

## Kudmali and its Impending Challenges

Kudmali (Ethnologue code ISO 639-3-kyw), pronounced *koɽma:li* and spelt ‘Kurmalı’ or ‘Kurumalı’ in the little literature available on it, like majority of the tribal languages of the Indian subcontinent is at W0 level in the developmental scale of writing (Ferguson, 1971) despite enjoying the status of second official language in the Indian state of Jharkhand along with 14 other tribal /indigenous languages. While documenting the lexicons of this language for a textbook based glossary, we found that its speech community is bilingual in either the state official language, or in the language of wider communication (LWC), or in another tribal language of the region, and that, not a single speaker of this language is a monolingual. For this study, we take Fasold’s (1984) proposition that societal bilingualism is a prerequisite for language shift as the hypothesis, and we find that many Kudmali proper nouns have become obsolete a couple of generations back, the verbs and adverbs are being replaced by the ones from the dominant languages of the Indo-Aryan (IA) group. Some proper nouns from Kudmali which have become extinct now are: *B<sup>h</sup>ogo*, *B<sup>h</sup>õđo*, *Ha:ga:*, *Mõhgi:* (names for human males) and, *D<sup>h</sup>ũ:đi:*, *Mmko*, *Bõđ<sup>h</sup>ni:*, *Bõđgi:* (names for human females). Similarly, the use of verb by today’s youth is such that the TAM marker from Kudmali is retained and conjugated with the root from an IA language. Consequently, the verbs from the vernacular are constantly inching towards moribundity. To check whether it is endangered or not we tested it on the EGIDS scale (Lewis & Simons, 2010) and found this language placed between 6b (threatened) and 7 (shifting), as:

- 1) Intergenerational transfer of the language is on a constant decline.
- 2) Communication and other transactions in the government offices do not take place in Kudmali.
- 3) Neither there are Kudmali medium schools, nor the print/electronic media is available in it.
- 4) In the schemes of the state government, it is unjustifiably placed as a regional language instead of a tribal language, and thereby, debarred from getting the attention that a tribal language should. There are no institutional measures from the government of Jharkhand for its development and furtherance.
- 5) Like the decadal phenomenon of Census of India is yet to include it as a language and come up with figures like number of speakers for it, a study about the linguistic diversity of Jharkhand (UNICEF & JTWRI, 2013) too failed to document the Kudmali language despite this joint study being the largest in terms of sample size.

In this study we also identify that Kudmali has at least three varieties – Dhalbhum Kudmali (DK), Manbhum Kudmali (MK) and Singhbhum Kudmali (SK); and that its non-standardisation poses a great level of challenge for the lexicographers particularly at the level of lemmatization, and overall documentation. The survey data has been collected through elicitation in classroom at the middle schools of Jharkhand and interviews of community members using a structured questionnaire.

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Key terms: Dhalbhum Kudmali, Manbhum Kudmali, Singhbhum Kudmali, Societal Bilingualism, Intergenerational Transfer and Endangerment.

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