

ORAL TRADITIONS AND EXPRESSIONS

Bhutan's intangible cultural heritage has been preserved in a wide variety of oral expressions such as proverbs, riddles, folktales, legends, myths, epic songs and poems, charms, prayers, chants, songs, dance, drama and prose. This invaluable heritage has been passed down to us from our ancestors as knowledge, cultural practices, social values and collective memories, and it is our responsibility to keep it alive for our future generations.

This research has revealed that certain forms of oral expressions are common among different communities while there are others unique to a particular group. The current study focuses mainly on those elements that are on the verge of or likely to be disappearing in the near future.

1.1. LANGUAGES & DIALECTS OF BHUTAN

In Bhutan, various languages and dialects have been in use as a tool for communication and co-existence, and these have evolved over many generations. Although Bhutan is a small country, there is a wide variety of rich linguistic and cultural diversity, in fact so wide that is said to even embarrass the Monsoon Dragon with its loud roar. Language experts George van Driem and Karma Tshering say (van Driem 1998) that with a population of just about three quarters of a million Bhutan has 19 dialects that are still in active use.

There is a wide range of languages spoken in the fifty four different countries of the Asian region. These languages have been classified into thirteen major groups namely:

1. Sino Tibetan, 2. Indo European, 3. Altaic families, 4. Mon Khmer, 5. Tai kadai, 6. Austronesian, 7. Dravidian, 8. Semitic, 9. Siberian families, 10. Caucasian families, 11. Small families of Southern Asia, 12. Creoles and Pidgins, 13. Sign languages.

The languages and dialects spoken in Bhutan belong in the Sino Tibetan group under the Burman sub-group derived from Sino Tibetan, mainly falling under Central Bodish and East Bodish, where they may be further classified as follows:

The Central Bodish languages, comprising:

1. Dzong kha, 2. Chho cha nga cha kha, 3. Brokpa ke, 4. Dakpa kha, 5. Brok kat, 6. La kha, 7. Laya kha, 8. Lunapai kha and 9. Bjobi kha.

The East Bodish languages, comprising:

1. Bumthang kha, 2. Kheng kha, 3. Kurtoep kha, 4. Chhali kha, 5. Zala kha, 6. Nyen kha, and 7. Ole kha.

The other languages that do not belong to the two sub-groups but are classified under Tibeto-Burman language groups are:

1. Tshangla kha, 2. Lhopu kha, 3. Gongdue kha, and 4. Lepcha kha.

Beside these languages, Indo-Aryan languages like Nepali are used as medium of communication along the southern border region of the country. Karma Phuntsho (2013), clearly mentions there are some minor dialects spoken along the southern foothills which are not included in any group, as follows:

1. Rai, 2. Kurus/Adivasi, 3. Limbu / Subbha, 4. Mongar / Ghaley, 5. Sherpa, 6. Tamang, 7. Gurung, 8. Newar / Pradhan.

According to Tashi Tshewang (2013) all the languages and dialects spoken in Bhutan can be grouped according to region:

1. Eastern region: Mostly Tshangla kha, Chali kha, Cho cha nga cha kha, Brokpa ke or Merak and Sakteng kha, Dakpa kha, Zala/Brami/Khoma kha, Kurtoep kha and Gongduk kha.
2. Southern region: Widely spoken - Nepali, Rai, Kurus/Adivasi, Limbu or Subbha, Mongar and Ghaley, Sherpa, Tamang, Lepcha, Gurung, and Newar or Pradhan kha.
3. Western region: Commonly Ngalong kha, Lhopu kha and Oley kha.
4. North region: Laya kha, Lunana kha, Boe kha, Lingzhi kha, La kha or Sephu kha and Brok kat,
5. Central region: Kheng kha, Mangde kha, Nyen kha, Bumthang kha, Kurtoep kha and Mon kha.

Since there are Tibetan settlers in some parts of the country, the Tibetan language or Boe kha is also included as one of the languages of Bhutan. In addition to the above there is the sign language taught in Drakthso

schools, *Sang kha* (code language used mainly by the Armed Forces to establish their identity especially in the evening) and the code languages invented by youth (mainly girls) for private communication. In Tshangla dialect this is called *Gum-nang lo*, meaning reversed or twisted language, reflecting that the words used are sometimes reversed or repeated within a sentence. Lastly there is *Aloi kha* or child language.

Dzongkha, the principal dialect of the eight western districts of Bhutan, has been in use within the administrative system since the time of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. The Commanding orders of 1st Desi Tenzin Drugey and lyrical ballads of Gelong Sumdar Tashi, Pemi Tshewang Tashi and other records like taxation and receipts and other records are maintained in Bhutanese cursive writing, *joyig*, a script that dates back to before the 10th century. As the dzongs were the centres of both temporal and religious affairs, the

language used by monks and the officials came to be known as Dzongkha or language of the dzong.

In 1967 scholar-monk, Pema Tshewang (subsequently Director of the National Library 1973-1993) was assigned to the textbook division of the Education Department, where he played a major role in the development of Dzongkha, which hitherto had lacked a written form, to enable its adoption as a written language. In 1971 Bhutan's 3rd king, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck declared Dzongkha the national language of Bhutan. Apart from Dzongkha, Tibetan and Nepali have their own scripts.

The Table below provides a general view of the usage of different languages and dialects in Bhutan reflected in researches conducted by the Royal Government and private individuals.

Examples of the usage of languages in Bhutan

Region	Language/dialect	Way of speaking
National Language	Dzongkha	Choe gi ming ga chi mo?
East	Tshangla	Nan ga ming hang ya?
	Chali	E ming de wa?
	Cho ca nga ca kha	Khyoe ki ming chi lo?
	Merak sakteng?	Khyoe gi ming chi lo?
	Dakpakha/Zala/Brami/Khoma	E ku ming zi lo?
	Kurtoep	Wae ming zhe yo?
West	Ngalung	Choe gi ming ga chi mo?
	Oleykha	Ing gi ming a de la?
North	Laya and Lunana	Choe gi ming ga chi mo/ga chem?
	Lingzhi	Choe gi ming ga chi mo/ga chem?
	Lakha	Khyuk ming chi lo?
	Sephu	Khyong gi ming chi lo?
	Brok-kad	Khyoe ming chi yo?
	Boekha	Khyoe rang gi ming gang yin/re?
South	Nepali	Tim ro nam kay wo?
	Tamang	Ae la ming te go?
	Rai	Am ko nung de wo?
	Subbha and Limbu	He man me ma wo?
	Gurung	Extinct
	Mongar	Na ko me ming ye wo?
	Lepcha	A dho abreyang shu bu?
	Lhopu	Na ning heta ho?
	Kurus/Adivasi	Tu nar nam ki?
	Sherpa	Khyoe re ming khang yin?
Central	Kheng	We che ming ja yo?
	Gungduk	Ge ming sa po?
	Mangde	Weche ming zhe yo?
	Bumthang	We ming zha yo?
	Nyenkha	Ye ming she lo?
	Kurtoep	Wey ming zhe yo?
	Mon	Ing gi ming zhe yo?