Chalipaikha (ক্রণ্ট্রেম্): The Language of Chali



Bhutanese has some two dozen languages spoken in the country. The language of Chali, or Chalipaikha, is one of the exotic endemic languages of Bhutan. Chali is one of the seventeen *gewog* (क्रिल्ल) under Mongar district in eastern Bhutan. It is about 17km from the Mongar town. It lies on the highway towards Lhuntse Dzongkhag and its cluster of 270 households comprise a resident population of about 2,200 people. The village is nestled on a gentle slope overlooking the Kurichu river.

According to local lore, Chali village is named after the letter 'cha' ($^{\mathfrak{S}}$) as the village is seen in the shape of this letter from Tsamang village, which lies opposite Chali on the other side of the river. Chali language is different from other eastern Bhutanese languages spoken around the Chali area, and besides there it is only spoken in a small part of Trashigang district. The Chali dialect is spoken in three villages of Gonpa Chali, Wengmakhar and Chali itself.

In the south, the Chali speaking area begins at the Ganggola pass north of Mongar township. The main Chali speaking villages are Chali village and neighboring village of Wangmakhar, and the language is also spoken in the tiny hamlets surrounding these two villages. To the west the Chali speaking area is bound by the Kurichu and to the north by the Threwenchu, a lateral tributary of the Kurichu. The easternmost Chali speaking hamlet is Gortshom, which lies on the ridge above Chali village. One third of houses in Tormazhong village, where the main language is Chochangachakha (

[5] Saproximately one-third of the households are also reported to speak Chali. The

people of Chali call their language Chalipaikha ($= \sqrt{2} \sqrt{2} \sqrt{2}$). The Chali speaking area is bordered to the north and west by the Chochangachakha speaking areas, and to the south and east by the Tshangla speaking areas.

The people have no idea of the historical origin of linguistics but there are two versions stories of origin of the Chali language in the local folklore. According to one story, people believed that the dialect spoken in Chali is one of the most difficult to understand. When Guru Rinpoche travelled across the world to distribute the languages from his sack and gave different languages to different communities and when Guru Rinpoche reached Chali, he ran out of languages. When people implored for a language, Guru Rinpoche emptied the sack of all leftovers. Thus, Chali language is said to be consisted of words from many languages including some Indian languages. People of Chali, often after a few sips of alcohol, narrate such stories of ancestry and origin with great pride.

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