

Lepcha Social Life and Language: an introspection: a case from Dzongu, Upper Sikkim

ANUPAM DATTA

Abstract:

Lepcha is the oldest and the first tribe reported from Sikkim, India: majority of its population inhabiting in Dzongu valley, an officially demarcated reserve for Lepcha community, bordering Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve, in north district. Lepchas of Dzongu are known for their retention of rich cultural heritage. In view of the on-going cultural and economic changes brought in by the process of globalization, the immediate need was felt to document cultural diversisty of the Lepcha community. The recent comments on the gradual loss of influence of the Lepcha language on the Lepcha community influence the attention for an intimate look at the Lepcha speech community. According to Landweer (2008), "The indicators of ethno-linguistic vitality are a collection of factors that have been documented in socio linguistic literature ... have been useful in indicating the probable direction a speech community will go relative to the maintenance of, or shift from, its traditional language. No one factor has become a leading indicator of linguistic vitality. Whether a language appears to be "maintained" or "dying" depends on the collective impact of positive or negative indicators that place the language on a continuum of stable vitality, change in process due to other-language interference, radical shift in process, and death. As such, language maintenance and shift are long-term consequences of consistent patterns of language choice throughout the speech community." This paper examines the ethno-linguistic vitality of the speech community with special reference to the Lepchas of Dzongu valley, 'the prime Lepcha reserve' in North Sikkim. In order to explore the endangered situation of the language, the probable direction of language maintenance and shift, towards which the speech community is proceeding has been studied, keeping in view the socio - political aspects of Lepcha life and its impact on the Lepcha language and culture across time.

Social Life Of Language

S Ben Porath



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