The Dajong Kā (‘bras ljons skad) Sikkimese Language

-Prof. S. K. Pathak

A small state Sikkim (derived from Sukhum in Limbu) otherwise called Dajong (‘bras ljons) has area of 7096 km² with a population above 4 405 lakhs. The country is mountainous and in general having many ridges and valleys sloping southward down up to 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 (Boh), the Nepali and the Mon early inhabitants residing in the slope areas in vicinity of the forests. It suggests that the Lepcha (Rong) the Bhota and the Nepali had migrated and settled in the Tista (ska 508 rtags) and Rongtig in the south eastern part. The Lepchas migrated by the 12th century A.D. probably from the north eastern Bharatavarsha which has been broadly named Asam or Pragvyottsa in the olden days and their chief ruled the area up to the middle of the 17th century A.D. The Boh pa, the inhabitants of stol bod, which is now named Tibet, established their kingship (1541 A.D.) after defeating the Lepcha rulers. The Nepalese migrated to Sikkim when the British encouraged their entry in the adjacent hill tracts since the 19th century A.D. The Nepalese have now outnumbered 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 multihinic groups. In course of time an assimilated life style has grown among the heterogeneous inhabitants of Sikkim and accordingly their speech also becomes distinct in character than that spoken by their neighbours. For instance: Bengali, Eastern Bhutanese spoken in the east of Sikkim, while Nepali and some corrupt form of Tibeti 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 aware 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 as 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 the 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 (bankura). 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 Gung, Kiranti, Sherpa, Thart and Bura are occasionally met. It suggests that the Tibet-Mongoloids entered the afore said Himalayan tracts since the pre-Christian days in

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search of better livelihood in the Gandaki and the Koshi river valleys of Nepal, as well as Tista and Rongp valley 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 up to the Garwhal and Kumaon hills occurred in upward curves from time to time. Also, the Bhota or Bod pa people settled in Sikkim belongs to the Tibetan-Mongoloid ethnic group as they are distributed as the Dukpa Bhota, Sherpa, Tamang and Kagats. In the course of time, the spirit of mutual acceptance and accommodation prevailed among them as a unitary designation of the Sikkimese of Dajong pa with a composite outlook. Sikkim and the Bhotas of Darjeeling come under the purview.

The Bhotas are divided into several clans, such as Yolmo, Sherpa or Serpa, Hanspapa, Akertang, Tshomolwa, Tamang and Danjongpa or Bhota of Sikkim. Regarding their migration from the Tibetan region and their respective date of migration, a separate study is required. Some Dukpa Bhotas of Bhutan may also be included on account of preserving a common tradition.

As regards the socio-economic conditions of the Bhota, 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 Bhotas are mainly Buddhist in their faith and practice Tantric Mahayana Buddhism with the Tibetan rituals. A considerable number of Christian Bhotas are found in the areas under present study, but the Muslim Bhota are hardly observed in this area.

The Lepchas and the Bhotas 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 patrilocality and polygamy are admissible with the sanction of the local. It is further interesting to note that many instances of intermarriages among the Lepcha and the Bhota 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 Lepcha and the Bhota 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. Kumaun and Garwhali and Hindi in the Central Sector and Dogra and local Kashmiri 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) Bhota (bhotika) including Kagate, Serpa (tsarpai), Yolmo, Hanspapa in West Bengal.
(ii) Dajong Kha spoken by the Bod pa in Sikkim.
(iii) Dukpa Kha (Bhutanese) of Bhutan

These speeches hold affinity with the Bu Tshang kha (dbus gis rub skad) spoken by the
inhabitants of Gyantse, Yatung, Thong. (Chumbi valley), Door, Chamkaanghat, Dechen and Mekongkang of the trans-Himalayan range.

(a) Mon pa kā'
(b) Serdakpan kā'
(c) Khamba kā'
(d) Membu kā' in Arunachal Pradesh

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

B. Central Sector:
(i) Garthwali Bilota in Bashkar and Thitaragarh
(ii) Jat Nyamra and Marcha in Tehri, Nelah in Upper Karmar of Uttar Pradesh
(iii) Lahul-skad in Himachal Pradesh
(iv) Spiti skad in Himachal Pradesh
(v) Kuruk skad in Himachal Pradesh
(vi) Upper Kinnar speech in Himachal Pradesh

C. Western Sector: (broadly named as Ludshki speech)
(i) Lahad skad spoken in Leh district of Ladakh
(ii) Nabra skad (spoken by the inhabitants of Nabra valley after crossing Khardangla mountain pass.
(iii) Skad is heard at Kharzil (Mkhar dgyel) and in Zanskar Tsulil of Ladakh.
(iv) Purik skad is spoken adjacent areas of Spur-nags.
(v) Dogru skad spoken by the inhabitants of Da (nda) as distinct from the speech but Hamu and the neighboring village on the bank of Indus.
(vi) Balti skad holds distinction in speech as studied by Spragg separately.

Though the above speechess bear some kinship with the Western Tibetan dialects belonging to the Nari ka (Mingy khar guum skad) spoken at Hundesh, Rudhol, Gartok, Bondhual, Yamblo extending upto Tise (Manaslu-tor) lake area, some variations are occasionally observed. An exhaustive study on the Ladakhi speech as spoken today has been done by Sanyukt Kasaal in the recent years.

In the present context the speech of the inhabitants of Sikkim undergo a fast change in the race for separate literatures among the Rong or Lepcha, the Bhutia and the Nepali speaking Unbu, Rai, whether Shiva margi or Buddha margi, are available. Lama Dawa Samdup raks could foresee such trend among the Sikkimese and Bhoutaneses 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. Roepen endeavoured to locate the variations in the colloquial speech as those observed in Ü-kú (dibus skad), Tsang Ka (gtsang skad) and Khamska (khams skad) by the forces 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 Lumbs (36.18%) in contrast to the Bhotia speaking 16.45%, Lepcha speaking 7.24% and Limbu speaking 3.95%. Here the Nepali speaking includes Tatsang, Gurung, Newar, Rai and Shampa 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 5.22%, Gurung (9) 5.82% Newar (17) 11.18%, Rai (17) 11.28% and Shampa (3) dialects 4.98%.

As regards the Dajongkú spoken among the Bhottias in Sikkim it holds affinity with the Tsang kú, especially that of Tho mo valley, Tatsang and Phari tending towards the Ü-kú (dibus skad). Suggestively the trends are:

(i) Sound simplification as prevalent in the U-Tsang dialect in Tibet has 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 moneyables in formation of the conjuncted words or that of the compounds while speaking.

(iii) Elision of the locative particles and when necessary like agentic 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 commissives.

(v) Minor change in spelling towards simplification tending to variations in syntax order.

(vi) Some chosred expressions in agglutinated form as shown by Lama Dawa Samdup Kazi in his Dictionary.

(vii) Occasional acceptance of loan words for accuracy in communication like baza for chutso, 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 Bhutia kura forms the communicative speech of the common people in Sikkim. The Lepcha and the Bhutia dialect of Sikkim i.e. Dajongkú are also the means of domestic and social customary communication with the respective communities linguistically, all the three languages belong to the Tibet-Himalayan Branch of Tibet-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 whereas the Bhoutia group of the same Tibetan branch of language. The Tibetan-Burma 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 languages. It is novel attempt to study Nepali, Lepcha and Denjomkú or Bhotta 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 more 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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