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Namgyal Institute of Tibetology

A LINGUISTIC SURVEY OF SIKKIM

Project Overview

Starting in September 2005, the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology initiated the *first modern linguistic survey of the State of Sikkim*. The survey has three main objectives:

(i) to compile an inventory of all of the languages spoken in Sikkim

(ii) to determine the geographical distribution and typological classification of each language spoken as a mother tongue in this Himalayan state

(iii) to estimate the of numbers of speakers of each language on the basis of disaggregated census data, roof counts and on-site field investigation

A baseline linguistic survey of a state is an essential requirement for planning language policy in education, media and the public sphere. Detailed linguistic surveys have been conducted in the Kingdoms of Nepal (1986) and Bhutan (1991) respectively, the findings of which have augmented rudimentary data already available from national census bureaus. While the ten-yearly *Census of India* (most recently 2001) collects cursory information on social factors, it returns no data on monolingualism, bilingualism and multilingualism, nor does it address the uptake of officially-recognised minority languages by children. Building on data already in the public domain, the linguistic survey field team will travel to the four districts of Sikkim and visit local schools and administrative offices in order to better understand the complex linguistic reality of the Sikkimese state.

According to its Objects and Functions, as articulated in the *Charter of Incorporation of the Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology* of October 28, 1958, NIT shall sponsor and promote research on a range of subjects including linguistics. It is both fitting and timely that almost 50 years after its establishment, this internationally-renowned centre of research and learning should be the institutional home for the first linguistic survey of Sikkim of the 21st century. Directed by a field linguist with 15 years of research experience across the greater Himalayan region, NIT will provide logistical backing to a small project team who will combine data analysis from existing sources, GPS data readings and mapping with empirical field trips to make an inventory of all of the languages spoken in Sikkim and determine the number of speakers.

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