



CENTRAL INSTITUTE OF INDIAN LANGUAGES

53rd Foundation Day Lecture Series

Lecture 26

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Language Endangerment of Tibeto-Burman languages in Western Himalayas



Suhnu Ram Sharma

Suhnu Ram Sharma retired as Professor of Tibeto-Burman Linguistics from Deccan College, Pune, (1980-2006). He served in Anthropological Survey of India for six years (1974-80) and conducted field work in Arunachal Pradesh, Andamans and Central India on several Tribal languages. He was Senior Fellow twice at the Himalayan languages Project; twice Gonda Fellow at the International Institute of Asian Studies, Leiden and once Fellow at Central Institute of Indian Languages. He has been a member of the Editorial Board of the journal 'Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area', (1987-2010) and now on the Advisory Board of the 'Himalayan Linguistics' Journal. He has published 3 books and 32 research articles mainly on Tibeto-Burman languages of western Himalayas. Currently he is working on the Manchad Grammar— a TB language in Western Himalayas.

This lecture will provide an overview of the diverse linguistic landscape of North-Western Himalayas focusing on the endangerments of Tibeto-Burman (TB) languages. About 20 TB languages/dialects are spoken by less than ten thousand speakers each along the Indo-Tibet borders in the states of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and the union territory, Ladakh. In this region the Pahari group of Indo-Aryan languages dominate numerically. Hindi and English are the languages of education, administration and mass media. Thus, the Tibeto-Burman languages are reduced to home and hearth leading to language endangerment. I will discuss the state of the Tibeto-Burman languages of this region in the light of the definition of endangered languages provided by UNESCO, Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered languages.

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