



# DLA

## NEWS

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Website: [www.ijdl.org](http://www.ijdl.org)

E-mail: [dravling@md5.vsnl.net.in](mailto:dravling@md5.vsnl.net.in); [ijdlisdl@gmail.com](mailto:ijdlisdl@gmail.com)

APRIL 2010

A MONTHLY OF DRAVIDIAN LINGUISTICS ASSOCIATION OF INDIA

## 38th ALL INDIA CONFERENCE OF DRAVIDIAN LINGUISTS

17-19 June 2010

Final Announcement sent. Please ensure your accommodation.

- Prof. V.I. Subramoniam Memorial at ISDL Complex is being completed.
- Linguists will pay homage to Prof. V.I. Subramoniam, the Founder of DLA, IJDL and ISDL.
- About 200 Indian linguists and a few foreigners will meet in a three-day Conference at ISDL Complex, Thiruvananthapuram.
- A full-size portrait of Professor V.I. Subramoniam will be unveiled at the inaugural function.
- Dr. B.B. Rajapurohit, Former Professor of Linguistics, CILL and President of the DLA will deliver the Presidential Address.
- Prof. S.V. Shanmugam, Former Professor of Linguistics, Annamalai University will deliver the *Prof. V.I. Subramoniam Memorial Lecture*.
- Prof. P.S. Subrahmanyam, Former Professor of Linguistics, Annamalai University will deliver the *Nagamma Reddy Memorial Lecture*.
- Awards and prizes will be announced before the conference.
- ISDL Governing Council Meeting takes place on 16th June 2010 at 3 p.m.
- IJDL Annual Meeting is on 16th June 2010 at 5 p.m.
- DLA General Body meets on 17th June 2010 at 5 p.m.
- Books published by ISDL during the year will be released.
- A Book Exhibition will be arranged.

## ANDAMANESE TRIBES, LANGUAGES DIE

Two unique languages disappear with death of last speakers

When Boro died on Strait Island last November, Boa lost a friend. The world lost a language. Last week, Boa also died. Another language died with her. The death of these last surviving speakers of two Great Andamanese languages, Khora and Bo, has resulted in the extermination of their unique tribes on the islands.

"There are just 50 Great Andamanese left", says Anvita Abbi, a professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University who has undertaken a project to document the languages of these tribes. "Now we only have Jeru and Sare speakers in the group."

Originally, the Great Andamanese were a group of 10 tribes with a total population of 5,000 when the British colonised the Andaman Islands.

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Over the years, most were killed or died of the diseases brought by settlers. When the tsunami hit the islands in 2004, 80-year-old Boa was still strong enough to climb a tree. But she was shattered by the death of her friend, Boro, a frail introvert with curling white hair, last year.

"When Boro died, Boa told me she felt very lonely", says Dr. Abbi. "Already Boa used to lament that no one else shared her mother's language. She would sing her songs in Bo, but no one else could understand her ... No one else could help her translate them for me", she added.

Dr. Abbi was unable to get a full grasp of the Bo and Khora languages with the inputs of just one speaker. However, she and her team have compiled a dictionary of 2,500 words in Great Andamanese, a mixture of all four languages - Bo, Khora, Sare and Jeru.

The trilingual, tri-scriptal book could help not just linguists but ecologists as well, as many of the words are the names of plants, birds and fishes. "For example, one of the words is *ain*. Boa told me of these small bushes which grow by the seashore ... She said that when *ain* leaves are crushed and put in water, it intoxicates the fish which float up, making them easier to catch", says Dr. Abbi.

Subsequent experiments on the west coast of the Andamans showed that Boa's recollections were correct, although the bushes were later destroyed by the tsunami. "It's a storehouse of indigenous languages for environmentalists", Dr. Abbi adds.

Survival International director Stephen Curry says that the death of Boa and the extinction of the Bo language should spur action to save the remaining tribes. "A unique part of human society is now just a memory. Boa's loss is a bleak reminder that we must not allow this to happen to the other tribes of the Andaman Islands", he says.

If outsiders helped wipe out the Great Andamanese, they are also helping to record their voices. Dr. Abbi's dictionary project includes an audio CD. "If you click on a word or phrase, you can hear Boa's voice saying it ... You can hear her songs."

There are songs of celebration and of mourning, of the rain and the sea, of hunting and dancing - all in a language now dead. Is anyone listening?

[Courtesy: **The Hindu**, 5th February 2010]

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## PURANANURU TRANSLATION - Section from the Introduction

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[I have completed the final draft of the translation of Purananuru that I had to take up at the direction of the late

Prof. V.I. Subramoniam. I depended heavily on Prof. Gloria Sundaramathy for explaining many nuances, and for going through the drafts, item by item. Of course, the responsibility for errors that still remain is my own. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Prof. Nachimuthu who went through the draft of the "Introduction" and advised several improvements, some of which I have accepted. I also thank Prof. Indra Manuel, whom I have mentioned more fully in what follows here. This is an extract from section 7 of the Introduction; I have retained the paragraph numbering for ease of reference. I hope that its publication in 'DLA News' may invite comments from scholars, for which I shall be most grateful.]

7.3. *Orality & Authorship*: Hart has concluded that the songs in *Purananuru* were written, composed pieces, masquerading as if they were orally recited (cf., "... The text is often too complex to have been extemporized - the chief requirement for oral poetry - and that it must therefore have been written down as an imitation of truly oral poetry" (p. xxiii). He tries to follow the criteria laid down by Parry and Lord in the study of Yugoslav bardic compositions, and of the *Odyssey*, and other European models, and finds that though *Purananuru* too contains formulaic components both of theme and description, "nonetheless, fewer formulas are found in the *Purananuru* than in many oral texts such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, and the *Mahabharata*" (p. xxiv). He further finds that the poems do not conform to Lord's requirement that each line should end a thought, and verbs at the start of a composition that ends with an object or subject several lines later. He concludes that the poems "must have been" written by "literate" poets who consciously imitated the oral works of illiterate Panans and Kinaiyans, thus producing not "oral poetry" but "poetry that contains oral elements". He believes that several compositions, e.g., *Auvayar's*, were "careful imitations" of the oral poetry. He emphasizes that the "great didactic poems 182 through 195 could scarcely have been modeled directly on the utterances of the low-caste (*sic!*) performers". Hart urges no reason, nor is there any, why learned poets should in the first place seek to imitate the "illiterate Panans and Kinaiyans", who, according to him, bore the stigma of being "low caste".

7.4. Apart from the overwhelming evidence that Panans and Kinaiyans could interdine with and be entertained by the wives of the kings themselves (e.g., *Puram 395*), one of the great didactic poems, viz., 183, clearly indicates that learning and worth, not birth, decided the placement of an individual in the hierarchy of honour. It is possible, but by no means established that some Panar were illiterate. It is also possible that some poets like *Auvayar* had risen in the social hierarchy because of their excellence as bards rather than because they were born as Panar in humble circumstances. The only reason why scholar-poets, like

Mutukannan Cattamar, who was aware of the (then "modern") Pythagorean speculations that the Earth was a globe, and of the Hippalus Wind (Puram 30), should seek to adopt the bardic style of oral composition and recitation should have been that that style had great prestige and social acceptance. It was popular with kings and soldiers, and could be sung during the festivals, and to accompany dances. The bards were wise and learned with varied experience. Their genius could condense highly meaningful messages with a great economy of expression. Kapilar became an outstanding "imitator" of the bardic style because he could import references to multifarious fables and myths into his compositions, so loading them with intriguing allusions. He could at the same time instil the highest degree of emotional intensity into his shorter songs. Auvwayar too excelled in the lyrical sweetness of her recited songs, and their suitability as dancing tunes. It is abundantly clear that the bardic tradition was preferred to the literary tradition during the period of the *Purananuru*. It was only much later that the tables were turned in favour of the literary tradition.

7.5.1. Hart's main argument is that the compositions are too complex in grammatical structure to be extempore work. He cites Puram 19 as an extreme example of the complexity of such compositions. This Puram uses a multitude of images; each set of lines completes a set of them as a component, as is usual in bardic compositions. But when the sequence of images has to be put together in a grammatically correct (American) English sentence, the correspondence between lines and ideas is inevitably complex. If we are prepared to sacrifice the requirements of English, then Tamil falls into logical sequences of ideas expressed in the images, heaped profusely one over the other, without undue distortion of the then "correct" Tamil grammatical structures.

7.5.2. In a later contribution ("Syntax and Perspective in Tamil and Sanskrit Classical Poetry" in Chevillard & Wisden (Eds.): *South Indian Horizons: Felicitation Volume for Francois Gros*, Institut Francais de Pondichery, Pondicherry 2004, pp. 219-227), Hart has refrained from re-asserting his view that the composition was not oral poetry. He realized that the units of these poems are not closely related by syntax - they tend to hang, and the relationship between them slowly takes shape in the *hearer's mind* (*italics added*). He concludes:

"It is, I would suggest, the nature of the Tamil language, and the fluid way of perceiving the world that it enhances, that gives old Tamil literature its most remarkable feature - the ability to describe and stimulate a complexity of vision and experience that is constantly shifting".

In other words, the complexity of syntax that he had earlier cited as reason that the compositions were not oral, could have been due to the nature of the Tamil language, and the resultant "complexity of vision and experience", instead. It was the *hearer*, and not the reader, who adjudicated on its merits.

7.6. The meter used is *akaval*. Kailasapathy (*op.cit.*) speculates that it was so named because of the connection with those who officiated and got the afflux in the Muruka cult, and provides a clue to the early connexions between ritual singing or chanting of soothsayers and bardic composition.

7.7. The Bards had an important historic function to discharge - the Tamilization of Tamilakam! They traversed the length and breadth of the region, braving the dangers of dense evergreen forests and mountains, of dry lands and scrub jungles, and of swamps and seashores. They intermingled with people of diverse cultures - hill tribes, surviving by hunting and gathering, shifting cultivators living in harmony with the wild life, wet land farmers, fishermen, salt-manufacturers, sailors and traders, and fighters and chieftains. To all of them, they wanted to convey the message that life was ephemeral, and that only gift-giving led to great and permanent glory. In the process, they extolled the mighty and celebrated military prowess. Unlike the Brahmins who imitated them because of the prospects of great gifts of land and gold, they were careless about their wealth, giving away as liberally as they got. Their prestige was so great that the Brahmins, though *pulavar* (= learned poets), found it expedient to imitate them.

7.7.1. Kailasapathy (*op.cit.*, Ch. III) distinguishes the following classification of itinerant singers and entertainers, apparently in the order of honour accorded to them: Pānar, Porunar, Kūttar, Viraḷi, Koṭiyar, Vayiriyar, Kannular, Akavunar, Pulavar. Such a classification is not available in the *Purananuru*, and Kailasapathy's references in this regard are mostly to later works.

7.7.2. In Chapter (IV), he has detailed the "Techniques of Oral Verse-making" adopted by the bards. Formulae (*viz.*, the repetition of words and phrases, or parts of poems, more or less unchanged, in several compositions) played a prominent role in them. Epithets could be yoked to different nouns, provided they are metrically fitting. Some of the formulae extended to four "feet" of recitational material, which appears to be an extension of "half-line stock epithets", the first three together forming the qualifying epithet, while the last one comprises the object. The scheme admitted improvisation and substitution, so that the bard need not mechanically repeat memorized formulae, but may re-create his poetic language. A formula

could be inserted anywhere in a song, e.g., in the last 'foot' of a line and flowing into the subsequent lines. The result was a style that became stereotyped, traditional and conventional.

"The formulaic nature of the literary language is thus both the cause and the effect of the evolution of standard Tamil... In other words, the evolution of standard Tamil was an inevitable concomitant of bardic literature." (pp. 183-184)

7.7.3. Kailasapathy's overall conclusion is worth quoting:

"The foregoing discussion makes it quite clear that the bards ... possessed an adequate language that could cope with their literary and technical requirements. At the same time, what is striking is the evolved and standardized nature of that language. It may be regarded as certain that this was not a spoken language" (of the common people). (p. 182)

"By way of conclusion, it may be suggested that it was this uniformity and consistence of the bardic material so systematically handled by the bards that enabled grammarians like Tolkappiyar to systematize the poems, analyze them and reduce them to rule... In so doing, they became both creations and creators of their age." (p. 186)

7.8. *Emeneau's analysis of Toda songs*: In his classic work on Toda Songs, Emeneau M.B. (*Toda Songs*, Oxford, 1971, all citations mainly from the Introduction, pp. xiii - xviii), emphasizes the essentials of the verbal structure of these songs, viz., the formulaic technique as manifested in the three-syllable song units, from which are built the longer syntactic structures of the sentence and the paired parallel units and sentences (p. xv). Several of the songs in the collection were intended for choral singing in groups. This is not a feature of *Purananuru*, where most of them are exclusively sung by a single bard, with (except in a few cases) no distinctive refrain. The most important difference between the Toda songs and those in *Purananuru* is that the former represent the outpourings of an egalitarian society, where the songs were sung at communal ceremonies. The songs in *Purananuru* are the creations of a segmented hierarchical society, where a few were lords and masters, with largesse to distribute from the proceeds of violence and loot, contrasted with needy persons whose main technique of livelihood was composing and singing songs of praise to the former and their way of living, so that they (the latter) could benefit from the largesse.

7.9. *The Minstrels of the Gond chieftain families*: The Pardhans are a community some of whom have Marathi as mother tongue, but most of whom "have Gondi as mother tongue though they are bilingual and know Hindi" (Singh, K.S.,

1994:981). According to myth, when the great god Lingal established the ancestors of the Gonds, they needed a helper to perform sacred rites, and to serve as go-between in search of brides. Hirasuka, the son of the Gond's Guru, was appointed as the first Pardhan. Eventually, a Pardhan family came to be attached to each clan or sub-clan of the Gonds. The proportion of Pardhans to Gonds is on an average one to twenty or even thirty families, and it thus is the nature of their symbiotic relationship that one Pardhan family is associated with numerous Gond families. The Pardhans lived on the bounty of the Gonds. The main function of the Pardhan was to keep the genealogies of his patron families and sing them aloud at functions. He also assisted the clan priest in the performance of some important rituals. They were the guardians of the tribal tradition, and it was mainly through them that Gond mythology and Gond religion had been kept alive and intact. But the symbiosis started to decay, decades ago, with the economic empowerment of the Pardhans, and their access to alternative means of livelihood. (Material mainly from Menon, T.M. (Ed.), 1997, *The Encyclopaedia of Dravidian Tribes*, Vol. III, ISDL publication, Thiruvananthapuram, several sections.)

7.9.1. The Pardhans played a role somewhat similar to the bards of the *Purananuru*. But the compositions of the latter transcended the merely ritualistic requirements that the former had to discharge. The Bards of the Sangam Age though dependent on the largesse of their patrons, had the confidence in their ability to go beyond mere praise and narrative reporting. Genealogies are mentioned in a few compositions, but seldom traced back systematically. Evidently, the *Purananuru* songs were not part of any ritual performance, though, in some, ritual performances including Sanskritic *yōga*, are mentioned. They sang the praises of a few, but inspired many, and their compositions were therefore preserved in memory until, centuries later, they were redacted and edited by admiring scholars of a later age. So powerful was the "Myth of the Heroic Age" they projected that, as pointed out by Kailasapathy (op.cit.: p. 93), "... the socio-political, linguistic, provincial, nationalistic and separatist movements among the Tamils in modern times hark back in one way or another to this glorious age". Hart goes even further and asserted:

"The LTTE (Tamil Tigers) of Sri Lanka, a guerrilla group fighting for a separate Tamil homeland, have taken some of their practices and ideology from the *Purananuru*. One example is the funeral for young men who have fallen in fighting, at which the mother is urged to express joy and is not supposed to cry. In addition, many of the phrases and terms they use to glorify war are drawn directly from this anthology." [note No. 7 at p. xxxiii].

[The LTTE had subsequently been decisively defeated, in 2009, with the death of its leader Pirabakaran.]

*[I am grateful to Prof. Indra Manuel for having gone through this section of the Introduction, and suggested many improvements. But she had also suggested that the observations regarding LTTE may be reconsidered. I have retained it, as I have only quoted verbatim two eminent scholars, viz. Kailasapathy as well as Hart, on an aspect of the lasting influence of the literature concerned. She also suggested that the term "Hero" may be reconsidered, and "Warrior" used instead. But many of the "heroes" in several poems are NOT warriors; hence I felt that the change would be inappropriate. The word "Hero", including its gender alternative, would be generally applicable to any category about whom the song may be addressed. The responsibility for the views expressed remains my own.]*

T. Madhava Menon

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### NATIONAL SEMINAR ON TAMIL HISTORICAL GRAMMAR

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A National Seminar on *Tamil Historical Grammar* was organized by the Department of Linguistics, Madurai Kamaraj University in collaboration with Central Institute of Classical Tamil, Chennai.

The inaugural meeting was held on 3rd March 2010 at 11 a.m. at Sethupathi Arangu in the School of Tamil Studies. Dr. A. Athithan, Co-ordinator, School of Tamil Studies welcomed the gathering and spoke on the objectives of the seminar.

In the presidential address, Dr. M. Thirumalai, Controller of Examinations, Madurai Kamaraj University emphasized the need of grammatical studies for the description of modern grammatical works.

Dr. S.V. Subramanian, former Director, International Institute of Tamil Studies, Chennai in his inaugural address spoke on the ancient grammatical works of Tamil and how the study of historical grammar can help to understand the history of Tamil language.

Dr. K. Umaraj, Co-ordinator of the programme, proposed a vote of thanks.

A. Athithan

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### ALUMNI ASSOCIATION OF LINGUISTS

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The Alumni Association of the Department of Linguistics, University of Kerala (ADLUK) was formally inaugurated on 3rd April 2010 by Dr. V.R. Prabodhachandran Nayar, Professor and Head of the Department of

Linguistics (Retd.), in a function held at the Department of Linguistics, University Campus, Karyavattom, Thiruvananthapuram.

Former professors of the Department of Linguistics - Dr. V.R. Prabodhachandran Nayar, Dr. G.K. Panikkar, Dr. E.V.N. Namboodhiri, Dr. B. Gopinathan Nair and Dr. Rajendran were honoured in the meeting. Dr. Rose Mary, Head of the Department of Linguistics delivered the Presidential address in which she emphasized the need of special effort to popularise linguistic studies in colleges and universities. Dr. Naduvattom Gopalakrishnan, Secretary of ADLUK presented the working report. The felicitations that followed admired the irredeemable effort of Dr. V.I. Subramoniam for the uplift of linguistic studies in South Indian languages. Dr. Shanavas, Staff Secretary welcomed the gathering and Dr. Kunjamma, former Head of the Department of Linguistics proposed a vote of thanks. The alumni association meeting came to an end with the pleasant get-together of linguists with their consorts and variety entertainments.

Naduvattom Gopalakrishnan

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### SOME ISDL PUBLICATIONS

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**VANJIKĀNDAM: K. Ravindran**

[2008, PB, Demy 1/8, pp. x + 205, Rs. 200/- (US\$ 40/-)]

The book is divided into fifteen chapters which include details of the Sangam period, archaeological sites, Roman trade, Vanchi, Chenkuttuvan, expedition to the Himalayas, Kannaki the Goddess, and People and Social Life. The people of Chera country had developed a civilization along with the Pandyas and Cholas of Tamīlakam. Evidences from archaeological and numismatic sources may prove or supplement the literary sources.

**OLD BENGALI SYNTAX: Subhadrakumar Sen**

[2007, PB, pp. 12 + 126, Rs. 80/- (US\$ 16/-)]

This monograph deals with the Syntax of two ancient texts, *Carya* and *Doha*. The author has restricted his study to Old Bengali which covers only one-fourth of a single codex. The codex was discovered by Mr. Hariprasad Sastri in Nepal. Textual variations and other alternations like the ones made by Sukumar Sen are examined and accepted. The wide reading of the author especially in Indo-Aryan languages and the German language has enriched his statements on Old Bengali in several places. Following the introduction, the old Bengali syntax is discussed in six chapters, viz. Gender, Number, Concord and Case Endings, Syntax of Cases, Post Positions, Adjective and Pronoun, Verb and Sentence Structure and ends with a bibliography.

**OBITUARY**  
**K. VAMADEVAN**

Mr. K. Vamadevan (88), former Chief Judicial Magistrate of District Court, Thiruvananthapuram passed away on 20th March 2010 at his residence at Pettah, Thiruvananthapuram. He served as legal adviser to the DLA and ISDL for a long time till his demise. He is survived by his wife Dr. K. Retnamma, former Professor of Malayalam and Retired Deputy Director of Collegiate Education, Government of Kerala, two daughters Prof. Rajalekshmi, S.N. College, Chempazhanthi, Dr. Nandini, S.A.T. Hospital and 4 grandchildren.



Prof. Retnamma is one of the Vice-Presidents of the DLA. The Vamadevans took active part in all the activities of DLA and its sister organizations from their very inception. We deeply mourn his demise; our heartfelt condolences to the sorrowing members of his bereaved family.

*B. Gopinathan Nair*

**ADDITIONS TO THE ISDL LIBRARY**

Alexis Leon. 2009. *Fundamentals of Information Technology*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.

Aravind Adiga. 2008. *The White Tiger*. Uttar Pradesh: Harper Collins.

Aswathy Thirunal Gowri Lakshmi. 2010. *Glimpses of Kerala Culture*. New Delhi: Konark Publishers.

David Lodge, Nigelwood. 2010. *Modern Criticism and Theory*. New Delhi: Pearson.

Edna Fernandes. 2008. *The Last Jews of Kerala*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.

Gectha Nagaraj. 2008. *English Language Teaching*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman.

Innes, C.L. 2007. *Post Colonial Literatures in English*. Cambridge University Press.

Kalpna Bardhan. 2010. *Oxford India Anthology of Bengali Literature*, 2 Volumes. Oxford University Press.

Krishna Iyer, V.R. 2009. *Wandering in Many Worlds*. New Delhi: Pearson.

Malathy J. Shendge. 2010. *Unsealing the Indus Script*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers.

Mohit K. Ray. 2007. *Literature in English*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers.

Narayanan Desai. 2009. *My Life is My Message*, 4 Volumes. New Delhi: Orient Longman.

Pramod K. Nayar. 2010. *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory*. New Delhi: Pearson.

Rajan Gurukkal. 2010. *Social Formation of Early South India*. Oxford University Press.

Rashmi Sharma. 2009. *Local Government in India*. New Delhi: Manohar.

Russel Bernad, R. 2008. *Research Methods in Anthropology*. Raipur: Rawat.

Sudhakara Rao, M. & Raghavendra Reddy, B. *Encyclopaedia of South India*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications.

Syamal Das. 2009. *Essays in Linguistics*. New Delhi: Akansha.

His Highness Uthradam Thirunal Marthanda Varma. 2010. *Travancore: The Footprints of Destiny*. New Delhi: Konark Publishers.

Wendy Doniger. 2009. *The Hindus: An Alternative History*. New Delhi: Penguin.

**Contributions to  
Prof. V.I. Subramoniam Endowment Fund**

12.03.10	Prof. K. Rangan	Rs. 5,000.00
<b>TOTAL AS OF LAST MONTH</b>		<b>Rs. 2,59,247.00</b>
<b>CURRENT TOTAL (Including FD)</b>		<b>Rs. 2,64,247.00</b>

**DLA News Endowment Fund**

<b>TOTAL AS OF LAST MONTH</b>	<b>Rs. 1,72,160.10</b>
<b>CURRENT TOTAL</b>	<b>Rs. 1,72,160.10</b>