

Common Names of Coconut (*Cocos nucifera* L. Arecaceae): Some Indications on Its Nativity.

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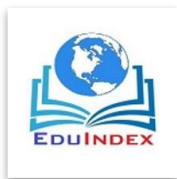
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Abstract: Common or vernacular names of plants are christened in vernacular language by common people over a long past. These names emerge out from the mist of times and are passed by word of mouth over generations. Such names are therefore enriched with the experiences, observations and wisdom of the concerned human society. These hidden secrets are hardly earthed by the scientific community, particularly by botanists, as they have perforce been forced to follow the rules of ICBN. Coconut palm is widely distributed and hence received a vast array of names worldwide. Moreover, its nativity has remained a subject of debate and object of many investigations they are hence analyzed etymologically in this communication. Its nativity, history and migration apart from the root words for coining names are high lightened. Some hard evidences have been also comparatively discussed to lend support while arriving at its nativity as Indo-Pacific *vis-a-vis* Asian.

Key Words: Common names, Coconut, *Cocos nucifera*, Etymology.

1. Introduction: Coining of common names for objects in human associations is a natural instinct. This activity of mankind obviously helps in their identification and future communications. However, this is not the only functions of common names. They can serve for many more functions which have been largely ignored by us. The subject matter is rendered more interesting and even intriguing when an object like coconut palm or fruit has migrated country to country, continent to continent touching the hearts of many human societies in the Old as well as New

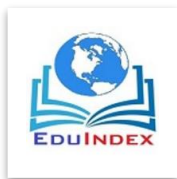


world. Origin of coconut in Asia or America is debatable. The author studied common names for coconut in Indian languages as well as languages of outside India. The nativity *vis-a-vis* origin of coconut has yet remained enigmatic.

If these names are analyzed on etymological ground, they may provide information of the respective native people and their language. The study of language and literature, called philology, can also add in our knowledge linking the common names with reasons. Etymological investigations particularly on common plant names have been, of late, carried out. (Patil, 1998, 2000, 2009; Patil and Patil, 2000, 2002; Pawar and Patil, 1999; Dhale and Patil, 2013; Patil and Tayade, 2014.) However, these attempts have not emphasized. Their studies on origin of plant species. This account is an attempt to shed more light on the nativity of coconut and origin of various common names.

2. Methodology Adapted: Common or vernacular names of coconut have been gathered from various literary sources *viz.*, Floras, monographs, ancient literature etc. The languages are particularly focused from the probable places of origin of coconut debated in past and also where coconut is thought introduced, domesticated or even brought for the purpose trade. These names are comparatively studied with particular emphasis on their meaning and migration with mankind. The common names of coconut have been provided language or country-wise in tabular forms. These tables are categorized as (i) Names in Indian language, (ii) Names in Sanskrit and (iii) Names in countries of its occurrence. Apart from etymological and philological evidence, hard evidences from other domains of plant science lending support to arrive at proper conclusions have been also borrowed.

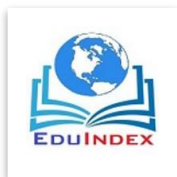
3. Enumeration: Common or vernacular names of coconut palm (Arecaceae) have been borrowed from various literature sources. They belong to various continents, countries and human societies. They are provided in tabular forms for the sake of precision. They are conveniently categorized as: names from worldwide (Table 1), Indian names (Table-2) and Sanskrit names



(Table-3). They are enlisted along with their country or language of origin and their literary sources.

Table: 1. Worldwide names for coconut (*Cocos nucifera* L.)

Sr.No	Language/Country	Name/s.
1.	Spanish	Coco, Cocode agua, Cocotero, Palmera de coco
2.	Brazil	Coco da India, Coco de Bahia
3.	French	Coco, Cocotier , Noix de coco
4.	Portuguese	Coqueiro, Coco da Bahia, Coco da India
5.	American Samoa	Niu
6.	Chinese	Ye zi, Ye shu, Ye-tsu
7.	Cambodia	d`ong
8.	Carribean	Cocos, cocospalm
9.	Cuba	Coco blanco, Coco indio
10.	Germany	Kokosnusspalme.
11.	Italy/Italian	Coco, Noce di coco Palma de coco
12.	Malaysia	Kelapa Nyior
13.	Netherlands	Kokopalm.
14.	Philippines	Niyog, Niy, Inioeg, Lubi
15.	Sweden	Kokopalm
16.	Thailand/thai	Maphrao on Maak muu
17.	Vietnam	Da

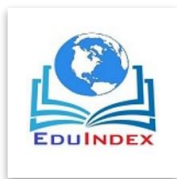


18.	Arabian/Arabic	Sharjatuth narejila, Gawzel hind, Nargil.
19.	Persian	Drhakat naregila, Nergil, Bading
20.	Bulgarian	Kokoc, Kokos.
21.	Finish	Kookospahlina, Kookospalme.
22.	Indonesia	Kelapa
23	Dutch	Coco, Cocos, Cocopalm
24	Bali	Niu, Niu
25	Korean	Kokoneos, Ka-ko-sa, Kokosa

Sources: Ahuja (2014) (ii) E-references 5to7.

Table: 2. Indian names for Coconut (*Cocos nucifera* L.)

Sr,No	Language	Names
1.	Bengali	Narakel, Narikel, Narcole , Nariyal, Daab
2.	Gujrathi	Naliyer,Naryal, Jhada, Nariyela
3.	Hindi	Nariyal, Narel
4.	Marathi	Naral, Shriphal, Mar, Mad, Mahad
5.	Konkani	Narla madde, Narlu.
6.	Kannada	Thenpinna, Kinshenna, Tengina, Tengina-chippy, Tengina-kayi, Tengina- gida, Tenginaoraru, Tenginay amne
7.	Telagu	Tenkayi chettu, Thengu, Kobbari Kaaya
8.	Tamil	Tengay, Tennai, Tenku, Thenga, Tenna,Tennan-chedi, Tenna-moram, Tengay, Taynga



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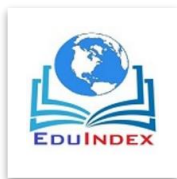


9.	Malayalam	Kalapa, Nyor, Tenna-maram, Kalambir, Ten, Thengu, Thenna, Tenga, Nur
10.	Manipuri	Yubi
11.	Urdu.	Nariyal
12.	Oriya.	Nadia, Nardiya
13.	Punjabi	Gola, Nariyal
14.	Kashmiri	Narjeel
15.	Assamse	Narikel, Phalkeshav

Sources: Ahuja (2014): E-reference 1 to 4: Watt, 1889-1893.

Table: 3. Sanskrit plant names with their meaning for coconut (*Cocos nucifera* L.)

Sr.No.	Names	Meaning
1.	Daakiikaatrya	From Southern Parts (of India.)
2.	Drohanira, Dridhaphala	Fruit firmly attached and yielding water
3.	Kaushikphala	Fruit of Kaushik, a name of Vishvamitra
4.	Kurchashiraska	With a brush-like tuft of leaves at the head
5.	Mahaphala	Great fruit
6.	Mruduphala	Sweet fruit
7.	Mangalya	Auspicious
8.	Payodhara	Bearing milk
9.	Phalamunda, Shirphala	Fruits borne in a clump at the crest
10.	Rasaphala	Full of juice

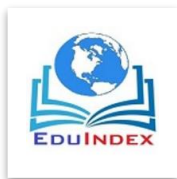


11.	Sadaphila	Always flowering
12.	Toyagarbha	With water in its womb
13.	Shubhanga	Sacred all over
14.	Trinaraja	King among plants
15.	Trayakshaphala/ Trayambakaphala	Bearing fruits with three eyes, like Lord Shiva
16.	Uccataru	Lofty tree
17.	Varaphala	Sacred fruits
18.	Rasayanataru	A tree yielding elixir

Sources: Krishnamurthy, K.H. (2010) Coconut or Narikela (*Cocos nucifera* Linn.) Namah 17
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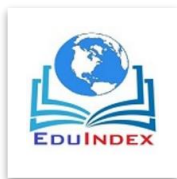
4. Discussion And Conclusions:

The common name Narikela in Sanskrit is thought originated from two words of South Asian origin viz. (i)Niyor (for oil) and Kolai (for nut) (*cf.* Iyengar, 1913; Acharya, 1998). The tamil word `nai` (for a semi solid Greasy fat) is considered to be derived from words like `ngai` and `niu` used for coconut oil in Polynesia and Nicobar islands (Chattopadhyaya,1970). It is further interesting to note the name `Niu` and (possibly) its torsioned forms of names are prevalent in the adjoining of Indo-pacific or Malay-Indonesian `Niu` (an American Samoah, South Pacific Ocean); Bali), Nyior (Malaysia), Nioyg (Philippines), Niy (Philippines), Niu (Bali) (*cf.*Table.1.) The root word `ten` is used for coconut in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada languages. `Ten` means south and `tenaki`-the nut fruit belonging to south. The word `tennaimaram-tengimar` would mean the tree belonging to south. Sri Lankan names for coconut are also derived from `ten` which also mean south (Swamy, 1973). All these derivations, therefore suggest that one has to look for the islands of South Pacific-Malaysia and Polynesia.



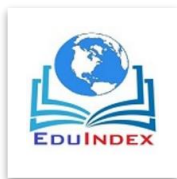
The common names for coconut in Polynesia and Malaysia are originated from 'niu', Likewise common names in Philippines and Guam for it are derived from 'nyiu' or 'Nyior' which are Malay words. This fact also indicates origin of coconut in the Malay-Indonesian region. There is another set of names based after root-word 'coco' most of these are prevalent in the American continent. It has slightly torsioned in the American countries or even European ones (*cf.*Table-1.)The present authors seek attention of the researcher to the origin of the words 'coco', 'cocos' or 'coconut'. It is said to be derived from 16th century Portuguese and Spanish word 'coco' meaning head or skull after three indentations on the coconut shell that resemble facial features. This epithet means monkey in reference to the markings on one end of the nut (Patil,2007; Ahuja *et.al*,2014) Garcia da Orta (1563) spelled the name for coconut as 'Coquo' and also stated that 'with reference to those three holes, gave it the name that Coco because it seems like the face an ape'. It appears pertinent now to explain

etymology of Sanskrit name *viz.*, 'Trayakshaphala' (fruit with three eyes) and 'Trayambakaphala' (Fruit bearing three eyes like Lord Shiva of Hindus, who is also called Trinetra (three-eyed) (*cf.*Table.3.). Sanskrit is obviously is an ancient language and therefore these names have originated or coined independently and appear not having any bearing of American name 'Coco' or 'cocos' explained above. The Sanskrit name obviously bears a stamp of originally and not borrowed from any other sources. Coconut is well known in south India since historic times. It was unknown in Vedic period to Vedic people of northern India. (Swamy,1973). Vedas do not mention the coconut (Mohan Ram,2016). The Sanskrit name 'Narikela' is said to be coined in the medieval period; so also the term 'Kalpaka'. This latter term migrated to Malaya and Malaysia in more recent times with the diffusion of Hindu culture and represents the same commodity (*cf.*Swamy, 1973.) In Sanskrit name for coconut 'Narikela' appears closely related to Arabic names 'Nargil' or 'Narajila'. Arabs has trade contacts since ancient times and hence they appear to have borrowed their name from Sanskrit or even other similar vernacular names in India (*cf.*Table1-2.).Other Arabic names *viz.*, 'Jauz al hind' and 'Gawz el hind' (nut of India) clearly suggest that coconut was sourced from India by Arabian



countries like China, Cambodia, Java, etc. have coined names differently. Some south Indian vernacular names from language like Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam appear to have a common origin with a root-word `Tenga` indicative of south region in Indo-pacific oceans. The coir obtained from coconut fruit is derived from Malabar word `Kayiru`. Coco da indica (Portuguese), Brazilian names, Coco indio (Cuba) also indicate source or origin coconut from Indian territory. Clemant *et al.* (2013) clearly concluded that there is no archaeological, ethnobotanical and linguistic evidence that supports a pre-Columbian origin of these Pacific coast Panama. Hence, American origin of coconut can be easily refused.

In a nutshell, the present author now would like seek attention to some facts and observations. These are: (i) Origins of Indian, Arabic and Sanskrit names for coconut are indicative of nativity *vis-a-vis* place origin as Indic-Pacific region. Sanskrit name referring three holes or indentation on one end of its shell (as explained above) also lends support to such viewpoint (ii) The oldest fossil of coconut from Deccan intertrappean, Mastrichian- Damian sediments is as a hard evidence so far its occurrence in an ancient period (*cf.* Srivastava and Srivastava, 2014). The other similar records by Singh *et.al*; 2016; Sahani, 1946; Kaul, 1951; Shukla *et.al* 2012; Tripathi *et.al*, 1999; Maloney, 1993; Dransfield *et.al*, 2005, 2008; Gauh, 2004; Gunell *et al*, 2003; Prasad *et al*, 2013; revealing richness fossil of coconut amply corroborate foregoing evidence produced by Srivastava and Srivastava (*loc.cit.*). The supporting geological reasons explained by Kaul (*loc.cit.*), Shukla *et al* (*loc.cit.*) are also warranting nativity of coconut palm. Daniels attempt (1996) explaining introduction of coconut in Mexico is worth notable. Conclusively, origin (nativity) of coconut should not be as thought mystery (Swamy, 1973) and one can be safely inclined aforesaid region as its homeland. Sea trade between Mediterranean and Pacific islands from the commencement of Christian era, the nuts could have become dispersed through this agency. Long-distance dispersal of coconut is secondary (Harries and Clement, 2014). The archeological and architecture of temples in India may be taken as an evidence for extensive domestication in India and appreciation for religious purpose by Hindu. A



sum of total evidences if assessed together, they appear well supportive to Indo-Pacific or Asian origin. Its greatest diversity in southern Asia also lends support to this standpoint.

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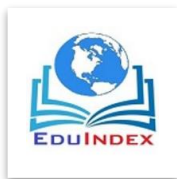
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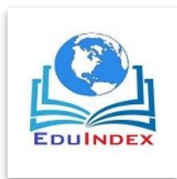
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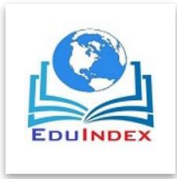
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user/plant.aspx.Latin](https://pfaf.org/user/plant.aspx.Latin) Name
Name = Cocos + nucifera.