

For the love of Konkani

*With many local dialects on the brink of extinction, **Joanna Lobo** meets the language conservationists who have taken it upon themselves to preserve Goa's official language*

Social networking site Orkut may have lost its lustre but digging through its remnants throws up a group called Aamchigele Bindaas Community (ABC). It was started to bring together Konkani-speaking people across the world. The group is now active on Facebook under the name Broad Minded Konkani (BMK), where people post queries about Konkani words and

phrases. "This group has helped members understand the language to a great extent," says Rajanikanth Shenoy Kudpi, founder and one of the administrators of the 160-member group. BMK has members from Saraswat, Catholic Christian, Bunt, Navayat Muslim, Jain and other communities, who speak Konkani. "Konkani as a language will definitely be rejuvenated if contemporaries and



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scholars put in consistent efforts," says Kudpi.

One such effort was a recent four-day workshop organised by the Centre for Internet and Society

(CIS) and Access to Knowledge (A2K) for the students of Goa University and St. Xavier's College. "We want to strengthen the Konkani Wikipedia," says Nitika

Tandon, program manager, CIS-A2K. Tandon quotes the Census Department of India 2001 figures that puts Konkani speakers at 24 lakh but adds that limited documentation is available online.

However, opinion is divided over the language's fate. "I don't think it's dying," says Roshan Pai, founder, savemylanguage.org. Pai started the website, a Konkani dictionary that documents the language spoken by the GSB community in and around Mangalore, in 2005. The site is dependent on volunteer contributions – people send in meanings of various words that are validated by others, who also put in different uses or meanings of the words. All the 17,528 words collected (belonging to GSB dialects in Mangalore, Goa, Kerala and Cochin) are stored online.

One of the major factors behind people talking about saving a language has to do with its links to culture. "It is the essence of life and contains a lot of information that has been passed on through the generations," says Gurudath Baliga, assistant director at World Konkani Centre, Mangalore. The centre works towards preserving the language by empowering the community that speaks it through tech-related grassroots activities, documenting folklore, appointing teachers in different schools and publishing books. The centre is now working on Konkanterver.com, an in, catholic Christian, ter script translator, and World Konkani Archives, that will serve as a repository for all data and text. With such initiatives, the language is in safe hands.

Ljoanna@dnaindia.net, @djoiii

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