SOME NOTES ON THE KUI DIALECT AS SPOKEN BY THE
KUṬṬIA KANDHS OF NORTH-EAST KORAPUT

by

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According to the *Linguistic Survey of India*, IV, p. 457, Kui has two principal dialects, “one eastern and spoken in Gumsur and the adjoining parts of Bengal (sic, i.e. Orissa), and one western spoken and spoken in Chinna Kimedi”. Gumsur and Chinna Kimedi are two tracts in the Ganjam district the former lying roughly in the eastern and the latter in the south-western part of it. Of these two dialects the Gumsur dialect has been considered to be the standard Kui, and has been mainly dealt with by scholars writing on the Kui language, namely J. P. Frye (1851), J. Smith (1876), L. Letchmajee (1902), J. E. Friend-Pereira (1909), and more recently W. Winfield (1928–29). In view of its more comprehensive nature and greater accuracy the work of Winfield may be considered to have superseded the earlier works to a large extent, and at the present time it is the standard work on the Kui language. The Linguistic Survey based its account of Standard Kui on the works of Smith and Letchmajee. Its specimen from the district Khondmals agrees with the standard dialect but shows a more marked influence of Oriya. For the Chinna Kimedi dialect it was content to repeat the brief notes of L. Letchmajee from which not much more emerges than that original *l* is retained instead of being changed to *d* (*itu “house” as opposed to *idu*, etc.). A specimen is also given of the dialect as spoken in Kalahandi which shows this feature, and also intervocalic *-c- (-cc-)* for the usual Kui *-s- (-ss-)* in places where this feature occurs also in the Kuṭṭiya dialect and in Kuvi (i.e. *māčērū “were”, sāčēnjū “he went* [macceru, saccenju]). Apart from these features there are no signs of any very great differences between these dialects and the standard, but nevertheless they should offer a fruitful field of investigation for further research.

The dialect of the Kuṭṭiya Kandhs of which a short account is given in the following pages, has so far not figured in any work on the Kui language. While touring the Koraput district in the winter of 1957–58 we decided to spend a short time investigating this dialect, partly on
account of the reputation the Kuṭṭiyas have of being the most primitive of the Kandhs, and partly because situated as they are near the boundary which separates the Kui and Kuvi languages they might possess a dialect intermediate between the one and the other.

Among the earliest references to the Kuṭṭiyas is the following by Campbell:1 “The inhabitants of the villages above named are a wild race known as Kootia Khonds, speaking a dialect of the Khond language that differs considerably from that spoken by the surrounding tribes.” It appears from his narrative that throughout his journey in the Kandh land in connection with the suppression of human sacrifice, he found the language more or less uniform everywhere except in this one area. He further writes: “In the Mootha of Ryabiji the Meriah prevails to a great extent, and the natives resemble in character and appearance those of Chinna Kimedy, but the dialect they speak is different and could with difficulty be understood by my interpreters” (p. 198).

Ryabiji and Chandrapur, two villages in the Bisam-Cuttack taluk of Koraput district, are located in the heart of the Kuṭṭiya tract, and it may be assumed that the dialect referred to by Campbell in this passage also refers to that of the Kuṭṭiya Kandhs. Verrier Elwin distinguishes the Kuṭṭiyas from the rest of the Kandhs, emphasizing their primitive character and their dependence still on axe cultivation.2

In order to make acquaintance with the Kuṭṭiya dialect we camped at Gudari some 25 miles north of Gunupur for a week. So far as we could gather the southern part of the Kuṭṭiya tract lies a few miles to the west of Gudari. The forest area inhabited by them extends from this place along the borders of Bisam-Cuttack and Gunupur taluks to Ryabiji and Chandrapur. We realised later that Chandrapur situated far more into the interior would have been a more suitable place for our work. As it was, we were dependent on such Kuṭṭiyas as we could contact in Gudari, but it was difficult to retain their services for any long period, so the material gathered was less extensive than it would have been under more favorable conditions.

Nevertheless we were able to ascertain the main features of the dialect which proved to be interesting, and which would deserve further study. It is a dialect of Kui, not Kuvi, but it possesses a number of characteristics of the latter language, and in general when it differs from the standard Kui it shows features which can be found in Kuvi. The most obvious of these

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1 Campbell (John), A personal Narrative of Thirteen Years Service among the Wild Tribes of Khondistan (1864), p. 228,
2 Elwin, V., Tribal Myths of Orissa. p. xliv.