

## Trends in integration of Bhutanese Society

*Sonam Kinga*

Before the late King, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (1928–72), laid the foundation of modern education system in the 1950s, only monastic education was available. Writings and scholarship on Bhutan by Bhutanese authors have largely been limited to a few genres like hagiographies of Buddhist saints and lama, history, religious treatise and poetry. Almost all of them were written in Chokey, classical Tibetan. Hence, they have a strong Buddhist content. Aspects of popular literature articulating non-clerical values found expression only through oral medium, which has resulted in a strong oral tradition among various communities in the country. For long, non-Bhutanese authors wrote almost every literature on Bhutan available in English. Only recently has Bhutanese authors adopted English as medium of writing. This however, does not indicate total decline or disappearance of indigenous scholarship in Dzongkha, the national language and Chokey. The first among non-Bhutanese authors writing on Bhutan in English were political missionaries of British India beginning with George Bogle in 1774 and continuing till the first half of 20th century with British Political Officers of Sikkim who directly dealt with Bhutan. On their missions, the British emissaries kept records of the life and activities of ordinary people. These aspects of life were not the areas of traditional scholarship. The second group of scholars was mostly Indians but there are some western writers as well. Subsequent to India's Independence in 1947, and the launching of development programmes in Bhutan in 1960–61 with financial support of the Indian government, many Indians visited Bhutan in various capacities as technical advisors, expatriates, teachers and others. In their writings, we find a continuation of the interest on non-clerical aspects of Bhutanese life. A common approach among them has been to provide a general introduction or write about the country's geography, people and lifestyle. And all of them, consciously or otherwise followed their predecessors in dividing the country into specific geographic zones inhabited by people to whom they ascribed specific ethnolinguistic characteristics. Many statements such as the following are very common in their works: Dzongkha is the 'language of the home' in western Bhutan. The different dialects spoken in eastern Bhutan generally fall into two broad linguistic categories – the Bumthang or the Tashigang dialect. The Nepali Bhutanese who make up the vast majority of the population in southern Bhutan come from a wide variety of communities in Nepal, most of which have their language or dialect'. Except for people of Nepali origin who came in the beginning of the last century, this conventional classification must have been valid for most part of the country's history. But it is no longer applicable to modern Bhutanese society, which has seen progressive trends at integration of various ethno-linguistic groups. Such rigid classification has completely excluded local migrations, population movement and settlements that have occurred over the years either as results of epidemic outbreak, local migration, resettlement programme, land purchase and settlement and inter-ethnic marriages. These factors have gradually brought about changes in the demographic landscape of the country.

The purpose of this paper is to study the gradual development of this rigid conventional classification of ethno-linguistic group into an unchallenged fact over the years, and then provide preliminary evidences of the trends in social integration in recent decades. I will consider the position of different non-Bhutanese authors on this issue. Some writers have produced maps to illustrate the cultural and linguistic divisions they wrote about. I will analyse these maps, and then discuss the confusion pertaining to usage of geographic terms by writers for directions like 'east and west' in their works in referring to administrative or linguistic units. Finally I will enumerate some social processes that serve as preliminary evidences of the gradual disappearance of boundaries among different ethno-linguistic groups drawn by the writers. These processes are generated by socio-economic development, modernization, education and other factors.