

Prof. Anvita Abbi

(Padma Shri)

Prof. Anvita Abbi, the **Director** of the Centre for Oral and Tribal Literature, Sahitya Akademi (National Academy of Letters), New Delhi was formerly at the Centre for Linguistics, School of Language, Literature and Culture studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi (till July 2014).

Professor Abbi's work on tribal languages and other minority languages of South Asia has been exemplary and is widely recognized in the world. Her pioneering work on the highly endangered languages of the Andaman Islands has been received with great acclaim in India and abroad. She identified a new language family of India, namely Great Andamanese, which was subsequently verified by the population genetic studies. This discovery has helped in understanding the peopling of Asia and Oceania.

- Professor Anvita Abbi has devoted decades of work to documenting the minority languages of all six language families of India extending from the Himalayas to the Andaman Islands, evaluating their status, and training students in fieldwork and language documentation. As a teacher of 40 years in JNU she developed and taught various courses in Language Sciences at post graduate level. She has supervised 25 Ph.D. and 36 M.Phil. and directed more than 12 national and international projects during her tenure at JNU.
- Born on January 9, 1949, Prof. Abbi received her Bachelor of Arts in Economics in 1968, and Master of Arts in Linguistics in 1970 from the University of Delhi. She received her Ph.D. degree in Linguistics in 1974 from Cornell University, USA. She taught at Cornell University and Kansas State University, USA before returning to India in 1976 when she joined Jawaharlal Nehru University.
- She has widely published in the areas of areal typology, language documentation, structures of tribal and minority languages, language policy and education, and analysis of ethno-linguistic aspects of language use. She has authored, co-authored and edited 18 books, in addition to over seventy articles in the areas of Linguistics published in national and international research journals. She has helped in creating interest and disseminating knowledge about Indian linguistic diversity in USA and Europe through TV interviews on BBC and CNN as well as giving lectures at major universities including London, Cambridge, Manchester, Edinburgh, Paris, Vancouver, Germany, Switzerland and Washington.

- She has recently been awarded the most prestigious award in Linguistics, the *Kenneth Hale Award* (2015) conferred by the Linguistic Society of America for outstanding lifetime contributions to the description and documentation of languages of India, *Padma Shri* (2013) by the President of India for her pioneering work on endangered languages of India, **Leverhulme Professor** at SOAS, University of London (March – December 2011) for her contribution to languages of South Asia, **Visiting Scientist** position at the Max Planck Institute of Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig, Germany (2000, 2003, 2010 and 2014), Visiting Professor at the Cairns Institute, James Cook University, Australia (2010-2011) and was nominated **Distinguished Fellow of 2001** at the Institute for Advanced Study, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia for her seminal contribution to the languages of South Asia. She received the *Rashtriya Lokbhasha Samman 2003* award for her contribution towards the tribal languages of India.
- She is on the panel of advisory board of several national organizations such as Sahitya Akademi (National Academy of Letters), UGC, CIIL (MHRD), and President's Nominee to the Indira Gandhi National Tribal University at Amarkantak, M.P., as well as advisor to international organizations including Terralingua and UNESCO on language issues. At present, she holds the position of the **President** of the Linguistic Society of India and **Director** of the Centre for Oral and Tribal Literature at Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi.