



ABS - CHENNAI CHAPTER

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DEPARTMENT OF TAMIL LANGUAGE, UNIVERSITY OF MADRAS

invite you to an illustrated lecture on

NATURE AND LANGUAGE

By

Eric Miller

**Venue: Auditorium, Marina campus, University of Madras
(Near University Guest House on the Beach Road), Chennai – 600 005**

Date: July 28, 2005 Thursday

Time: 6.30 p.m.

Programme

6.30 pm: Welcome – Dr. V Jayadevan, Professor & Head - Dept. of Tamil Language.

6.35p.m: Introduction – Ms. Premalatha Seshadri, ABS member, artist, poetess, writer.

6.40 pm: An illustrated talk – Mr. Eric Miller.

7.10 pm: Audience interaction.

7.25 pm: Vote of thanks – Dr. A.Amudhavalli, Secretary, ABS- Chennai Chapter.

7.30 pm: Refreshments.

8.00 pm: Evening concludes.

About the Speaker



Whether it is evolving storytelling to a scientific fine art, or living with a tribal population in southern Tamil Nadu, from New York to Chennai it has been a long and involved journey for Eric Miller. This native New Yorker has lived for almost five years in Tamil Nadu, over the past 16 years. His involvement has now led him to decide on settling permanently in Chennai.

Eric has taught at universities in New York City (Fordham U., St. John's U., and New York U.), courses such as *Storytelling*, *Folk Tale*, *Modern Short Story*, and *American Drama*.

Currently, he is a Ph.D. candidate in Folklore at the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, USA) whose research has drawn him into the heart of south India. The dissertation titled "South Indian Children's Songs-Chants-Dances-Games, Language Learning, and Videoconferencing" involved living for a year-and-a-half with Kani tribal people in a village in a mountain forest area in Kanyakumari district. The dissertation deals with how repetition in the songs-chants-dances-games helps to teach language.

In Tamil Nadu, Eric studies numerous forms of storytelling, including: 1) *Kathaiyum Pattum* (Story and Song) in villages; 2) *Villupattu* (Bow Song), especially as performed by Subbu Arumugam; and 3) *Katha Kalakshepam* (also known as, *Harikatha*), a form of religious and ethical discourse.

In fact Eric is planning an International Storytelling Institute with others from around the world!

Eric has facilitated numerous videoconferences for the purposes of education and cultural exchange, and is a scholar-designer-entrepreneur regarding videoconferencing.

About the topic

Sayings such as "He is leaving no stone unturned," and "He is turning over a new leaf," are examples of how language contains expressions, sayings, proverbs, and stories that compare people's behavior and character with other elements of nature, especially plants and animals.

The lecture will include discussion of many such expressions-sayings-idioms, proverbs, and stories -- in Tamil and English. Fifteen nature-related proverbs of the Kani tribal people of Tamil Nadu's Kanyakumari district will be considered.

Certainly any people's language is influenced by that people's physical environment. This lecture will seek to bring out especially how forest environments may influence language.

The value of biological diversity has now been clearly established: for example, it is widely accepted that forests tend to attract and hold water, and clean the air. This lecture will seek to help to also establish the value of linguistic and cultural diversity.



A tribal woman in Kanyakumari district

Forests, and languages that have developed in and around those forests, are intertwined and mutually-supportive valuable resources. For the sake of appreciating beautiful poetry and understanding close-to-nature cultures – and also for the sake of practical matters such as development of medicinal uses of plants, and methods of agri-forestry – these resources should be nurtured together.

Also, if ecological, cultural, and educational tourism in forest areas is to occur, the talk will raise some possibilities of how aspects of the languages (and dialects) of those locales could be presented to the visitors.