

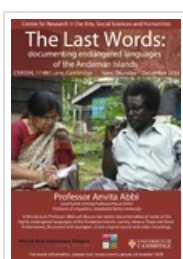


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# Lecture by Professor Anvita Abbi for the World Oral Literature Project Occasional Lecture Series



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## Description

.pdf file

## Abstract

The latest research by geneticists indicates that the indigenous inhabitants of the Andaman Islands are the descendants of early Paleolithic colonizers of South East Asia. The languages of these colonizers are important repositories of our shared human history and civilization. This talk will discuss recent attempts at documenting some highly endangered languages of the Andaman Islands, namely Jarawa, Onge and Great Andamanese. This Leverhulme lecture will share the exceptional experiences of compiling a multilingual and multiscriptal interactive dictionary of the present Great Andamanese language. The ethno-semantic and ornithological account of the local birds and their names in the language that feature in the dictionary and in the recent publication of the book 'Birds of Great Andamanese' in great part reveals the various ecological and archaeological signatures of the original communities that maintained close ties with their environments. Languages are witnesses to the diverse and varying ways in which human cognitive faculties deal with the world, so the study of the language of the present Great Andamanese and the recent compilation of a dictionary open windows to a world long past. As a result of the richness of the information thus gleaned, we have been allowed a unique insight into the world views of the speakers of this unique language which is in danger of disappearing from the face of this earth. The talk will include examples of rare original sound and video recordings of the native speakers of this dying language. Anvita Abbi is Professor of Linguistics at the Centre for Linguistics, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. During her work on minority languages of the Indian sub-

continent she has carried out first-hand field research on the six language families of India. She has published in the areas of areal typology, language documentation, structures of tribal languages, language policy and education, and analysis of ethno-linguistic aspects of language use. Her most significant recent work has been on the highly threatened languages spoken in the Andaman Islands, especially the languages of the Great Andamanese which she has documented.

## Keywords

endangered, language, Andaman

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