Article 8(j) of the UN Convention of Biological Diversity (Khan).

Arogya pacha leaves, seeds, and fruits have been found to have anti-fatigue, anti-oxidant, adaptogenic, anti-allergic, immunity-enhancing, and hepato-protective actions. It is a herbaceous, perennial, rhizomatous plant, containing various glycolipids, and other non-steroidal compounds (polysaccharides). Arogya pacha's botanical identity is *Trichopus Zeylanicus*. Its Ayurvedic identity is Varahi, which is one of the eighteen divine herbs mentioned in the Charaka Samhita and the Susruta Samhita.

The Kanis' traditional arogya pacha based medicinal mixture is known as *mala marunnu* (meaning, "mountain medicine"): it is especially used to treat forms of liver disease. The license for making a commercial arogya pacha based product was awarded in 1995 to the Ayurvedic medicine manufacturing company, Arya Vaidya Pharmacy of Coimbatore. Arya Vaidya Pharmacy paid ten lakh rupees (that is, one million rupees, or approximately twenty-five thousand dollars) for the license fee, half of which went to the Tropical Botanical Garden and Research Institute, and half to the Kani group. The TBGRI and the Kani group likewise receive an equal royalty on all sales. The product is named, *Jeevani*. It contains arogya pacha and two other medicinal plants, and is in the form of edible granules. Arya Vaidya Pharmacy reports that the bulk of its exports to southeast Asian and Western countries consists of Jeevani (lyppe).

In 1997, nine Kani individuals registered a trust -- the Kerala Kani Samudaya Kshema Trust ("Kerala Kani Community Agricultural Trust") -- which manages the Kani share of the license fee and royalties. The Trust is using the funds for health, education, and other welfare activities for the Kanis. The idea for the Trust came from Prof. Anil Gupta, founder and coordinator of the Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustained Technologies and Institutions, and of the Honeybee Network (an association of development-oriented organisations).

Arogya pacha is a shade-loving plant, and thus in the wild must live as an understory vegetation of trees. To assist the plant is also to assist the trees that protect and otherwise interact with the plants. Traditionally, the plant was found growing in the forest, where the tribal people harvested and cultivated the plants in sustainable ways. TBGRI has now trained dozens of tribal families to cultivate the plant in garden areas, as the Forest Department, quite reasonably, requires that tribal people confine their for-profit cultivating work to land specifically allocated for agricultural purposes. In the first year, each participating family earned about eight-thousand rupees from the sale of arogya pacha leaves to the Arya Vaidya Pharmacy. Assistance and expertise has also been provided by the Integrated Rural Development Project.

Adding Language to the Equation

Like the Kani people of Kerala, the Kani people of Tamil Nadu also work with medicinal plants. But in Tamil Nadu there may be an opportunity to combine language development with this plant work. Why might Tamil Nadu provide an ideal environment for such an experiment? An answer is that the people of Tamil Nadu have historically felt a devotion to their language to a degree unsurpassed by any other people in the world: some Tamilians even experience the Tamil language as a goddess (Ramaswamy). In Tamil culture, there is an extraordinary respect for, and fascination with language in general. Tamil Nadu has historically provided a very tolerant environment for diverse religions, ideologies, and languages. The Kanniyakumari district is especially multi-lingual, with English and Malayalam very prevalent, along with Sanskrit and Hindi.

The Kani people's dialect is called *Kani pasai* ("kaa-Ni paa-sai", "Kani spoken language"). On the Tamil Nadu side of the state border with Kerala, this dialect is composed primarily of Tamil; however, many Malayalam words are used, as before 1957 the Kanniyakumari district was largely a Malayalam-speaking area. Malayalam is a form of ancient Tamil that became mixed with Sanskrit. Now, through the political circumstance of the Kanniyakumari district having been brought into the modern Tamil-speaking realm, Tamilians have the opportunity to embrace the forest language of the Kani people living in Tamil Nadu, Malayalam words and all, as a respected variant of Tamil. However, the language development processes discussed in this paper would not be done in a spirit of language chauvinism, but rather in a spirit of celebrating language diversity.

There are many variants of the Tamil language: the ancient and modern written versions; and the spoken versions which vary from place to place in Tamil Nadu, Sri Lanka, and elsewhere. In the Kanniyakumari district, Kani pasai is a variant of Tamil featuring innumerable words, terms, expressions, sayings, etc., that reflect the forest environment in which it has been developing for tens of thousands of years. This living forest Tamil is an interesting complement to the ancient written court-based sen-Tamil ("chaste-Tamil") of the Sangam Age, which has been preserved for us in literature such as poetry and epics.

The Kani's forest dialect of Tamil should be treasured, documented, and nurtured. Just as biodiversity is healthy for landscapes, preventing deforestation and desertification, so cultural diversity is valuable in human societies. As the Tamil language enters the Age of Cyberspace, let Her enrich Herself with knowledge and experience from the forest. One never knows when varied points of view and modes of perception might help a people to cope with new experiences and challenges.

As Dr. Pushpangadan has learned first-hand, "Kanis view themselves as part of the ecosystem... They have developed a symbiotic association with nature and natural resources... Understanding this knowledge and integrating the same into the modern scientific paradigm could profitably be utilized in bioprospecting for drugs and other forest-based products, with concern for management and conservation of forest-based genetic resources" (Pushpangadan).

The Kani people's worldview and knowledge system are largely stored in, conceptualized in terms of, and expressed through, their language. This is so regarding both the aspects of the language that are used unconsciously -- including ways in which sentences are constructed and other matters of grammar, and everyday references and associations -- and also those aspects that are used consciously. Consciously-used language elements include sayings, expressions, proverbs, stories, and songs which are spoken, chanted, and sung, in both informal and ceremonial contexts, as people collect, cultivate, process, and administer plant medicines. Cultivating these linguistic cultural resources alongside the botanical resources could increase the benefit to both resources. On the other hand, if the dialect would disappear, so would much of the worldview that provides the foundation for the Kani people's knowledge of, and relationship with the plants, and this could lead to the de-vitalisation and eventual disappearance of the plant knowledge itself.

One central Kani story ("Kunja Kathai", "The Story of the Youngest Brother") tells of how a Kani woman, with assistance from a playful snake and mongoose, brought her dead

husband back to life with a medicinal plant mixture. Many Kani stories and songs tell, in poetic and mystical ways, of life-spirit-energy migrating between humans, plants, animals, and other elements of nature, such as the earth and rivers.

Today numerous Tamil leaders are searching for an approach that could give Tamil tourism a unique and immediately recognisable identity in the increasingly cluttered global tourism market. Kerala has its beautiful landscapes and waterways, its “God’s Own Country” slogan, and its nature-based health systems and spas. An identity for tourism in Tamil Nadu could be that the visiting of people and places would, to some degree, involve language: a language presentation and learning experience. Whatever location, craftspeople, historical landmark, etc., would be visited, a cultural presentation explaining aspects of the local language, and giving a small language lesson, could be given. This would make the visit a richer and more participatory one for tourists, enabling them, to some small degree, to really get inside the local culture, for such an approach would necessitate tourists to actually meet and talk with local people -- at least with the tour guide language presenters.

People tend to enjoy language learning when the lessons are easy to follow, and when they can control how much time is spent in the activity. Because spoken language is by its nature fleeting and difficult for the uninitiated to grasp, it is often helpful to use visual multimedia for such presentations. Presentations can feature letters and words that have been painted, drawn, or printed on large pieces of paper and cloth; when possible, computers and projectors can be used.

In instances in which tourism would involve tribal and natural destinations, Tamil Nadu could establish exposure to the local language or dialect as an inherent part of *eco-tourism*, which at present is a very vague term. To use the example of the present case: although the use of plants can largely be experienced by sight and by touch, the culture that supports and informs the plant use is largely verbal. Eco-tourism here would involve letting visitors see how medicinal plants are tended, and also exposing them to the verbal culture around the use of those plants.

Developing educational and entertaining language presentations and lessons for tourists (both Indian and foreign) is one way to not only preserve a traditional language, but also to help it grow and evolve. Different versions of such presentations and lessons could also be developed for Kani children, as a supplement to their formal Tamil and other language education. For as Kani children are spending more time in the classroom (in which standard Tamil is usually the medium of instruction) and less time in the forest, many are in danger of

not fully acquiring the tribal identity and knowledge that is their birthright. Perhaps in after-school programs, young Kani people could learn from community elders about the plants, and about the culture and history surrounding the plants. If this sort of thing does not occur, a very valuable cultural resource is in danger of disappearing with the passing of the present generation of elders, and this would be a great loss for the Kani people, the Indian people, and the people of the rest of the world.

Many Kani people trace their community's knowledge of medicinal plants back to the Hindu saint and holy man, Agasthiyar Muni, who is credited as the founder of Siddha, the Tamil system of medicine. They believe that their knowledge of arogya pacha is a gift from Agasthiyar, given to them to help them to survive in the forest; and indeed, some Kani men say they can live actively for over fifteen days eating only the seeds, fruits, and leaves of the plant. Agasthiyar is said to have lived in the southern Western Ghats approximately two thousand years ago.

Agasthiyar may very well have made numerous cultural contributions to the Kani people, but it should also be kept in mind that, according to most scholarship on the subject, the aboriginal tribal people of what is now called south India have been living in their present location for over fifty-thousand years. Perhaps, as the first wave of modern human beings, they came into being here, or perhaps they migrated from Africa and/or Australia, as, according to a great deal of archaeological evidence, there has been a related aboriginal tribal population from Africa to Oceania beginning at least fifty-thousand years ago (Cavilli-Sforza). In Tamil Nadu, while Kani pasai is a dialect of Tamil utilising many Malayalam words and some English words, it also features numerous words that do not seem to derive from any of these languages. There are also breathing sounds and guttural sounds in Kani pasai that cannot be represented using conventional verbal transcription techniques. It is possible that there are traces of African and/or Australian languages in the dialect: further comparative linguistic research is called for in regard to these possibilities.

Dravidian and Aryan cultures may have appeared in south India eight- and four-thousand years ago respectively -- although there is no academic or scientific consensus regarding these dates. Regardless of such details, however, the evidence seems overwhelming that aboriginal tribal people have lived in south India for over forty-thousand years before either Dravidian or Aryan cultures appeared in the area (Nagaraju; Rao). Thus, although it may at first glance seem not to confer a great deal of status on India's medicinal plant knowledge, it may be that tribal people were the first developers of it. Further, this knowledge may very well have been developed primarily by tribal grandmothers, as it tends to be mature women

who specialize in medicinal plant knowledge. This is because, in forest communities as elsewhere, it is often mature women who nurse and treat the young and the old, and who assist women and others with life-cycle health difficulties. As in so many other fields of human endeavour, it is only when medicinal plant use becomes professionalized that men tend to dominate the field. It is also often the case that newcomers with advanced technology (such as writing) often appropriate, take credit for, and profit from practices that illiterate people have been developing for ages.

While some small-scale forest gathering for personal and ceremonial use will hopefully always remain a part of their experience -- for such activity is essential to their culture and identity -- there has, of course, been a general shift among Kani people from forest gathering, to agricultural work on land set aside for this purpose. Nonetheless, many Kani people tend to blend the wild and the domesticated in their work with plants. When Kani people collect medicinal and edible vegetation in the wild, they typically leave some plants, avoid damaging roots, and utilise other sustaining cultivating techniques that ensure that the patch of plants will continue growing in that location. Conversely, many of their agricultural areas are very hilly and rocky, and for practical reasons they often replicate some wilderness conditions in these areas. (Please see the discussions below regarding “living” fences and houses, and manipulated interactions between different types of vegetation.)

Businesses ventures involving medicinal plant agriculture, entertainment and education, and tourism can be combined. The resulting employment and entrepreneurial opportunities could help to alleviate poverty in this and other equatorial regions, but it must also be asked: What is the meaning of the concept of poverty for people living in forest areas? Lack of access to modern medicine, education, and telecommunication, is part of poverty here, as elsewhere. But, in real terms, another very important cause of malnutrition and other material deprivation -- and of emotional and spiritual alienation -- among tribal people is the denial of access to forest areas, and/or the denial of the right to use these forest areas in sustainable ways for personal use, as members of these communities have been doing for tens of thousands of years. This denial of access and/or use sometimes comes about due to the forests being destroyed (for the sake of agriculture, cattle grazing, timber sales, etc.) or being restricted (as sometimes happens to some degree when wildlife sanctuaries are developed).

“Biodiversity is the biological capital of our planet, and it forms the foundation upon which human civilisation is built,” writes Dr. Pushpangadan. “The biodiversity and associated indigenous knowledge systems are two invaluable capital assets of a country like India.” It

has now been proved beyond a doubt that there are rational reasons for preserving forest wilderness: for one thing, wilderness prevents desertification in the entire region, increasing the water supply (forests' diverse vegetation holds water in the earth, and stimulates rainfall through its vegetation sending moisture upward). Tribal people, who traditionally have been parts of forest eco-systems, can play valuable roles in helping to maintain such systems today. (In ancient times, many of south India's tribal people practiced *shifting cultivation*, which involved burning the vegetation in an area after doing agricultural work there for some time, so as to enrich the soil. Now that the lifestyle is no longer nomadic and there is much less land available, there is general agreement that this agricultural technique is for the most part no longer appropriate or practical.)

The Govt. of India has clearly recognised that it must do all that it possibly can to preserve India's remaining forests, and a major way that this objective can be realized would be for the Government to engage more tribal people as forest watchers -- both as employees and as volunteers. No one can detect and monitor interlopers in the forest like local tribal people, in part because they are in the area twenty-four-hours-a-day and they tend to do a great deal of walking. Thus, for the benefit of all, tribal people should increasingly be actively included in India's forest and wildlife sanctuary projects as forest watchers, as well as as nature tour guides and cultural presenters.

A number of Indian scholars have already carried out excellent ethnographic research with Kani people of the Kanniyakumari district. Two of these scholars are on faculty at Nagarcoil's Scott Christian College: Dr. C. Kingston (Botany Dept.) and Dr. Y. Tharma Raj (Tamil Language Dept.). Dr. Kingston's dissertation identifies and describes three-hundred-and-thirty-seven plants used for medicinal purposes by local Kani people. A challenge that remains ahead is to put this research to practical use by helping, in partnership with interested Kani people, to develop plans of action involving the growing of medicinal plants, the documenting of traditional tribal culture, and the developing of these two activities for eco-tourism and for education of Kani children.

Such plans of action, especially once they would begin to be executed, could form a model for cultural, economic, and environmental development that could lead the world, just as the arogya pacha project has led the world in terms of a partnership between a tribal people and a national government to market a medicinal plant product. This nature/language eco-tourism model could be especially useful to people of other equatorial countries around the world, where there are many fascinating local languages and dialects, all of them intimately related to local environments. The world is in dire need of such leadership at this time, when

so much of the world's remaining forests are being destroyed, and so many forest-based cultures (including their languages) are dying out due to economic globalisation and the appeal of English and other major languages. Again, equatorial biodiversity should be linked with cultural (especially language) diversity, and exposure to local languages should become an intrinsic part of eco-tourism.

To successfully develop and begin to implement such a model would require the combined efforts of people in numerous fields, including scholars (including Kani students and teachers), leaders of academic institutions and of the Govt. of India (especially its Forest and Wildlife Departments), and many Kani community members. Two activities that might constitute part of such an effort might involve the making of a documentary video about the Kani people -- focusing on their knowledge and uses of plants, and on their forest language -- and the conducting of a college course entitled something like "Tribal Development", in which all of the above could be studied and discussed in the local and global contexts, and plans of action could be formulated and begun to be implemented.

Sixteen Kani Sayings

We have collected the following sayings from Kani people of Tamil Nadu's Kanniyakumari district.

Incidentally, although they may look similar when represented in English, the words, "Kanniyakumari" (which is often shortened to "Kanyakumari") and "Kani" have distinct meanings. "Kanniyakumari" ("கன்னியாகுமரி", "kan-ni-yaa--ku-ma-ri") means, "virgin girl", referring a local Goddess. On the other hand, one meaning of "Kani" ("காணி", "kaa-Ni") is "a certain measure" of land. This meaning was used by Bharathiyar, when he wrote the lyrics,

காணி நிலம் வேண்டும், பராசக்தி!
 kaa Ni ni lam veeN Dum pa raa sak thi
 a certain measure land I want Parashakti
 Please give me a piece of land, oh Goddess !

In the case of the Kani people, the word, "Kani", has also come to mean "people of the land". (A formal form of "Kani" is "காணிக் காரர்", "kaa-Nik-kaa-rar", "Kanikkaarar".)

Our presentation method for the sayings displays the material repeatedly in four different forms, each on its own line: 1) *Tamil letters (Kani pasai dialect)*; 2) *English sounds*; 3) *English words*; and 4) *English sentences (or other colloquial translation)*. Actually, the second line is not a direct phonetic (sound) representation of English, but rather follows the International Phonetic System.

In the version of the IPS being used here, 1) a long Tamil vowel is represented by a doubled Roman vowel letter; 2) a Tamil consonant that calls for the tongue to be directed up and back is represented by a capitalized Roman consonant letter; and 3) “ந்” is represented by “n̄”.

The sayings shown in Tamil letters are transcriptions from spoken language (the Kani pasai dialect), and thus do not always follow the same grammatical rules as standard written Tamil. We have done our best with the translating, but there may be some mistakes, and we apologize if this is the case. We have often only given one meaning for each saying, but in many cases there may be multiple possible meanings.

Traditionally, sayings such as these are often spoken during storytelling sessions, known as “கதையும் பாட்டும்து” (“ka-thai-yum paaT-Tum”, “story and song”), as a way of summarising and drawing attention to a point made in the story.

கருத்து விளக்கம்

ka rut tu vi Lak kam
deep meaning explanation
Explanations with deep meaning.

Tamil letters (Kani pasai dialect)

sounds__English (IPS)

words__English

sentence / colloquial__English

பழ மொழிகள்

pa LRZa mo LRZi haL
old languages
Traditional words.

Traditional words.

1

ஆனைக்கும் அடி சறுக்கும்.

aa naik kum a Di cha Ruk kum
elephants and all others strike and slip

Elephants and all others sometimes bang into things and loose their footing. (Even the great make mistakes.)

Language Note:

In Kani pasai, the Tamil sound, "sa", often becomes "cha" -- as in the word above, "சறுக்கும்".

2

நீ மீனு போல வளையாடுணது!

nii mii nu poo la vi Lai yaa Du Na thu
you fish like playing

You are playing like a fish! (First you are going one way, then another way.)

3

பக்கியின போல பறக்காத!

pak ki yi na poo la pa Rak kaa tha
bird like flying don't

Don't fly like a bird! (Haste makes waste.)

Language Note:

In Kani pasai, as given above, the pronunciation of a word's final syllable often sounds like "பறக்காத" ("pa-Rak-kaa-tha"), although standard written Tamil is "பறக்காதே" ("pa-Rak-kaa-thee").

4

நத்து போல காணாத!

nat thu poo la kaa Naa tha
owl like look don't

Don't look around like an owl!

Note:

Owls are often looking around for mice and other small animals to catch and eat.

5

பெண்ணே! மிளா போல சாடாத!

peN Nee! mi Laa poo la chaa Daa tha
girl! sambar (large deer) like jump don't

Girl! Don't jump like a sambar!

6

பன்னி போல ஒறங்காத!

pan ni poo la o Rang gaa tha
pig like sleep don't
Don't sleep like a pig! (Don't sleep anywhere, anytime; don't snore loudly.)

7

தள்ள பன்னி வேலி எடுக்கும் போல

thaL La pan ni vee li e Duk kum poo la
mother pig fence will break like

பிள்ள பன்னி வேலி எடுக்கும்.

piL La pan ni vee li e Duk kum
child pig fence will break

Mother pig breaks the fence; her child likewise breaks the fence. (Examples set by parents are often followed by their children.)

Note:

Kani people traditionally build fences using vegetation and stones to keep wild pigs from coming and eating their crops. In this saying, unruly and inconsiderate human behaviour is being said to be similar to the behaviour of the wild pigs who break into peoples' agricultural areas.

Language Note:

When saying this expression -- and also expression no. 9 -- a Kani person originally from Tirunelveli district said "புள்ள" ("puL-La"), rather than "பிள்ள" ("piL-La"). The dialect of the Kani people living in the Tirunelveli district may differ in a number of ways from the dialect of the Kani people living in the Kanniyakumari district.

8

நின்ன பிலி பிடிச்சிண்து!

nin na pi li pi Dich chi Na thu
to you tiger catch
The tiger will catch you! (Behave properly, or you will be punished.)

9

புத்தியுள்ள பிள்ளைக்கு பிச்சிபூ நெஞ்சா?

put thi yuL La piL Laik ku pich chi puu nenj jaa
good mind child to sesame flower is it poison

To a child with a good mind, will the flower of a sesame plant be poison?

Note:

This saying relates to a story in which a well-behaved and intelligent girl is not harmed by eating a flower that might be harmful to others. This saying -- like the previous one and many other Kani sayings -- implies that Nature gives rewards for good behaviour and gives punishment for bad behaviour.

Language Note:

A Tamil word for poison is "நஞ்சு" ("nanj-ju"). Here, as is often the case in Kani pasai, the pronunciation of the "அ" ("a") sound is nasalised to produce "எ" ("e"), and so "ந" ("na") becomes "நெ" ("ne"). [In this instance, the word's final vowel sound has also been changed, from "சு" ("ju") to "ச" ("ja"). And the final vowel

sound has become a long sound to express that this is a question, which is a practice followed in both Tamil and Kani pasai.]

10

வேலிக்கி விச்ச முள்ளு காலுக்கு.

vee lik ki vich cha muL Lu kaa luk ku
fence planting thorn to the leg

If one puts a thorny plant in a fence, one's own leg might be injured by those thorns. (One's actions meant for others may eventually affect oneself.)

Note :

Kani people often place living plants in the fences they make. These living fences are called “பச்ச வேலி” (“pac-cha vee-li”, “green fence”). Similarly, a traditional Kani house often uses a living tree as a pillar. Sometimes, a small house is built high up on a tree: this is called an “ஏறுமாடம்” (“ee-Ru--maa-Dam”, “ladder small-house”). In each of these cases, the living and dead vegetation are lashed together with vines, strips of bark, small plants, etc.

11

மிருக்கு வளந்தா தூணுக்கு ஒதவாது.

mi ruk ku va Lan thaa thuu Nuk ku o tha vaa thu
tree with thorns growing wood pillar not useful

A tree with thorns is not useful as a pillar. (One cannot depend on unfriendly people.)

12

பென விளர விளர நாரு விச்சிய.

pe na vi La ra vi La ra naa ru vich chi ya
palmyra tree growing growing rough become

The palmyra tree is growing and becoming rough. (And so is a certain person.)

13

வாழ்குருத்து போல வளந்தா போருமா?

vaa LRZa ku rut thu poo la va Lan thaa poo ru maa
banana leaf like growing is it enough

Is it enough to grow like a banana leaf? (A certain person is growing quickly but not strongly.)

14

மெரம் அறிஞ்சி கொடி விச்சணும்.

me ram a Rinj ji ko Di vich cha Num
tree know vine planting

Know the tree, before planting the vine. (One should know about the other person's character, before becoming close to that person.)

Note:

Kani culture includes a great deal of knowledge about how different trees, plants, vines, etc., interact with each other, and Kani people use this knowledge to assist vegetative growth, both in the forest and in agricultural areas.

15

பாக்கா இருந்தப்பம் மடியி விச்ச
 paak kaa i run thap pam ma Di yi vich cha
 areca nut young hip placing

இப்பம் மெரம் ஆயாச்சி.
 ip pam me ram aa yaach chi
 now tree become

The areca nut one carried on one's hip has now become a tree. (One can't take care of one's children once they are grown, to the degree that one could when they were small.)

16

பழத்தெல விழுப்பம் பச்செல சிரிச்சம்
 pa LRZat the la vi LRZup pam pach che la chi rich chuum
 old leaf will fall green leaf will laugh

பச்சலெக்கு நாளைக்கி இதெ கெதி.
 pach cha lek ku naa Laik ki i the ke thi
 to the green leaf tomorrow this situation

When an old leaf falls, a young leaf might laugh -- but one day the young leaf will also fall. (Young people should treat old people with compassion and respect.)

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