

THE SIKKIMESE BHUTIA

-Prof. S. Norboo

The language spoken by Denzongpas, now better known as the Bhutias of Sikkim is called Denzongpe Ke or simply Denzong Ke. This Denzong Ke like other dialects spoken by ethnic groups such as the Ladhakis, Lahulies, Yolmowas, Sherpas and Tamangs living in the Himalayan and Indo-Tibetan border regions is offshoot of Tibetan, the Denzongpas however living in a compact area and in sizeable 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 far 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 Ke¹, 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 Gurboom or the 100 thousand songs of Milarepa, the great saint Poet of Tibet. The Tamangs form a substantial portion of the Nepali 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:

Thee nge Khangpa yin - (Tibetan)
Thee nge Khyim - (Denzong Ke)
Thee ngai khyim yinge - (Yolmowa)
Tsu ngala dhim hinna - (Tamang)

Now for another expression say "I am writing a letter" the rendering will be :-

Nge yigi digiyo - (Tibetan)
Nga yigi bido yin- (Denzong Ke)
or didoyin (Denzong Ke)
Nga yigi brilele yoba - (Yolmowa)
Nga chitti briken mula - (Tamang)

From the above illustrations, it will be observed that though the syntax 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 khyim which is slightly changed into "dhim" in Tamang dialect. For the word "this" the common expression in Tibetan, Denzong Ke and Yolmowa is "thee". For the Tamangs, however, the word is "tsu". The Tamang word "ngala" meaning "my" is a total deviation from "nge" or "ngai" in other languages. Moreover, the word "chitti" in the expression "Nga chitti briken 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

Denzong Ke. The closeness of the Denzong 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 "rare" is a corrupt form of Konpo whose original form was kondh po. In the Ladhaki dialect, this pronunciation is still very much there. Tsho on the other hand meaning an offering is pronounced as Thogs by the people of Lahul and spiti whereas the modern Tibetan pronunciation has dropped both the last two letters i.e. ga and sa and hence it is tsho only.

Such archaic pronunciations are visible in the case of the Yolmowa and Tamang dialects. Bray which means "rice" in Yolmowa dialect and "briba" meaning writing in the Tamang dialect are "day" and "di" in modern Tibetan. This means that the Rata subjoined letters have lost their original significance. Such archaic sounds are to be met with in the Denzong Ke also but they are much less compared to other dialects. Take for instance the word "bya" which means "to do" in Denzong Ke but it is "Jay" in Tibetan though orthographically it is written bay. Thus we see that the Tibetan language spoken today is very much different from what it was at the beginning and yet inspite of it, the Denzong Ke is very much close to Tibetan.

Now coming back to the subject of Denzong Ke and the efforts to give it a literary form, some progress had already been achieved as text books have been compiled and taught upto the Senior Secondary School level. It is all the more interesting to know that a news paper in the language is already in circulation. Considering the peculiarities of the sound system in the two languages, i.e. Tibetan and Denzong Ke, as well as their closeness to each other it was very natural that the architects of Denzong 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 "Ha". 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 Denzong Ke to the status of full fledged written language