

Endangered Status of Andaman Languages

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Abstract

This article attempts to explore the threat to linguistic and cultural identity of the tribal people of the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal. According to DNA studies the Andamanese tribes might have migrated from Africa about 70000 years ago. The Andamanese tribes consist of Onge, Jarawa, Sentinalese and Great Andamanese. From the establishment of the Andaman Homes in 1863 to their rehabilitation in Strait Island in 1970, The Andamanese were in contact with various communities including tribes from Chota Nagpur plateau. . From the very beginning of the Penal Settlement in 1858, Hindustani was the lingua franca of the islands as they learnt it from the convicts from mainland India and Burma. The original language of these tribes gathered a lot of inclusions and modifications with time This had an adverse effect on indigenous languages spoken by the tribes of Andaman. This paper throws showcases the cultural isolation, the social and behavioural changes, the threat to the cultural and linguistic identity that has taken place in these societies of the indigenous tribes after coming into contact with various communities and the attempts made by the Andaman and Nicobar Administration in preserving the Andaman languages.

KEYWORDS : cultural isolation, acculturation, anthropology, linguistic identity, language and dialect, rehabilitation, tribal languages, bilingual primers etc.

Introduction

The Jarawas :The tribes of the Andaman Islands – the Jarawa, Great Andamanese, Onge and Sentinelese – are believed to have lived in their Indian Ocean home for up to 55,000 years. The Jarawas have now dwindled to 400 to 1000 people. Many Jarawas came in contact with the tribal people of Chotanagpur plateau in Jharkhand who came to Andaman after independence to work as labourers. As part of civilizing the Jarawa tribes many children of the Jarawa tribes have been attending schools in Port Blair. They have learnt to speak Hindi. It was believed that they did not survive the Tsunami in 2004. However all 250 members of the Jarawa tribes survived the tsunami by escaping inland. According to anthropologists their knowledge of the wind, sea and birds may have saved the indigenous tribes.(<https://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/jarawa>)

Jarawa : The Jarawatribeis apimitive tribe living in the South and Middle Andaman towards the western coast. In the Andamaneses language “Jarawa” means “ stranger”. (Dr. J Dwivedi 2015) They are described to be living in an economic stage of hunting and gathering. Culturally, they are supposed to have been living in the Old Stone Age Culture. (V.R. Raja Singh 2000).The first ever contact with the Jarawa of South Andamanese was established in 1989.The Jarawas are always armed with bows and arrows to hunt a game that may appear on the way. They live in a group and always move in a group.(V. Raja singh, 2000).In 1990 the local authorities revealed their

long-term 'master plan' to settle the Jarawa in two villages with an economy based on fishery, suggesting that hunting and gathering could be their 'sports'. The plan was so prescriptive it even detailed what style of clothes the Jarawa should wear. But in 2004, The Indian Government passed a policy that no attempt to integrate the Jarawas should be made as the Jarawas themselves have not expressed any desire to integrate into mainstream society. (<https://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/jarawa>)

They remain vulnerable to outside diseases to which they have little or no immunity. In 1999 and 2006, the Jarawa suffered outbreaks of measles – a disease that has wiped out many tribes worldwide following contact with outsiders. (<https://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/jarawa>)

According to some reports by Jarawa tribe members, some of the tribals have become unfortunate victims of all kinds of vices prevalent in modern society like smoking, drugs, sexual exploitation and poaching at the hands of Government officials, tourists, locals etc.

The Onges : The Onges are one of the five primitive tribes living in the jungles of Little Andaman Island. When the administration of independent India opened up the island agricultural production and settlement of non tribals, their population dwindled due to lack of land available for hunting and gathering. The Union Territory administration has settled them in two areas namely South Bay and Dubong Creek. (Dr. J Dwivedi, 2015) They continue to live in the reserved area and enjoy the facilities besides carrying out their economic activities. The present population in both the settlements is just 94. Ethnologists classify them as belonging to the Negrito stock of the Negroid human race on the basis of their anatomical and physiological characteristics. (V.R. raja Singh, 2000)

Great Andamanese: The Great Andamanese are a small community belonging to the Negrito group. The Great Andamanese – as today they are collectively known – were originally ten distinct tribes, including the Jeru, Bea, Bo, Khora and Pucikwar. Each had its own language, and numbered between 200 and 700 people. (<https://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/great-andamanese>)

Prior to the penal settlement in 1858, there were more than 5,000 to 8000 Great Andamanese living in the islands. But presently they are only 36 in number. (Raja Singh, Manoharan, Ranganatha, 1994) However, hundreds were killed in conflicts as they defended their territories from British invasion, and thousands more were wiped out in devastating epidemics of measles, influenza and syphilis, all introduced by the British. (<https://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/great-andamanese>)

Even though these tribals still go for hunting, they can cook food using spices, they eat rice dal, chapatti and other modern food materials. Their traditional food is fish, turtle, pork, tubers, monitor lizard, octopus, molluscs etc. (J. Dwivedi, 2015)

Sentinelese: The Sentinelese are the most isolated tribe in the world. They live on their own small forested island called North Sentinel, which is approximately the size of Manhattan. They continue to resist all contact with outsiders, attacking anyone who comes near. It is thought that the Sentinelese live in three small bands. From what can be seen from a distance, the Sentinelese islanders are clearly extremely healthy and thriving, in marked contrast to the Great Andamanese tribes to whom the British attempted to bring 'civilization'. The people who are seen on the shores of North

Sentinel look proud, strong and healthy and at any one time observers have noted many children and pregnant women. (<https://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/sentinelese>)

II. Cultural isolation of the Andaman tribes.

Among the Andamanese tribes, The Great Andamanese married outside their culture. Earlier their population was only 25 to 30. Today, they are only 36 in number. There are many illustrations to show that the Andamanese have been resisting attempts to forcefully merge into mainstream society. The Government has been providing health care to the tribals but the tribals prefer to stick to their own traditional medicine. The Andaman and Nicobar Government has provided with modern food like wheat flour, pulses, rice. But many tribals Onge and Jarawas prefer to stick to their traditional food like tubers and pork, monitor lizard, crabs, turtle octopus, molluscs etc.. They prefer to live the primitive life of hunters and gatherers in the forests and don't prefer to stay in the Government constructed modern houses.

Even though some tribes have been exposed to modern education, many tribes like the Jarawa tribes prefer to stick to their traditional naming patterns that is, once the children become adults their name is changed. Enme, a member of the Jarawa tribe changed his name to Teriyatahanu after becoming an adult.

The Great Andamanese tribes continue to preserve their traditional festivals. Though the Jarawa and the Sentinalese tribes don't wear clothes, the Great Andamanese wear a necklace of tender coconut or banana leaves during traditional festivals

III. Language spoken by the Andaman tribes

Onges speak Onge, Jarawas speak the Jarawa language, The language of the present-day Great Andamanese is a mixture of a number of Great Andamanese languages spoken by tribes such as Aka-Jeru, Aka-Cari, Aka-Khora, Aka-Bo and many more from the list of 10 tribes once lived in the mainland of the Andaman Islands known as the Great Andaman (Abbi, 2006a). Little is known about the languages spoken by Sentinalese. World renowned linguist Prof. Anvita Abbi, in her book "Dictionary of the Great Andamanese Language " English – Great Andamanese – Hindi ", has stated that the development of the Great Andamanese linguistic structures followed a completely different trajectory from the languages of agrarian and pastoral societies. This dictionary documents the present form of the language, a koinè, drawing its resources from four great Andamanese languages, two of which, Khora and Bo have recently become extinct. India represents five language families: Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Austroasiatic, Tibeto-Burman and Andamanese. The origin of Andamanese tribes and its relationship with Southeast population have been the subject of speculation for centuries. Latest research by genetists [Thangaraj, K. et al. Reconstructing the origin of Andaman Islanders. Science 308, 996] of complete mitochondrial DNA sequences from two out of three accessible tribes, i.e. Onges and Great Andamanese populations, revealed two deeply branching clades that share their most recent common ancestor in founder haplogroup M, with lineages spread among India, Africa, East Asia, New Guinea, and Australia. (Anvita Abbi, 2007)

Morphologically, the Onge language is agglutinative with three way grammatical numbers, that is singular, dual and plural as distinguishing features. Onge language consists of fourteen vowels and sixteen consonants. Their language shows considerable similarities with the language of the Jarawa tribes, so much so that the

two can be considered as cognates, as in they are said to have the same etymological origin.(Rajasingh, 2000)

Abbi (2009)^[9] lists the following lexical items for Onge, Jarawa, and Great Andamanese, showing that Onge and Great Andamanese are distinct language families sharing few lexical similarities. Source : Wikipedia

| English | <u>Onge</u> | <u>Jarawa</u> | <u>Great Andamanese</u> |
|-----------|-------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| boat | ɖaŋɛci | (cagiyapaɖa)-taŋ/daŋ | rowa |
| bow | iʝa | a:w | ko |
| child | icizɨ | icizə | tʰire |
| crows | wawa-le | wa:raw | pʰatka |
| dog | wə:me, uame | wɔm | ca:w |
| 1SG (I) | mi | mi | tʰu |
| 2SG (you) | ɲi | ɲi | ɲ |
| forehead | -ejale | -ejea | -beŋ |
| eye | -ejebo | -ejebo | -ulu |
| palm | -obanaŋ-ge | -obaŋna | -koro |
| knee | -ola-ge | -olak ~ -ola | -curok |

As is evident from the table, there are distinct similarities between Onge and Jarawa languages. After taking into account the lexicon and morpho-syntactic complexities of the three endangered languages of the Andaman Islands, such as Great Andamanese, Onge and Jarawa, provides (1) enough pieces of evidence that Great Andamanese is

an isolate which constitutes the sixth language family of India. It is very different from Onge and Jarawa genealogically and linguistically.(Anvita Abbi,2007)

Many Onge, Great Andamanese and Jarawa tribes have become victims of poaching by the Govt officials. Since Onges are not educated, they are not able to make use of the resources available to them by the Andaman and Nicobar Government. The tribals do not have written literature of their own. In order to equip them to produce literature in their own language, and make use of resources available in the cooperative societies, the Government of India in collaboration with Central Institute of Indian Languages,(CIIL)has prepared bilingual primers. The Indian Government, the Andaman and Nicobar Government, the Anthropological Survey of India had taken the expertise from CIIL to publish bilingual primers that is Onge – Hindi Bilingual, Andamanese – Hindi – Bilingual,(Figure 1)Onge – Hindi – English pictorial glossary,(Figure 2). CIIL has also published “ A Handbook of Jarawa Language “ , (Figure 3), in collaboration with the Tribal Welfare Department, Andaman and Nicobar administration, Port Blair.This handbook translates many sentences used in day to day conversation from Jarawa language to Hindi and English.(Figure 4) Through pictorial representations, the meanings of daily use utensils, weapons, huts, traditional food, mode of transport, costumes, routine hunting materials , practices exercises etc. are given in Hindi, English and the tribal language. (Figure 5). These bilingual primers have been very helpful in educating the tribals so that they can come out with a handbook of their own language, folk songs sung during tribal festivals, folk tales etc. before their language becomes completely extinct, since their number are fast depleting.

IV.Conclusion

Due to paucity of funds by the tribal Welfare Department, Andaman and Nicobar Administration, Port Blair, the process of educating the tribals through the primers was stopped. Several Andamanese tribal languages like Khora and Bo have already become extinct. This paper makes a clarion call to civilized people to contribute their might to uplift the economic, social and educational status of the tribes and help them bring out their own literature so that their culture and language is not lost after coming in contact with modern civilization.

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Andaman and Nicobar Project Primer Series - 2

**ANDAMANESE - HINDI BILINGUAL
PRIMER**

अण्डमानी भारती-1



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मानसगंगोत्री, मैसूर - 570 006

और

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अंडमान तथा निकोबार प्रशासन

पोर्ट ब्लेयर - 744 101

द्वारा निर्मित

Figure 2

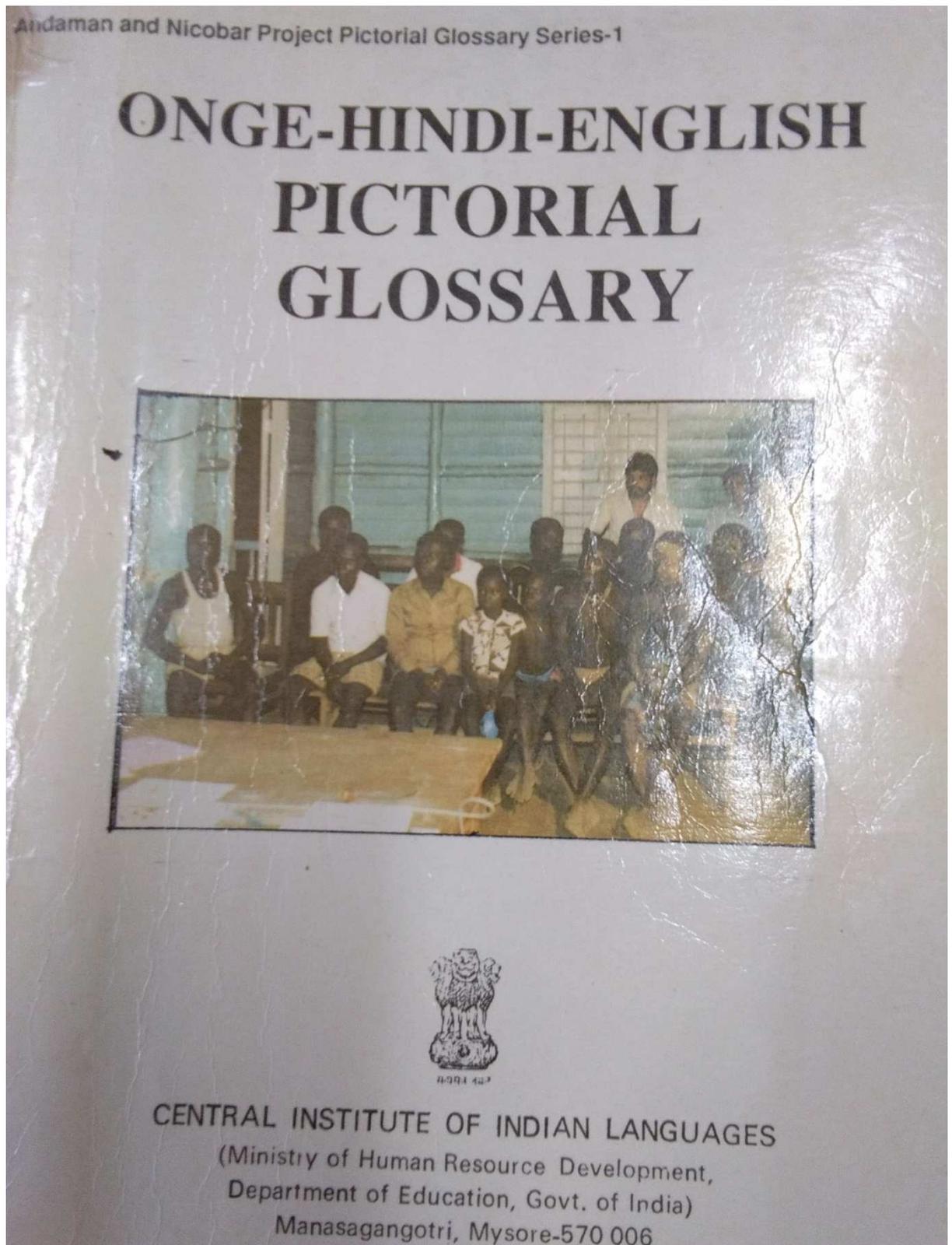


Figure 3

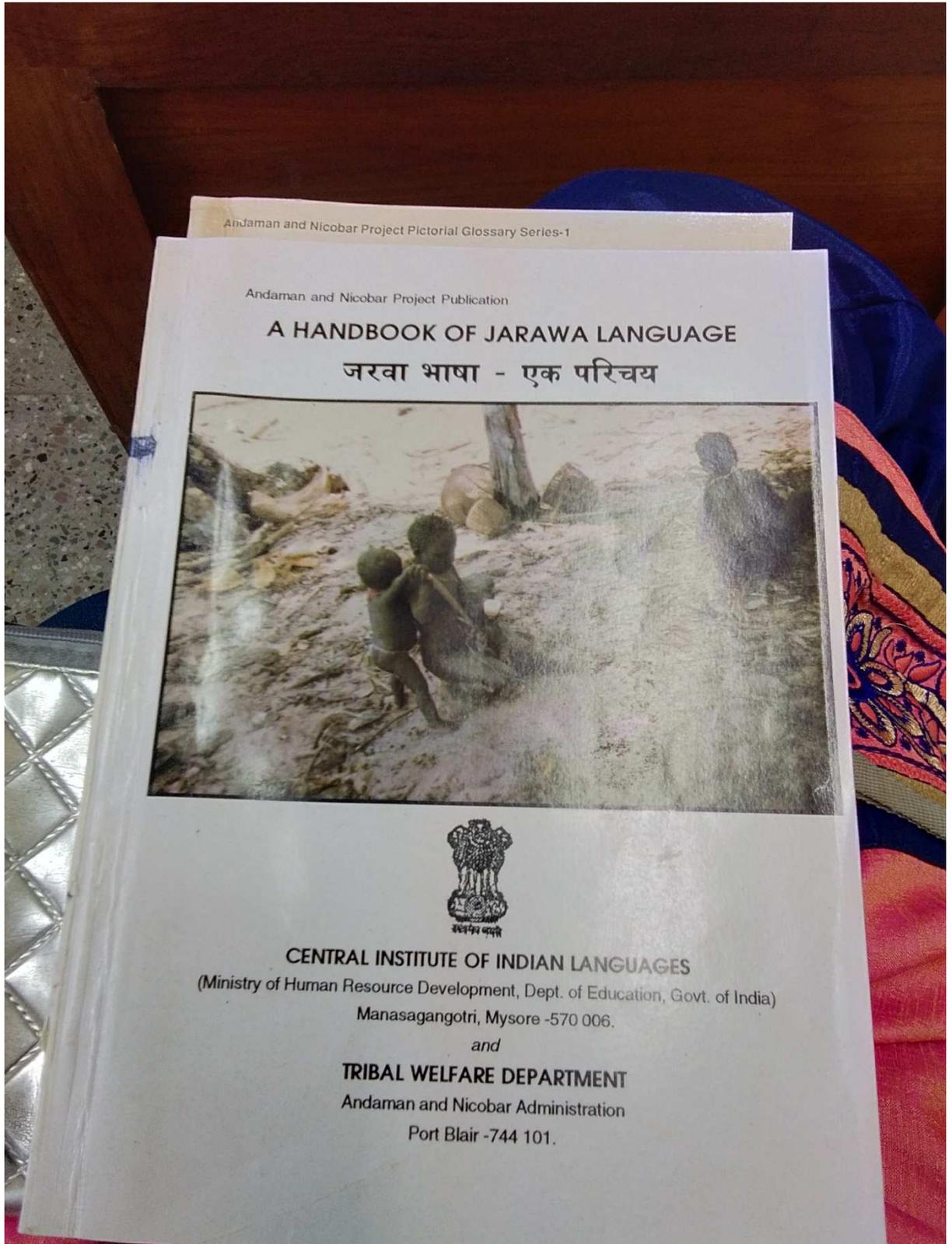


Figure 4 :Translation of sentences in Jarawa language

Would you tell your name ?
क्या तुम अपना नाम बताओगे ?

29. li aatiba ↑
लि आटिब ↑

Would you tell his / her / its name ?
क्या तुम उसका नाम बताओगे ?

The possible responses would be of in the forms as given in 30 and 31 respectively.

इन प्रश्नों के उत्तर में हम कह सकते हैं—

30. mi hwaamɔn
मि ह्वामन्
I am hwaamɔn.
मैं ह्वामन् हूँ ।

31. li aheya
लि अह्य
She is aheya.
वह अह्य है ।

Responses 30 and 31 will also be possible in their elliptical form without mi 'I' and li 'she' respectively.

30 और 31 में दिए गए उत्तरों को मि 'मैं' और लि 'वह' के बिना भी कहा जा सकता है ।

Figure 5 – Exercises for Practice

