

# HIGH HIMALAYA FORUM



June 2012

## Discussion Report

**Bhoti: 7th century language - now endangered?** Is Bhoti losing its sheen? Should it be included in 8th schedule? What are the various ways of its revival? How can individuals help?

# High Himalaya Forum

## DISCUSSION REPORT

### Introduction

Language is not only a medium of communication but it also reflects the history, culture, people, system of governance, ecology, religion and politics. With about 200,000 users around the whole belt of Himalayas from Ladakh to Tawang, Bhoti is one of the richest languages of India. The glory and grace of this language is not only confined to the Himalayan region of India but also that of Bhutan, Nepal, Tibet, China, Mongolia and Pakistan.

In the era of globalization and more efficient communication networks, languages die more frequently than they are born. Bhoti is a language of the masses, language of the saints and poets, language of the hills and valleys of the Himalayas, language of peace and compassion. Today this language is struggling for its identity.

It is high time that we take actions to preserve this precious language and bring it to the mainstream. The introduction of bill for inclusion of Bhoti language in the eighth schedule of Indian constitution is a commendable step towards recognition and revival of this language. There is still a long way to go to restore the glory of bhoti language as of one of the richest languages in india.

### Participants of the discussion:

1. Chhring Lal - Kinnaur, India
2. Chhimet Namgyal - Leh, India
3. Ms. Kelsang Wangmo - Leh, India
4. Amir Lama - Spillo, Kinnaur, India
5. Dechen Dolma - Lahaul & Spiti, India
6. Nawang Upasak - Lahaul & Spiti, India
7. Vinay Tandon - Shimla, India
8. Lobsang Dorje - Arunachal Pradesh, India
9. Tsering Angmo - Ladakh, India

10. S Basu - Kolkata, India

## Summary of responses

The discussion saw a mix of responses. Whilst some participants felt that the language is eroding fast, others are hopeful that Bhoti is not going to get obsolete anytime soon. Some felt that government intervention may be helpful while others had the opinion that one should begin by making localized efforts instead of relying on the government to take action. A prime concern that emerged from the discussion however was that Bhoti is not incorporated in the school curriculum. Some key highlights from the discussion have been put together as follows:

***Current status of the Bhoti language:*** In the entire Himalayan stretch, Bhoti is the link language for the inhabitants. Today the language is struggling for its identity and has been ranked as endangered. It has almost reached a stage of stagnation. There are not many new literatures in Bhoti. It needs a new lease of life. There is however immense appreciation and interest for Bhoti language among the local people of Lahaul & Spiti, Kinnaur, Ladakh. Though the language is not taught in schools, the elderly and learned people do take interest in it.

***Community-based initiatives for Bhoti preservation:*** In Lahaul and Spiti, winter sessions are organized to keep the traditions of the oral songs and verses alive. People have also tried to document the lyrics in Bhoti and learn the script. Awareness sessions are held on Bhoti in some parts of Kinnaur and Panchayat resolutions were also passed for submission to DIET (District Institute of Education and Training) asking for relevant action to introduce Bhoti in schools of Bhoti speaking areas of Kinnaur. In Spiti, where the community is more homogenous, Bhoti has been introduced in certain schools.

***Initiatives by various stakeholders:*** Himalayan Buddhist Association, Central Institute of Buddhist Studies (CIBS), National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) is playing an important role in promoting the language. The SC/ST Commission and the Himalayan Buddhist Culture Association is also taking some initiative in this regard. A Bhoti newsletter on medicinal plants of Ladakh is brought out by a Leh NGO. Various other initiatives at the national and international level are in place to help preserve the language.

***Initiatives needed for mainstreaming the language:*** Increasing popularity of the language among the children and the youth is important. Introducing folklores, fables, poems in schools can help revive the language. Introduction of Bhoti language in schools is very important and the interest for learning Bhoti language must be generated in children right from schools. Books on school curriculum should be published in Bhoti. We need some budding writers for Bhoti language in India and other Himalayan nations and we need to encourage young writers. Literary fests, school magazines and local newspapers can be starting points.

Putting Bhoti in the 8th Schedule would also help in mainstreaming the language. We can develop and offer a correspondence course to learn the language and develop a good website (in Bhoti & English) to connect people using the language. We can come up with a Rapid English/ Hindi -

Bhoti Learner as in other languages and develop a list of Bhoti teachers in the districts where it is spoken and formulate a project to help these people contribute to the electronic Bhoti website.

## Responses in full

### *1. Chbbring Lal - Kinnaur, India*

Introduction of Bhoti language in schools for children is very important. We usually organise winter classes on Bhoti, but only middle aged people (30-40 years) take part usually. Starting classes in schools is extremely important. The inclusion of Bhoti in the constitution might help in this regard.

### *2. Chhimet Namgyal - Leh, India*

The usage or importance of Bhoti has not reduced, but at the same time, we do not see it making progress. It is not taught in schools, in LKG or in primary classes in government schools. If books about local stories, modern advancements in sciences are published for children, it would be very useful. It is important to know one's mother tongue, the local language and this could be a good approach.

### *3. Ms. Kelsang Wangmo - Leh, India*

Himalayan Buddhist Association, Central Institute of Buddhist Studies (CIBS), National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) is playing an important role in promoting the usage of the language. I teach students in M.A. level, where Bhoti language has been made compulsory. There are various initiatives going on in national and international level and I do not think Bhoti language is going to become obsolete anytime soon.

### *4. Amir Lama - Spillo, Kinnaur, India*

It is important to inspire the new generation to learn this language. My father and me both organise classes, speak about religious teachings in order to attract people towards this language. We run awareness sessions in Spillo and Karla in Kinnaur. Without knowing the language, we cannot get to know our cultural roots, the teachings of 'Ahimsa', which is so relevant in today's world. I am a Gram Pradhan myself. We have passed Panchayat resolutions and submitted them to DIET (District Institute of Education and Training) for relevant action to introduce Bhoti languages for the schools in Bhoti speaking areas of Kinnaur. We also tried bringing out a publication called 'Maitree doot' at one point of time, printed from Varanasi. We pledge support for all initiatives that seek to glorify Bhoti language.

### 5. Dechen Dolma - Lahaul & Spiti, India

Sometimes I feel sad that my grand child does not often speak our language. They are taught Hindi and English at school. I think they are important to put him at par with the children in the country. But I wish he would be familiar with his mother language as well. There are not many of us who know how to write and read Bhoti, although we speak the language. If our books and songs are only documented and kept in the shelf of Gompas (monasteries) it is not of much use for the new generations. There are a lot of scriptures on medicines, teachings of noble men that one should know about. If the interest is not generated at schools, it is difficult for us to make a child learn.

### 6. Nawang Upasak - Lahaul & Spiti, India

There is still immense appreciation and interest for Bhoti language among the local people of Lahaul & Spiti, Ladakh. We still organise sessions in winters to keep the traditions of the oral songs and verses alive. People take interest, but mostly middle aged, learned persons, government employees. Every winter we put up notices indicating the timings of such sessions. People from Tod, Garh, Khoksar and Myad valley are often more interested. But it is not taught in schools for the younger generation. In Spiti the enthusiasm is much more as the community is more homogenous and they have been able to introduce Bhoti in schools. Many of us have tried to document the lyrics in Bhoti and learn the script because, if we write them down in Hindi, we don't do justice to the unique pronunciations. The SC/ST Commission and the Himalayan Buddhist Culture Association are taking some initiative in promoting the language. We deeply appreciate and support all such efforts.

### 7. Vinay Tandon - Shimla, India

Putting Bhoti in the 8th Schedule would help a bit. However, much needs to be done outside. We could: 1. develop and offer a correspondence course to learn the language; 2. develop a good website (in Bhoti & English) to connect people using the language; 3. Get the Tibetan Govt in Exile in Dharamshala to help fund / develop these; 4. Come out with a Rapid English/ Hindi - Bhoti Learner as in other languages; 5. There is a Bhoti newsletter about medicinal plants of Ladakh being brought out by an NGO in Leh, they could be helped to include popular writing in their newsletter? 6. Develop a list of Bhoti teachers in the districts where it is spoken and formulate a project to help these people contribute to the electronic Bhoti website/ fora referred to above. The question is: who is going to take the lead? We cannot afford to wait for Governments to take action, because even if it does, it will be too little, too late.

### 8. Lobsang Dorje - Arunachal Pradesh, India

Bhoti language has almost reached a stage of stagnation. There are not many new literatures in Bhoti. We are learning from old texts and only using it in day-to-day conversation. It needs a new lease of life. We hear of so many great writers, lyricist around the country. We need some budding

writers for Bhoti language as well. We need to encourage young writers, may be right from the schools. Literary fests, school magazines and local newspapers can be starting points.

### *9. Tsering Angmo - Ladakh, India*

I could not attend school when I was a child. Now I know a little bit of counting and reading a few letters. I try my best to make sure that my children do not miss this opportunity. I hope they teach them some Bhoti in their school, which is our mother tongue. I want my children to read and write and learn about the world, do well for themselves. But I want them to also learn and respect our own language and culture. I feel this is important.

### *10. S Basu - Kolkata, India*

From Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh, Bhoti is the **link** language for the inhabitants of the region. In the present day the language is struggling for its identity. On a five grade scale as described by late Stephen Wurm, the Bhoti language is ranked as an endangered language. With increasing connectivity, cultural sovereignty of the Himalayan region is fast eroding. Increasing popularity of the language among the children and the youth is important. Introducing folklores, fables, poems in pre-school and primary schools can help reviving the language.

**Excerpts shared:** from an article by *Stanxin Dawa*: ..."Today, unfortunately, Bhoti language has been ignored and marginalized by the mainstream politics. The framers of the Indian constitution have not included this language in the 8th Schedule of the Indian constitution. Bhoti is speaking in the Himalayan region of India from Ladakh to Tawang spreading through Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal, West Bengal, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. The glory and grace of this language is not only confining to the Himalayan region of India but also in Bhutan, Nepal, Tibet, China, Mongolia and Pakistan. This language is a symbol of "Unity in Diversity". People from different religions, regions, cultures and countries are using this language. The Bhoti script was developed by Thomi Sambhota in the 7th century by modifying the four vowels and thirty consonants of the Devnagri script and grammar which was derived from the Sanskrit. It has a rich literature in different fields; such as Medicine, Architecture, Astrology, Music, Arts, Dance, Drama, Yoga, Philosophy, Tantric and Grammar..."

You can view the full article at:

<http://www.boloji.com/index.cfm?md=Content&sd=Articles&ArticleID=7718>

We would like to thank all the participants who took part in the discussion and shared their valuable opinions on the critical issue. For sharing further information on the topic, feel free to write to [info@himalayaforum.org](mailto:info@himalayaforum.org)