

OCCUPATIONAL REGISTERS IN SELECTED
OIL PALM ESTATES IN SELANGOR
AN EXAMINATION OF SOME LEXICAL ITEMS –
PART TWO

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1.1 Introduction

As mentioned in Part I,¹ Part II deals with the lexical usages peculiar to oil palm. The list of words and phrases contained in this article are only samples and they are not exhaustive. The lexical items² explained in this paper deal with the following

1. Workers in the oil palm estate
2. Oil palm field
3. Harvesting of oil palm fruits
4. Processing of oil palm fruits

2.0 Workers in the oil palm estate

Oil palm is a labour intensive crop. It requires harvesters for cutting down the oil palm fruit bunches. There are other types of workers such as weeders – who clear the unwanted weeds that grow in the oil palm field. There are also the general field workers whose work is mainly preparing new fields for planting, digging of drainage canals etc. These workers need people to supervise and oversee them. Hence the workers in the oil palm estate are made up of harvesters, weeders, general workers, supervisors and conductors.

The different types of workers are known as follows:

/kole veṭṭu āḷu/ ³)	)	'oil palm fruit harvester'
/paḷa veṭṭu āḷu/))	
/pū pōṭura āḷu/	)	'pollinator'
/pul veṭṭu āḷu/	)	'weeder'
/veḷikkāṭṭu āḷu/	)	'general field worker'

1. Part I appeared in Journal of Indian Studies, Jilid 3, 1985. PP.52 – 63.

2. The lexical items are in the phonemic form hence they are given within pairs of oblique lines. The words within inverted commas are the equivalents and not the meanings of the lexical items. The borrowed lexical items are foot noted accordingly.

3. /āḷu/ means person. This term is used with certain words/phrases to denote the person doing work related to the aspects indicated by the words/phrases.

The above types of workers work in groups of around 20. Each group has a supervisor to supervise them. The group of workers is also known as /kēñku/¹ 'gang'. The supervisor is referred to as /kañkāñi/. The one who supervises the harvesters is known as a /kole veṭṭuk kañkāñi/ or /pale veṭṭuk kañkāñi/. The pollinators are those who artificially pollinate the female oil palm flowers by spraying a mixture of pollens and talc by using a special pump. The /pū pōṭura kañkāñi/ supervises this assisted pollination group. The male pollens are referred to as /pūmās/ by the pollinators. /pūmās/ is a compound word consisting of a Tamil and a Malay word. /pū/ is a Tamil word meaning flower whereas /mas/ in Malay means gold. Thus the supervisor who supervises the pollination group is also known as /pūmās kañkāñi/.

The term /mandru/² is also used to refer to the overseer, although the term /kañkāñi/ is used more often. There are different types of /mandru/ such as,

/kole veṭṭu mandru/)	
	)	'supervisor of fruit harvesters'
/paḷa veṭṭu mandru/)	
/pū pōṭura mandru/	)	'supervisor of pollination groups'
/pul veṭṭu mandru/	)	'supervisor of weeders'
/veḷik kāṭṭu mandru/	)	'supervisor of general field workers'

Like the supervisors, different conductors have different jobs to perform. Conductors are known as /kirāñi/.³ The one who is in-charge of the field where harvesting of the fruit is done is known as,

/kole veṭṭu kirāñi/)	
or	)	'overseer in-charge of harvesting'
/paḷa veṭṭu kirāñi/)	

The conductors who are in-charge of the weeders and general field workers are known as

/pul veṭṭuk kirāñi/		'wedding conductor'
and		
/veḷikkaṭṭu kirāñi/		'field conductor'

1. English /gang/

2. Malay /mandur/ (supervisor)

3. Malay /kerani/ (clerk)

In the oil palm mill the workers work in three shifts of eight hours each. The conductor who oversees the workers in the mill is known as /siftu¹ kirāni/ 'oil palm mill conductor'. Incidentally, the term /kirāni/ is used with its original meaning of clerk when referring to the office clerk as

/ābīs kirāni/ 'office clerk'

2.1 The oil palm field

The oil palm is known as

/īcca maram/; /oil pām² maram/;

/klāppā³ pāli/ and /klāppā⁴ sāvi/

The oil palm sapling is known as /oil pām kanṇu/. The saplings are produced at the nursery known as /tavarane/. The oil palm is planted mostly on level land. The area that is planted with oil palm is referred to as /oil pām kāṭu/. The term /kāṭu/ refers to an area or field. There are many areas or fields in the estate. They are, divided into sections known as /namparu/. It is used with the Tamil ordinals to refer to different areas in the estate. The ordinals used depend on the number of areas in the estate.

/namparu/⁵ 'refers to an area planted with oil palm'

/onṇām namparu/ 'area No. 1'

/ārām namparu/ 'area No. 6'

/pattām namparu/ 'area No. 10'

Each /namparu/ is divided into sub-sections known as /tāskku/⁶. It is also known as /veṭṭu/ or /blōkku/⁷. /veṭṭu/ refers to an area consisting of approximately 300 oil palms.

1. English /shift/
2. English /oil palm/
3. Malay /kelapa pali/ (oil palm)
4. Malay /kelapa sawit/ (oil palm)
5. English /number/
6. English /task/
7. English /block/

There are many types of /veṭṭu/. They are as follows.

/are veṭṭu/	‘area consisting of about 150 oil palms’
/ōvar veṭṭu/	‘harvesting of unripe bunches’
/katti veṭṭu/	‘harvesting of oil palm bunches using a knife’
/kenti ¹ veṭṭu/	‘harvesting on someone else’s permanent /taskku/ or /blokku/’
/kole veṭṭu/)	‘harvesting of oil palm bunches’
)	
/paḷa veṭṭu/)	‘harvesting of oil palm bunches using a long handed chisel’
)	
/culōppu veṭṭu/	
/paṭi veṭṭu/	‘the pruning of oil palm fronds in such a way that the cut base of the fronds resemble the steps’
/paḷaiya veṭṭu/	‘area which consists of old fruit-yielding oil palm’
/putu veṭṭu/	‘area which consists of young fruit-yielding oil palm’
/nelacca veṭṭu/	‘area of oil palm that are permanently assigned to the harvesters’ (The harvesters are normally assigned about 8 permanent areas or blocks.

It could be noticed that the term /veṭṭu/ does not only refer to areas planted with oil palm but also to harvesting and pruning.

As mentioned earlier /kāṭu/ refers to an area or field. There are many types of /kāṭu/ in the oil palm estate. They are,

/oil pām kāṭu/	‘area planted with oil palm’
/elaṅkāṭu/	‘area consisting of young oil palms’
/kilattuk kāṭu/)	‘area consisting of old oil palms’
)	
/paḷaiya kāṭu/)	‘an empty plot of land surrounded by oil palms’
)	
/vayacuk kāṭu/)	
/coṭṭak kāṭu/	

1. Malay /ganti/ (to replace)

/cinna kāṭu/		'small oil palm field'
/pala veṭṭuk kāṭu/		'area where oil palm fruits are harvested'
/periya kāṭu/		'large oil palm field'
/putuk kāṭu/		'area consisting of oil palm saplings'
/pū veṭṭura kāṭu/		'area where male and female flowers are removed from palms that are less than 2½ years old'
/vēlakkāṭu/)	
	)	'place of work'
/tīmpār/ ¹)	
/veḷik kāṭu/		'open area or field where weeding is done'

As the palms grow the fronds close to the ground are cut. This is known as /kavāṭtu/. The oil palms begin to flower when they are 14 months old. Since the palms are still immature, the flowers, if they are allowed to remain and fruit, the fruits will be small and uneconomical. Hence castration of the immature palms has to be done at regular intervals. This process whereby all male and female flowers are continuously removed until the palms reach 2½ years is known as

/kāy aṭikkiratu/.

Soon after the planting of the saplings in the field, cover crop seeds are sown. There are 3 types of cover crops.

They are known as /kaccān² koṭi/ 'seed producing creeper'. The cover crops prevent soil erosion, retain moisture and help control other weeds and hardy plants.

The oil palms are afflicted mainly by a sickness known as /kālāñcīkku/ 'mushroom sickness'. This is caused by the growth of certain types of mushrooms at the base of the palm trunk.

2.2 Harvesting of oil palm fruits

The oil palm row is known as /nere/. The spiked fronds have to be cut to reach the fruit bunches. The cut fronds are then thrown in the avenues next to the harvesting paths known as /maṭṭenere/. The oil palm bunch is known as /kole/ there are many types of bunches such as,

1. Malay /timbang/ (to weigh)
2. Malay /kacang/ (nut)

/kāy kole/	'oil palm bunch with unripe fruits'
/kōcak ¹ kole/	'bunch stem minus the fruitlets'
/cinna kole/	'bunch with poor fruit setting'
/cakke kole/	'stem minus the fruitlets'
/pa ² lak kole/	'oil palm bunch with ripe fruits'
/periya kole/)	
)	'large bunch with good fruit setting'
/nalla kole/)	

The term /tāru/ is also used to refer to oil palm fruit bunch. The harvesters also use the following to refer to bunches with good and poor fruit setting. They are

/cakke tāru/	'bunch with poor fruit setting'.
/nalla tāru/	'large bunch with good fruit setting'.

The harvesting of the oil palm bunches which weigh an average of 20 kilos is done with the help of a sharp hooked knife tied to a light-bamboo pole. The sharp hooked knife tied to the bamboo pole is known as /alakku/. The /alakku/ is used to harvest the fruits in older trees which are normally tall. The act of harvesting bunches in tall trees is known as /kole veṭṭuratu/. In young palms which are shorter, harvesting is done with the use of a chisel known as /uḷi/. Chisel harvesting is called /kole kutturatu/. The cut bunches are carried to the roadside with the help of a bicycle where they are arranged in rows of fives or tens. The transporting of the oil palm bunch from the palms to the roadside is known as /kole aṭikkiratu/. The fruitlets or loose fruits which fall off the ripe oil palm bunch is known as /utirip paḷam/.

The harvesters work in pairs. The male does the harvesting while his partner (normally his wife) helps him to carry the bunches and collect the fruitlets. The harvesters are paid either according to the number of bunches /kole kaṇakku/ 'bunch count' or by tonnage /ṭannu kaṇakku/ 'tonnage'. The /kaṇakkap piḷḷe/ 'book-keeper' records the number of bunches or the weight of the fruits each team of harvesters have cut for the day and issues them with a chit known as /kole kaṇakku cūrā/ or /paḷa kaṇakku cūrā/² in which the number of bunches or the weight of the fruit is written.

1. Malay /kosong/ (empty)
2. Malay /surat/ (letter, document)

2.3 Processing of the oil palm fruits

The oil palm fruits are known as /oil pām pa_lam/ or /īccam pa_lam/. They are brought to the mill by trucks and are weighed. The weigh-bridge in the mill is referred to as /tīmpān/¹. In Malay the word is used as a verb whereas here it is used as a noun. The ramp where the trucks unload the fruits is known as /rēmu/². The oil palm fruits are dumped into the sterilizer cages known as /tōmpu/³ for 'cooking' the fruits by passing steam through it in a sterilizer. The process of cooking the fruits is referred to as /avikkīratu/. The unsteamed fruits are known as /pacce pa_lam/ whereas steamed fruits are called /venta pa_lam/ or /avicca pa_lam/. The steamed fruits are mashed by the /daijēstaru/⁴. The /tressaru/⁵ separates the fruitlets from the bunches. The stem minus the fruitlets known as /cakke kole/ is sent to the incinerator known as /cāmpa aṭuppu/. The mashed fruits are transported by buckets known as /elevēṭṭar bakket/⁶ to the /pressu/⁷ where the oil is extracted by processing the mashed fruits. The extracted oil called /kurūd āyil/ 'crude oil' normally has a lot of oily solids in it.

The oily solids are removed by a vibratory screen called /skriṇu/. The oil is then stored in the /kurud āyil ṭāṅki/⁸.

After the extraction of the crude oil, the pressed out fruit lumps which are known as cakes are sent to the cake breaker where the lumps are broken into smaller pieces. These are then sent to the /dīppri kāppar/⁹ where the fibre is separated from the nut. The fibre known as /paṅcu/ or /nāru/ is dried and sent to the /pāylar/¹⁰ to be used as fuel. The oil palm seed known as /oil pām koṭṭe/ is dried and sent to the /krēkkar/¹¹ for craking the shell. The /haidrōcaikkḷōṇ/¹² separates the shell from the kernel. The kernel known as /paruppu/ is used for extracting kernel oil known as /paruppu eṇṇe/.

1. Malay /timbang/ (to weigh)

2. English /ramp/

3. Malay /tong/ (drum)

4. English /digester/

5. English /thresher/

6. English /elevator bucket/

7. English /press/

8. English /crude oil tank/

9. English /depericarper/

10. English /boiler/

11. English /cracker/

12. English /hydrocyclone/

3.0 Conclusion

The lexical items concerning oil palm have a number of words of Malay origin. The reasons for the presence of such words are as follows:

Malay being the national language is the lingua franca of Malaysians. Hence most of the workers in the estate and all the informants who were interviewed for the collection of the data are Tamil – bazaar Malay bilinguals. Besides, the long period of contact between Malay and Tamil has resulted in the Tamils, especially the estate workers, borrowing and mixing Malay words and phrases in Tamil. This is a normal feature in any bilingual or trilingual situation. The influence of Malay is not only confined to the occupational registers in Tamil; it has a greater influence on the spoken discourse of the rural Tamils too.

As to the presence of English loan words, it is possible that since most of the terms used concerns the machinery in the oil palm mill, the workers do not have an option but to use them as they are, because it will easily be understood by all the workers in the mill, Tamil as well as non-Tamils alike.

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