THE SIKKIMESE BHUTIA

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The language spoken by Denzongpas, now better known as the Bhutas of Sikkim is called Denzongke or simply Denzong Ke. This Denzong Ke like other dialects spoken by ethnic groups such as the Ladkahos, Lahuls, Yolmowas, Sherpas and Tamangs living in the Himalayan and Indo-Tibetan border regions in offshoot of Tibetan; the Denzongpas however living in a compact area and in assemblage number are now trying to reduce their tongue to writing in order to preserve and perpetuate their culture and ensure its separate identity and to make it a means of mass communication. I shall say more about the language later. For the time being let us see what changes have taken place in the source language itself and how for the dialects including the Denzong Ke has deviated and assumed new forms. I am giving hereunder only one or two illustrations to compare the different dialects as it is not possible to accommodate all of them here.

Apart from the Denzong Ke, the dialects of the Yolmowas and the Tamangs have been mentioned. The name of the Yolmowas who live in the eastern region of Nepal feature in Guru Rinpoche and the 100 thousand songs of Milarepa, the great saint of Tibet. The Tamangs form a substantial portion of the Nepalese population and profess an old form of Tibetan Buddhism.

Now for the expression “It is my house”; the equivalents in Tibetan and other dialects will be:

Tshe nge Khangpa yin - (Tibetan)
Tshe nge Khym - (Denzong Ke)
Tshe ngai khym yong - (Yolmowa)
Tsa ngala dham hinna - (Tamang)

Now for another expression say “I am writing a letter” the rendering will be:

Nga vyi dguwo - (Tibetan)
Nga vyi dho vun - (Denzong Ke)
or didowin (Denzong Ke)
Nga vyi bridle yoba - (Yolmowa)
Nga chiti braken mula - (Tamang)

From the above illustrations, it will be observed that though the senses or the order of words in the different sentences is one and the same, there are differences in form and pronunciation. For “Khangpa” which means “a house”, the Denzong Ke and Yolmowa have khym which is slightly changed into “dham” in Tamang dialect. For the word “thir” the common expression in Tibetan, Denzong Ke and Yolmowa is “thie”. For the Tamangs, however, the word is “tie”. The Tamang word “ngala” meaning “my” is a total deviation from “ngai” or “ngai” in other languages. Moreover, the word “chiti” in the expression “Nga chiti braken mula” is certainly an outside influence. Considered from the point of view of vocabularies, expressions and sounds, the Yolmowa and the Tamang dialects are very much older than the
Demong Ke. The closeness of the Demong Ke to the Tibetan language is also established by an examination of the changes that have taken place in the “Tibetan phonetic system.” Take the case of the Tibetan word Kompo and Tshog. Kompo which means “raw” is a corrupt form of Kompo whose original form was koreh po. In the Ladakhi dialect, this pronunciation is still very much there. Tsho on the other hand means “offering” is pronounced as Tshogs by the people of Lhalu and spits whereas the modern Tibetan pronunciation has dropped both the last two letters i.e. ga and a and hence it is tso only.

Such archaic pronunciations are visible in the case of the Yolmowa and Tamang dialects. Yaray which means “rice” in Yolmowa dialect and “brinba” meaning writing in the Tamang dialect are “day” and “di” in modern Tibetan. This means that the Rata subjoined lenses have lost their original significance. Such archaic sounds are to be met with in the Demong Ke also but they are much less compared to other dialects. Take for instance the word “tva” which means “to do” in Demong Ke but it is “jay” in Tibetan though orthographically it is written bai. Thus we see that the Tibetan language spoken today is very much different from what it was at the beginning and yet despite of it, the Demong Ke is very much close to Tibetan.

Now coming back to the subject of Demong Ke and the efforts to give it a literary form, some progress had already been achieved as text books have been compiled and taught up to the Senior Secondary School level. It is all the more interesting to know that a newspaper in the language is already in circulation. Considering the peculiarities of the sound system in the two languages, i.e. Tibetan and Demong Ke, as well as their closeness to each other it was very natural that the architects of Demong Ke should have used the Tibetan Uchen characters for the purpose of their writing. It would have been very difficult otherwise to transcribe such sounds like “Cha Chha”, “ja” “Shha” “Zha” and “Ka”. The pioneers in the field might come across with certain problems in the area of Orthography, grammar and diction in future. Some obstacles seemed to have already been removed by introducing some innovation in the writing system. I offer my sincerest wishes to the pioneers in the field in their efforts to raise Demong Ke to the status of full fledged written language.