BO: THE END OF AN ERA

Posted on February 4, 2010 by Eddie

Category: Language Vitality

The phrase 'the end of an era' is extremely overused. Even something as banal as a pop group splitting up can be called 'the end of an era'. But there are events which are so momentous that they truly should be described as the end of an era. Recently, the last speaker of the Bo language died, marking the end of a 70,000 year linguistic history.

When Boa Sr died, the Bo language died with her, though in a sense, the language actually died when the second last speaker died. Languages are a social phenomenon and you can't really have a language only spoken by one person any more than you can play tennis with only one player and one racquet.

But what does it matter that the Bo language has finally died out? Unless you are a specialist on the Andaman islands, you have probably never even heard of the language. A lot of people would say that it doesn't matter at all. I've even heard some Christians suggest that a language dying out is a good thing, because it means that there is one less language in need of Bible translation.

However, to my mind, the loss of a language is a tragedy. Each language is unique and gives us a distinct insight into human nature and culture. But even more so, each language and culture is able to express unique things about the nature and character of God. With the loss of Bo, the human race is diminished ever so slightly in its ability to talk about itself and about God. It's a shame.

Read more about Bo and listen to a short recording of the language here.