



Voices from the Lost Horizon

Stories and Songs of the Great Andamanese

Anvita Abbi

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- It has QR codes which can be scanned to gain access to rare documentations: audio-visuals of Great Andamanese songs and tales

"It is fortunate that a scholar with Professor Abbi's tenacity, as well as her scientific credentials, was available and willing to conduct this work... The volume is a superb introduction for the layperson to the wonderful world that Professor Abbi has opened up for us." – Bernard Comrie, Santa Barbara, California.

"For two decades now, Abbi has marshalled the full intellectual and strategic weight of her training, disciplinary expertise and socio-cultural capital to document, preserve and share with the world the voices, songs, stories and laughter of the Great Andamanese." – Mark Turin, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

The Andaman Islands — Great Andaman, Little Andaman, and North Sentinel Islands have been home for milleniums to four tribes: the Great Andamanese, Onge, Jarawa, and Sentinelese. Their languages are known by the same name as that of the tribes. 'Great Andamanese' is a generic term representing ten languages among a family of languages that were once spoken by ten different tribes living in the north, south, and middle of the Great Andaman Islands. These languages were mutually intelligible like a link in a chain.

However, today, Great Andamanese is a moribund language of the only-surviving pre-Neolithic tribe, breathing its last breath. When a language is on the verge of extinction, its history, culture, ecological base, knowledge of the biodiversity, ethno-linguistic practices, and the identity of its community — everything is endangered. This is what prompted Prof. Anvita Abbi to conduct a research study to give life to the lost oral heritage of the vanishing world of the Great Andamanese.

Voices from the Lost Horizon is a collection of a number of folk tales and songs of the Great Andamanese. These stories and songs represent the first-ever collection rendered to the Prof. Abbi and her team by the Great Andamanese people in local settings. The compilation comes with audio and video recordings of the stories and songs to retain the originality and orality of the narratives.

Professor Anvita Abbi is a distinguished researcher on minority languages and perhaps the only one in the Indian subcontinent who has done first-hand field study on all the six language families from the Himalayas to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

During her studies in 2003–2004, she identified a new language family of India — the Great Andamanese, which was corroborated in 2005 by population geneticists. Her pioneering work was recognized by the Government of India and she was awarded the Padma Shri in 2013. In 2015, she received the Kenneth Hale Award, most prestigious in the field of linguistics, for her outstanding contribution to the documentation and description of Indian languages, from the Linguistic Society of America, where she was also elected as an honorary member.

Prof. Abbi taught linguistics at the Jawaharlal Nehru University for 38 years and was the President of the Linguistic Society of India, and has been invited as a visiting professor and researcher at prestigious institutions in the USA, Europe, Canada, and Australia. She served long as an expert from the UNESCO on issues concerning languages. She has 22 books to her credit, including the *Dictionary of the Great Andamanese Language: English-Great Andamanese-Hindi* (2011) and *A Grammar of the Great Andamanese Language: An Ethnolinguistic Study* (2013).
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