

## The Dajong Ká ('bras ljons skad) Sikkimese Language

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A small state Sikkim (derived from Sukhim in Limbu), otherwise called Dajong ('bras ljons) has area of 7096 Km<sup>1</sup> with a population above 4.505 lakhs. The country is mountainous in general having many ridges and valleys sloping southward down upto 1000 ft. above sea level.

The language spoken by the inhabitants of Sikkim is important to estimate their culture spectrum. The population of Sikkim consists of the Lepcha (Rong), the Bhotia (Bod), the Nepali and the Mon early inhabitants residing in the slope areas in vicinity of the forests. It suggests that the Lepcha (Rong) the Bhotia and the Nepali had migrated and settled in the Tista (bkra sis rtags) and Rongit in the south eastern part. The Lepchas migrated by the 12th century A.D. probably from the north eastern Bharatvarsa which has been broadly named Assam or Pragiyotisa in the olden days and their chiefs ruled the area upto the middle of the 17th century A.D. The Bod pa, the inhabitants of stod bod, which is now named Tibet, established their kingship (1641 A.D.) after defeating the Lepcha rulers. The Nepalese migrated to Sikkim when the Britishers encouraged their entry in the adjacent hill tracts since the 19th century A.D. The Nepalese have now out numbered the other described as the Census Reports of India speak.

Sikkim which is described as the Switzerland of Asia for her natural beauty becomes thus a home of multiethnic groups. In course of time an assimilated life style has grown among the heterogeneous inhabitants of Sikkim and thereby their speech also becomes distinct in character than that spoken by their neighbours. For instance, Bengali, Hindi, Bhutanese spoken in the east of Sikkim, while Nepali and some corrupt form of Tibetan are spoken by the Dolpo and Nya tsang pa of North East Nepal.

In the olden days the inhabitants of the Himalayan tracts were much unaware of geographical boundaries as determined now by the formation of political states in the Himalayas. Obviously the migration of different ethnic groups prevailed with the least resistance. These ethnic groups move from one place to other and settled in clusters. The migration of the Mongoloid people from the north towards the south occurred probably in the pre-Christian period. The spoken languages of each group occasionally suggest lone instances of migration and temporary settlement heterogeneous if there be once again in course of their movement. In that respect the ethnic structures of the Himalayan tracts of Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan require elaboration separately. Broadly speaking, three different speeches spoken by the inhabitants of Sikkim identify their ethnic multiplicity in spite of an intensive urge for assimilation by which Nepali overtakes (barikura). The Nepalis who are now in Sikkim after the political accession of the Nepali ruler in 18th century A.D. are not always the Limbu and the Rai. Some Gurung, Kiranti, Sherpa, Tharu and Burha are occasionally met. It suggests that the Tibeto-Mongoloids entered the afore said Himalayan tracts since the pre-Christian days in

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1. CENSUS OF INDIA 1991, Series-22 : SIKKIM. Directorate of census operation, Sikkim (Editor)

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search of better livelihood in the Gandaki and the Koshi river valleys of Nepal, as well as Tista and Rongit valleys of Sikkim. The migration of inhabitants of Nepal was from west towards the hill tracts of the eastern Himalayas. The ethnic migrations in the Eastern Himalayas and those in the Central Himalayas upto the Garhwal and Kumaon hills occurred in up-down curves from time to time. Also the Bhotia or Bod pa people settled in Sikkim belongs to the Tibeto-Mongoloid ethnic group as they are distributed as the Dukpa Bhotia, Sherpa, Tamang and Kagate. In the course of time the spirit of mutual acceptance and acculturation prevailed among them as a unitary designation of the Sikkimese of Dajong pa with a composite outlook Sikkim and the Bhotias of Darjeeling come under the purview.

The Bhotias are divided into several clans; such as Yolmo, Sharpa or Serpa, Hsingsapa, Kyerong, Thomowa, Tamang and Danjongpa or Bhotia of Sikkim. Regarding their migration from the Tibetan region and their respective date of migration a separate study is required. Some Dukpa Bhotias of Bhutan may also be included on account of preserving a common tradition.

As regards the socio-economic conditions of the Bhotia a large section earn their livelihood by agriculture or local industry and commerce depending on agriculture. A considerable section is however interested in business with small capital and public service under the State Government and other local agencies. The Bhotias are mainly Buddhist in their faith and practice Tantric Mahayana Buddhism with the Tibetan rituals. A considerable number of Christian Bhotias are found in the areas under present study; but, the Muslim Bhotia are hardly observed in this area.

The Lepchas and the Bhotias are distinct from another in terms of composition, kinship, social origin and the selection of spouse in their social life; but they hold some common traits. Such as, a household consists a family by itself; equal distribution of family property among sons, custom of bride price and in both communities polyandry and polygamy are admissible with the sanction of the local. It is further interesting to note that many instances of intermarriage among the Lepcha and the Bhotia families and that has tended to develop a high degree of cultural and religious assimilation in the socio-economic conditions of both communities. Since the present paper is devoted to trace some commonness in language and communication used by the Lepchas and the Bhotias the above points are mentioned for reference and background of problems.

The Indo-Tibetan language bears some compound traits which are not in development with the Indian Linguistics. It has been a natural process owing to the sustained efforts in speaking the Indo-Aryan speeches like Nepali and Assamese in the Eastern Sector, Kumauni and Garhwali and Hindi in the Central Sector and Dogra and local Kashmir in the Western Sector by the Indo-Mongoloid and the Non-Mongoloid Austro Asiatic people residing in the mid-Himalayas may broadly be divided into three branches.

### A. Eastern Sector :

- (i) bhotia (bhotekura) including Kagate, Serpa (ssarpa), yolmo, Hsingsapa in West Bengal.
- (ii) Dajong Kā spoken by the Bod pa in Sikkim.
- (iii) Dukpa Kā (Bhutanese) of Bhutan

These speeches hold affinity with the Ü-Tsang kād (dbus gtsai skad) spoken by the

inhabitants of Gyantse, Yatung, Thomo (Chumbi valley), Lhasa, Chamokanghar, Dechen and Medokangkar of the trans-Himalayan range.

- (iv) Mon pa kā
- (v) Serdukpan kā
- (vi) Khamba kad
- (vii) Memba kad in Arunachal Pradesh

The inhabitants of Loka and Kham speak distinct speech as which bear affinity.

**B. Central Sector :**

- (i) Garhwali Bhotia in Bashar and Pithoragarh
- (ii) Jad Nyamkat and Marcha in Tehri, Neelam in Upper Kanwar of Uttar Pradesh
- (iii) Lahul-skad in Himachal Pradesh
- (iv) Spiti skad in Himachal Pradesh
- (v) Kurik skad in Himachal Pradesh
- (vi) Upper Kinnaur speech in Himachal Pradesh

**C. Western Sector : (broadly named as Ladakhi speech)**

- (i) Ladakh skad spoken in Leh districts of Ladakh
- (ii) Nabra skad (spoken by the inhabitants of Nabra valley after choosing Khardangla mountain pass).
- (iii) Skad is heard at Kharghil (Mkhar dkyel) and in Zanskar Tehsil of Ladakh.
- (iv) Purik skad is spoken adjacent areas of Spu-rigs.
- (v) Dogmi skad spoken by the inhabitants of Da (mda) as distinct from the speech but Hamu and the neighbouring village on the bank of Indus.
- (vi) Balti skad holds distinction in speech as studied by Sprigg separately.

Though the above speeches bear some kinship with the Western Tibetan dialects belonging to the Nari ka (Mngaa ris 'Khar gsum skad) spoken at Hundesh, Rudhok, Gartok, Bongthal, Yambo extending upto Tise (Manasarovar) lake area, some variations are occasionally observed. An exhaustive study on the Ladakhi speech as spoken today has been done by Samyukta Kasal in the recent years.

In the present context the speech of the inhabitants of Sikkim undergoes a fast change in the race for separate literatures among the Rong or Lepcha, the Bhotia and the Nepali speaking Limbu, Rai, whether Shiva margi or Buddha margi, are available. Lama Dawa Samdup Kazi could foresee such trend among the Sikkimese and Bhutanese as early as in the first quarter of century. He remarked thus : "As to the construction of the Dictionary itself, it is simple English-Tibetan-Dictionary, the meaning being given in Tibetan characters. Care has been taken to give the Tibetan words as correctly spelt where possible, but where colloquial words had to be in preference to classical words, - because of the former being better understood, - no strictly correct spelling could be adhered to, and such places have been marked (colloquial). Names of trees, plants, fruits, animals, etc., which do not exist in Tibet, but which are to be found in Sikkim or in Bhutan, are given in these languages, and (Sik.) or (Bhut.) put in brackets against such words to show their origin."

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Subsequently, my teacher George N. Roerich endeavoured to locate the variations in the colloquial speeches as those observed in Ü-kā (dbus skad), Tsang Ka (gtsaṅ skad) and Khamska (khams skad) by the forties of this century.

The statistical data in respect of different inhabitants in Sikkim other than the Bengali speaking, the Hindi speaking and south Indian language speaking ones are the following :

Nepali other than Limbu (36.18%) in contrast to the Bhotia speaking 16.45%, Lepcha speaking 7.24% and Limbu speaking 3.95%. Here the Nepali speaking includes Tamang, Gurung, Newar, Rai and Sharpa who have migrated to Sikkim within a span of two centuries. Linguistically however there are several dialects spoken by the above groups. Such as Tamang with 9 variable dialects 5.92%, Gurung (9) 5.82% Newar (17) 11.18%; Rai (17) 11.28% and Sharpa (3) dialects 1.98%.

As regards the Dajongkā spoken among the Bhotias in Sikkim it holds affinity with the Tsang kā, especially that of Tho mo valley, Tatang and Phari tending towards the Ü-Kād (dbus skad). Suggestively the trends are :

- (i) Sound simplification as prevalent in the U-Tsang dialect in Tibetan by elision of the prefix, the suffix and the secondary suffix letters being compensated by the vowel sound modification as admissible by the Phonetic Laws in Tibetan.
- (ii) Tendency of agglutination of monosyllables in formation of the conjoined words or that of the compounds while speaking.
- (iii) Elision of the literary particles as and when necessary like agentive particles, case ending and conjugative particles.
- (iv) Variables in usage for communicating between the speaker and the listener referring to the honourable persons and the commoners.
- (v) Minor change in spelling towards simplification tending no variation in syntax order.
- (vi) Some choiced expressions in agglutinated form as shown by Lama Dawa Samdup Kazi in his Dictionary.
- (viii) Occasional acceptance of loan words for accuracy in communication like baza for chu tso, radio, motor etc.

### Prospect of the Sikkimese Language

The spoken language of the inhabitants of Sikkim make room for assimilation of the Lepcha, the Bhotia and the Nepali Speeches conveniently in the daily walk of life.

Nepali or Pahari kura forms the communicative speech of the common people in Sikkim. The Lepcha and the Bhotia dialect of Sikkim i.e. Dajong-kā are also the means of domestic and social customary communication with the respective communities. Linguistically, all the three languages belong to the Tibeto-Himalayan Branch of Tibeto-Burmese spoken in East Asia. The Nepali which is spoken in Sikkim and the Lepcha language are the offshoots of the Himalayan group though distinct in structure where as, the Bhotia group of the same Tibetan branch of language. The Tibeto-Burmen group holds a lien to the Classical Tibetan. The Government of Sikkim, however, has shown its broad outlook by choosing English for official use in state administration.

In view of developing the three languages prevalent in the state simultaneously the Government has already formed Text-book committees in respect to the above three language. It is novel attempt to study Nepali, Lepcha and Denjonkā or Bhotia methodically

among the new generation. Fortunately, Sikkim has got an immense treasure of human knowledge which is still unexplored. The location of Sikkim, which is in between India and Tibet has facilitated the people of Sikkim, to collect the resources of knowledge from both India and Tibet. Since Bhutan and Nepal, whose cultural heritage is akin to that of Sikkim, the Sikkimese have utilised all resources available from their neighbouring countries. In other words, Sikkim is rich in thought and wisdom.

Apart from the classical writings of the Tibetan scholars on literature, history, philosophy, medicine, astrology, astronomy and on other secular subjects, the Sikkimese have their local legends, folk tales, folk songs and traditional stories intermingled with myth and history, which speak about the prospect of Sikkim. These add more light to the culture of Sikkim to depict the integrated identity of the Sikkimese people.

One may optimistically hold that within a couple of decades, the Sikkimese will contribute many new materials for the study of the Tibeto-Himalayan languages. And, the Sikkimese literature will grow and develop in the course of time to express the innate characteristics of the land and the people of Sikkim.

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