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## Chapter-3

### THE MONPAS OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

#### 3.1 Profile of the Tawang Monpa

##### 3.1.1 The Land

Arunachal Pradesh, the erstwhile North East Frontier agency (NEFA), is situated in the north east extreme of the country. It lies between 26 28' to 29 30' North latitudes and 91 30' to 97 30' east latitudes. It shares a long international boundary with Bhutan to the West, China to the North and North East, and Myanmar to the east. It also shares national boundary with Nagaland in the east and south east and Assam in the south. It is a homeland to 26 major tribes and further divided into more than 150 smaller sub tribes. It has the lowest density of population in the north eastern region with only 17 persons per square kilometer as per 2011 census. However, it is the largest of the seven north eastern states in area covering 83,743 square kilometers. As per 2021 census, the total population of the state has been estimated as 1,748,873. Arunachal Pradesh is divided into twenty-two districts with Itanagar as the capital town. Tawang is one of the districts of Arunachal Pradesh. It has an area of about 2085 square kilometers. The district is located in the mighty Himalayas and has a rugged terrain with mountains and deep valleys at an altitude ranging between 3,500 to 22,500 feet from the sea level. It is situated in the western part of Arunachal Pradesh bounded by Tibet (China) in the north, Bhutan on the west and south west and West Kameng district of the state on the eastern and south eastern side. It is located between 27 25', 27 55' North latitudes, 91 35' and 92 20' East longitudes.

##### 3.1.2 The People

The native people inhabiting the Tawang district are called as the *Monpa*. The term *Monpa* consists of two terms *Mon* and *Pa*. The term *Mon* is a blanket term used by the Tibetans in the past to designate many of its southern neighboring regions consisting of Ladakh, Lahaul, Sikkim, western Nepal, Bhutan, Menchuka of west Siang district, Tuting of Upper Siang, West Kameng and Tawang districts of Arunachal Pradesh (Norbu, 2008) and *Pa* means people. The great Indian Saint Guru Padmashambav, in his text, *Pema Kathang*, mentions about leaving an impression of his body on the rock upon which he meditated in the southern land of *Mon*, which is known as *Mon Bumthang* presently in Bhutan. Some historical documents mention about *Mon Paro* and *Mon Thingpu* in Bhutan and *Mon Tsona* presently Tibet (China). Similarly, the present state Sikkim was known

as *Mon Denjong*. From these accounts, it becomes clear that the term “*Mon*” or “*Monyul*” of ancient time encompasses large territories.

R.S. Stein (1972) in his book, *Tibetan Civilization*, also writes,

“...the south, whose inhabitants had not thus far been organized into states, was lumped together under the name *Mon*. it appears that it is a blanket term used by the Tibetans to designate certain neighboring regions lying to their south”

The Monpas are one of the major tribes of the state inhabiting the entire Tawang district and Dirang and Kalaktang Sub divisions of West Kameng district. The *Monpas* are the largest Buddhist tribe of the state and profess *Mahayana* sect of Buddhism. The *Monpas* are geographically divided into three sections based on the region viz., the *Tawang Monpas*, or the *Northern Monpas*, the *Dirang Monpas* or the *Central Monpas* and the *Kalaktang Monpas* or the *Southern Monpas*. All of the three groups of the *Monpas* have similarity in traditions, customs, and culture except to the differences in the dialects found between people of the Tawang on one side and of the Dirang and Kalaktang on the other side.

Based on geographical location and differences in dialect they are divided broadly into three groups, Dirang Monpa, Kalaktang Monpa and Tawang Monpa. The Monpas of Dirang and Kalaktang term the Monpas of Tawang as *Brami*. The Monpas of Kalaktang and Dirang collectively are called as *Tsangla*. The Tawang Monpas call themselves as *Sherchokpa* (people of the east).

Geographically, Tawang Monpas can be roughly divided into five sub groups- the natives of Zemithang are known as *Pangchenpa*, *Dhakpanengpa* for the people of *Dhakpaneng* area, *Mago- Thingbu* for the people of *Thingbu*, *Tsogsumpa* for the people of *Tsogsum* area, and *Shyopa* for the people of Shyo village.

The Monpas are mild, gentle, courteous and good humoured and hardworking people. Dr. Verrier Elwin describes them as “gentle, friendly, courteous, industrious, good to animals, good to children, you see in Monpas the influence of the compassionate Lord Buddha on the ordinary man”. They are also hospitable by nature. The wonderful hospitality accorded to visitors by the Monpas is testified by Captain F.M. Bailey (1913), who toured extensively in the North east Frontier. He writes, “the people had cushions for us to sit on, in front of each of which was a small table on which a plantain leaf was laid as table

cloth, a fire burnt in the middle of the room, on which cooked corn cobs which they mix and make us a brew of *Marwa* beer during the long days when we oblige to wait for fresh transport. Sometimes they would come out to greet us with burning incense in their hands which they would fix in front of us when we sit down and which were later carried before us when we departed.” They are cheerful in disposition and light hearted by nature. They are the most industrious tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. Monpas are generally fond of music and dance. However, with the change of time and globalization they have acquired considerable business acumen and shrewdness in economic matters (Norbu,2008).

### **3.1.3 Origin and Nature**

Ethnologically, the *Monpas* belong to the *Tibeto Mongoloid* stock. The Monpas of Tawang, Dirang and Kalaktang, though are geographically distinct share a common tradition of having migrated from Tibet and Bhutan. However, there is no written record or account of the migration and settlement in this area. It is however certain that they did not migrate to their present habitats at a time in a single wave. The migration must have taken place over centuries, involving many groups who were on the move under unknown historical predicaments. The oldest record wherein we find mention of this land is the Tibetan epic legendary King *Ling Gyaser* (Norbu. 2008). Some scholars place King *Ling Gyaser* in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. he is said to have fought and defeated King *Shingtri* of the Southern Mon. The place Monyul finds mention in the biography of *Khando Drowa Zangmo*, which dates back to 7<sup>th</sup> century. In the book, we find the mention of a place where today the famous *Tawang Monastery* stands. The ruins below the *Yusum* village in Tawang is said to be the remains of the parental house of *Gyepo Kala Wangpo*’s first wife, *Duomo Hashang*. There is a belief that the black stupa located at *Dham Gonchung* near *Merak* in Bhutan is the tomb of *Duomo Hashang*.

## **3.2 Cultural life of the Tawang Monpa**

### **3.2.1 Festival**

The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh celebrate numbers of festivals as per their tradition and customs. Each tribe has one or more festivals, which are celebrated with great pomp and show along with religious fervors. During these festivals, numerous rites and rituals are performed followed by sacrifice of animals like Pigs, fowls, and Mithuns etc. dance, foods, drinks locally known as *Apong* or *Chang* form an important part of the festivals. Now a day, all the community with few exceptions celebrate the festivals on a fixed date.

Some of the prominent festivals celebrated by the different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh are *Nyokum Yullo* (Nyishis), *Solung* (Adis), *Mopin* (Galos), *Lossar* (Monpas & Shertukpens), *Dree* (Apatanis), *Chalo Loku* (Noctes), *Reh* (Idu Mishmis), *Si- Donyi* (Tagins), *Sangken* (Khamptis & Singphos), *Ojiyale* (Wanchos), *Boori Boot* (Hill Miris), *Chindang* (Mijis/ Sajolangs), *Nyechi Dow* (Aka Hrusso), and *Mol* (Tangsas) etc., Like other communities of Arunachal Pradesh, the *Monpa* also celebrate a number of festivals throughout the year. Majority of the festivals have religious background. Every festival has a history and significance of its own.

### 3.2.1.1 Lossar

*Lossar* (New year) is one of the most important festivals of the Monpas. *Lossar* is an agricultural festival. It falls mostly on the first day of the first month of the Lunar calendar. It mostly falls on the last part of the February or early part of March, but the exact date varies from year to year. This festival is celebrated with lots of pomp and gaiety.

Preparation of the festival starts from the middle part of the twelfth month. All kinds of edible items required for the festival are purchased before the starting of the festival. *Khabse*<sup>1</sup> a special delicacy sweet is prepared in every household of the said community. Every family rich or poor, big or small according to its capacity prepare itself for the celebration of the festival. Houses are cleaned, new clothes are purchased for every member of the family, the house altars are decorated, the houses are painted.

On the last day before the starting of the festival the houses are cleaned. Cleaning of the house on the first day of the festival is considered in auspicious. A special porridge on the last day before the festival is prepared for the family called as the “*guthuk*”<sup>2</sup> for dinner. Dough balls made of flour is made containing substances like salt, stone, chilly, wool, cotton, coal, butter, zanthoxylum, scroll of papers contains the names of moon or sun are added to the boiling porridge. When the porridge is served, each of the member is given one such dumpling. Each of these substances have a significance of its own. For example, the one who gets chili is thought to be troublesome and short-tempered person, wool indicates soft hearted while coal indicates one who is lazy and butter represents soft

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<sup>1</sup> A sweet delicacy which is prepared by the Monpas a week before the Lossar

<sup>2</sup> A special porridge prepared for good luck and prosperity

spoken. After the porridge is consumed by all the members of the family the left overs are collected in a container. An effigy of malevolent spirit is made of dough. Each member is given a piece of the dough which is rubbed in the whole body of an individual. The dough will then be collected with the left-over porridge and thrown in the tri junction path, or cross roads. This rite symbolizes the banishment of all malignant spirits and demonic forces that could harm the family, and ensure prosperity and well-being of the family.



**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**

### **Dough prepared by the monks of Tawang Monastery for a ritual performed during Lossar**

On thirteenth day of the last month, houses are decorated with colour papers flowers hanging from the ceiling, walls are decorated with flour or lime, depicting auspicious signs. The source of water resource is tied with a white scarf, and dabs of butter are applied on it. Offerings in the form of Khabse, dry fruits, beer, tea-bricks, sweets etc., are arranged finely on tables in the chapel, kitchen, dining room and sitting room. All these are done as a form of good omen for the pursing year (*Temre*<sup>3</sup>).

On the first day of the Lossar, one member from each family first go to draw the year's first bucket of water from the stream or water tap. The water drawn on the early morning are considered as purified and sanctified, because it has been cleansed by the starlight of the night before. before drawing the water, incense is burnt, *khada*<sup>4</sup> is tied round the tap,

<sup>3</sup> A ritual for good wishes and prosperity

<sup>4</sup> A religious scarf which is used in most of the religious activities in the community

and *Khabse* and *Chang*<sup>5</sup> is being offered to appease the benevolent spirits and the *Nagas*<sup>6</sup> for peaceful and prosperous new year. At homes the members of the family dress up in the best clothes and jewelry and offer prayers in the family altar for a prosperous and calamity free new year. All the members after offering their prayers sit according to their seniority and the home makers serve *chemar*, hot *changkol*, wheat porridge, *Khabse*, sweet rice, tea etc., on the first day of the festival the members of the family generally prefer to stay back at their homes. However, many go to wish their spiritual gurus for the coming year as well as to take blessings.

From the second day, the people visit their relatives and friends. Guests are usually entertained with sumptuous meals. Between the meals they entertain themselves with traditional games like dice, cards, *mahjong*, sing songs and dance. Young boys try their skills in archery and young girls play *thippi*. On the third day colorful flags are being raised for prosperity and good luck. Some visit the local monasteries to seek blessing from the gods and goddess for their long life and prosperity. Dances like *Yak dance* and *Aji Lhamo* are being performed in the villages during the festival. The festival is celebrated for a total of fifteen days and sometimes even for a longer time in some places.

### 3.2.2.2 Choekor

Another agricultural festival celebrated with great pomp and show by the Monpa people is *Choekar*. After the crops are sown and when there are little agricultural activities, *Choekar* rite is being organized at villages with the aim of providing supernatural protection to the crops, for good harvest and to drive away evil spirits which could harm the village and the community. *Choekar* in Monpa dialect means moving around of holy scriptures and texts in and around the villages. The ceremony is celebrated a few days before by recitation of holy texts such as *Kangyur*, *Tengyur*, *Bum* or *Gye-Tong* by village priests and monks. After the recitations of the holy texts the village priest would guard the text the whole night. The next day around twenty villagers dressed as *Arpo* (army/protectors) assemble in the village shrine or community hall where *Kyongyapa* (the singer) through his songs and chants propitiates the deity for protection of the participants in the *choekar* ceremony from the evil spirits. Thereafter the procession starts with *male kyengpa*, head priest and his assistant, one *kongyokpa*. The villagers in their traditional

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<sup>5</sup> A traditional local beverage which is prepared especially for Lossar

<sup>6</sup> A term used for a deity who takes the form of a snake representing rebirth, death and mortality

attires carry holy texts and images of Lord Buddha and deities on their back with some villagers carrying holy flags in hands, and the female *kyengpa* at the end, would go around the village temple and agricultural fields seeking protection and prosperity. The *kyengpa* while on the move perform funny dance moves. It is believed that the evil spirits become so engrossed in watching their funny dance moves that they forget to cause any harm. The procession halts at a certain place where the priest perform a ritual of purification and cleansing. The villagers participating in the procession are enlightened with refreshments arranged by the members of the village. The singers perform on the song composed by *Ling Geysar*<sup>7</sup> while the dances perform carrying the sword in outwardly position. The *arpos* even compete themselves in ballad competitions. The outwardly sword represents going on war with the evil spirits. While returning back to the village shrine, the sword is kept in inwardly position symbolizing win over the evil spirits. the procession ends at the village shrine or community hall where the priest, *kangyokpa*, *arpo* and *kyenpa* are received at the entrance to the shrine or community hall by the *machen*, the main person responsible for making arrangements on the occasion of *choekar* ceremony. Before entering the shrine, the *arpos* would pray for all things good, healthy and happiness. Rest of the evening is spent in drinking, singing and dancing.

### 3.2.2 Games and Sports

There are a number of traditional Games and Sports played by the Monpas. Games and sports play a very important part in the recreational lives of the Monpas. The traditional games played by the people are very simple and require minimum equipment. Some of the indigenous games played by the Monpas are as follows:

#### 3.2.2.1 Archery

Archery (*mle than*) is one of the most loved and played game among the young and old men of the said community. It is one of the most loved outdoor game and integral part of the Lossar festival. The bows and arrows are made of bamboo. The target each measuring about six inches by eighteen inches are set up at both the ends of the range, which is usually about 120 meters, in length. Competition is usually held in groups and individuals. Competitions are being held where trophy is being announced for the winners. In

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<sup>7</sup> One of four ancestral sovereigns of Shambala, representing the quintessence of the Tibetan Warrior tradition.



individual competitions, the one who hits the target first takes the total stacked amount, or his stacked amount as agreed beforehand. During the break they enjoy drinks, tea and snacks.



**Figure 3**



**Figure 4**

**Pictures of traditional games played during Lossar**

#### **3.2.2.2 Sho**

It is a game of Dice played by three players. It is played by using two dices, which are shaken in the wooden bowl and is upturned on a circular thick leather strap with a loud thumping noise done by the players. Small shells (*Cowries*) are kept to keep the score in the game.

#### **3.2.2.3 Mahjong**

It is an adapted Chinese game played by four persons with dominoes and dice. The players pick up the dominoes one by one and discard until one of them has the winning combination. It involves a great deal of concentration and gambling.

#### **3.2.2.4 Thippi**

It is a traditional game mostly played by the women folks of the said community. A set of shuttle cock is made with the help of the bird's feather which is then fixed in the hole on a flat round metal. It is tossed in the air, using the feet. The person who scores the maximum number of scores wins the game. It is believed in the community that the feathers earlier used were that of the vultures found in the community. Now a days the artificial feathers from the market are being used.

### **3.2.2.5 Lemgor**

Another favorite game played among the young and the old. This game is mostly played by the monks residing in the monasteries during their leisure hours after fulfilling their monastic duties and responsibilities. On a piece of ground, a line is drawn and all the participants stand behind the line. A target is fixed at the other end at a distance of about 25 meters. The players then one by one try to hit the target with the help of the lemgor (a flattened circular stone). The one who hits the target is declared as the winner.

### **3.2.2.6 Lai**

Another traditional game played by both the men and women folk of the community. Lai, a flat round shaped seed from a well grown wild tree found in the forest of the community. A number of lais are arranged on the ground. One *lai* is used as a striker to strike the other lais kept in a line in a far distance. The player holds one *lai* in between the crossed index fingers, strike the lais arranged on the ground. The one who hits the target is declared as the winner.

### **3.2.2.7 Punggor**

This game is played mostly by the village folks of the community. This game resembles the shot put with a slight change in the technique while throwing. A round stone weighing about three to four kilograms, is held in between the palm of the hand and hurled from the level of the shoulder. Whoever is able to throw the stone to the far without any foul is declared as the winner.

### **3.2.3 Dance**

Dances are an integral part of the Monpa Culture. The dances performed in the Monpa Community can be roughly divided into three major groups: Monastic, Non-Monastic and Recreational dances. Monastic dances are those dances which can be performed only in the premises of the monastery under strict rules and regulations set up by the members of the monastery. These dances require years of practice and vigorous training by the senior monks of the monastery. Only the lamas residing in the monastery can learn and perform the dances. These dances are performed during the festival celebrated in the monastery called as Torgya. Non-Monastic dances are the dances which are generally performed by the natives of the community. They are performed in the villages. The

interested people from the villages are being given training by the senior dancers of the community. Anyone from the community can participate in these dances. Pantomime dances are the specialized dances performed in this category. Recreational dances are a kind of dances which can be performed at any occasion. These dances are called as *broh*. They are not a part of any festival or ritual and anybody can take part in these dances. There is no costume involved in these dances. They do not require any kind of training but the new dancers learn the dances by imitating their elders. The dancers stand in a queue or form a circle, holding each other's hand on either side. As they sing, they swing their arms back and forth, take one step forward or sideways, halt and again take one step back to their original position. Some of the famous pantomime dances are as below:

### 3.2.3.1 Yak Pantomime

This is one of the most popular pantomimes among the Monpas. This is in local term called as the *Thoipagali* the man who brought yak in the *Monyul* region. This dance is performed in the villages during the *Lossar*. In this dance, a dummy yak is made by covering the body frame of bamboo with black cloth and setting a wooden head on it. An image of a goddess *Palden Lhamo* (Guardian Deity) with upraised hands is placed on its back of the body frame is carried about by two persons who dance in the tunes played by the drums and cymbals. Four men representing *Thoipagali* and his sons dance round the yak narrating the origin of the Yak.



**Figure 5**

**Picture of Yak and Palden Lhamo during the performance of Yak pantomime**

### 3.2.3.2 Achi Lhamo Dance

This masked dance drama is associated with the *Thangtong Gyalpo*, the 14<sup>th</sup> century highly recognized lama, respected teacher and self-made bridge engineer. This dance drama acts as a way of telling moral tales, based on Buddhist Philosophy. Achi Lhamo is performed in the villages in the outdoors for four to five days. It involves five characters- *Gyali*, *Nyapa*, *Nyaro*, *Lhamo* and *Lhum*. These dancers dance to the tunes of drums and Cymbals.



**Figure 6**  
**Actors ready to perform Aji Lhamo dance**

### 3.2.3.3 Lion dance

This dance is performed during Lossar and other festive occasions. According to the Legend there was a sage performing meditation on the Mount *Gangri Karpo*. The two mountain Lions witnessed the saint meditating. Impressed by the saint's religiosity, the lions offered milk to the saint for its sustenance and hence they became good friends. This dance is performed to celebrate the friendship between the saint and the good deeds of the two animals. This dance celebrates the friendship between man and animal.





**Figure 7**

**Picture of Senge Cham (Lion Dance)**

### **3.2.3.4 Kyeng Cham**

This dance is performed during the Choekor ceremony. After reading of religious scriptures is over in the villages Buddhist text and images of Lord Buddha and other Buddhist deities is carried out in the villages for procession round the village and agricultural fields. *Keng Cham* forms an integral part of this procession, where two young men wearing monkey like masks and a wooden phallus perform the dance with erotic movements. The dancers are called as *Kiengpas* and the dance is called as *Keng Cham*. It is believed among the Monpas that evil spirits that cause harm to the crops and the village become so engaged in watching the dance that they forget to harm the crops and the village. Thus, bringing prosperity in the village.



**Figure 8**

**Picture of Kyeng Cham**

### **3.2.4 Art and Crafts**

Monpas are considered as great craftsmen. They have a glorious heritage of arts and crafts. Theirs craftsmanship can be manifested in various trades like weaving, bamboo work, woodwork, painting, clay making, pottery, traditional paper making, stone work, hat making, shoe making incense making, needle work etc. Monpa craftsmen are involved in farming and other rural activities and they devote only a section of their time in the production of objects. There is no separate class of artisans and one is free to take any craft associated with their skill and masters. Monpa artisans are respected in the society for their services are inevitable in their socio-cultural life. Anybody having interest in the works can learn and make it. Monpa artisans are paid a respectable status in the Monpa society as they are considered to be serving to the community. They are paid in either cash or in kind.



**Figure 9**



**Figure 10,**



**Figure 11**

### **Pictures of few traditional Arts and Crafts**

### **3.2.5 Marriage System**

The Monpa society is patrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal. The family comprises the parents and their unmarried children. The head of the house is usually the executive head of the family. Monogamy is the common form of marriage; earlier practice of polyandry has ceased to exist in recent years. This freedom in exchange helps them to choose a suitable partner according to their likes. There is no prescribed rule of conduct of the marriage ceremony in the Monpa society and the bride price purely depends upon the consideration of either parties. The Monpas do not have any preferential type of marriage even though their predilection for a cross-cousin marriage. Parallel cousin marriage is however strictly prohibited. Marriages between the three groups of the Monpa, viz. Dirang, Tawang and Kalaktang is though socially

sanctioned. The *lamas* (monks) and the *anis* (nuns) are not allowed to marry. Divorce is permitted but its number is less in the society. After the divorce a woman can go for remarriage. Widow remarriage is permitted in the society (Lama, 1999). Marriage by capture, however, is unheard of in the Monpa society.

The system of bride price has been in widespread practice since time immemorial which continues till today in Monpa Society. Yet the concept of bride price, is not looked upon as the price for the bride but it is simply an instrument to join bride and groom together and adopt a social recognition as legal partners in life (Lama, 1999). A system of payment of bride price is in vogue, normally it is paid in kind, constituting of yak, sheep, horse, cow and cloths etc. the boys and girls in the Monpa society are given full liberty to mix freely without any restrictions. *Dhongzan* is the local term for bride price in Tawang Monpa dialect. It is in fact the nursing money.<sup>8</sup>

Monpas view on marriage are very liberal. Marriage is considered as very personal and individual thing, and not a religious duty. It is regarded as a social affair rather than a religious affair. Therefore, not much ritual is involved. The Monpa term, for the institution of marriage is called as *nyen*. The motive behind marriage for the Monpa is procreation, close companions extending cooperation and sharing economic burden, and of course for biopsychic need of sexual gratification. The discharge of household's work is shared by both the partners. All difficult and heavy works are carried out by the husband and the wife does all the light household work like fetching of water, cooking, rearing of child, etc.

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<sup>8</sup> During marriage this word often comes up. It basically means after both families agree and organises a send-off ceremony for the bride to the groom's house. The bride's parents generously give presents like livestock, cash, clothing, and jewellery as send-off gifts, etc to start a new life for their daughter. It's a kind of a seed money or property to start with, so some translations may be nursing money. Words like Bride's price, Dowry, Dehez etc are little outdated now, so people use words such nursing money or seed money or bride family's gifts etc. although entity wise, they mean the same.



**Figure 12**

**Marriage picture of a Monpa Couple**

**3.2.6 Dress and Ornaments**

The costumes and adornments of the Monpas are many and varied. The Monpa men folk wear a short woolen trouser called *kangnom* or a full length woolen trouser called *dhorna*. They usually dress in red colored woolen jacket called *Chupa* and also a customary well-tailored coat called *khanjar*. Commonly, they wear a cap called as *zom* made of yak's fur with five tassels jutting down on the legs they wear a traditional full shoe called as *lham*. The Monpa woman wear a red colored gown with white strips called *shinka* covering the body, right from the shoulders to the knee and is tied at the waist, and a flat rectangular piece of woolen cloth is worn at the back. Monpa women wear a lot of jewelry made of red beads or turquoises which are traditionally transferred from mother to the daughter. The ornaments are generally considered as an index of their wealth. Some of the ornaments are *Son-dhup* (finger-ring), *Nyon-dhup* (bangles), *Kaykor* (necklace), *Along* (earring), *Grokha* (Brooch) (Norbu,2008).

The costumes of the monks and the nuns are different because of their higher and respectable status of the society, but the colour of the garments always be saffron and red hues.



### **3.2.7 Food Habits**

The food of the people is largely determined by its agricultural practices, availability of vegetables. Millet is grown abundantly in the district and thus, the staple food of the Monpas. They also eat rice, maize, barley, wheat, buckwheat and various pulses. Monpas eat lots of chili. *Chamin*, the chili pastes, which is prepared by grinding chilies with fermented cheese, called as *Churpi* is invariably used in the preparation. Meat and fish though form a part of their diet but these are dependent upon availability. It is seen that the lams of the monastery are purely vegetarian and common people have no restriction in consuming of non-vegetarian items. Home brewed liquor also form an integral part of their food habits. The drinks are prepared rice, maize, millet and buck wheat. Taking of tea made up of salt and butter is one of their favorite drinks (Biswal,2006).

### **3.2.8 Settlement and Dwellings**

The settlements of the Tawang Monpas are permanent nature. The villages are situated on the slopes of the hills, while some of the villages are extended along the side of the streams. The numbers of the households in a village varies from 50 to 200 or so. The houses were mainly built of stones and timbers and are double storied. But many of the houses are built with modern materials such as cement and bricks. The household activities are centered on the hearth (*Medrang*) situated at the center of an elongated house and the family chapel (*Choisom*) is located at the rear end, just opposite to the main entrance of the house. The Monpas are good artisans and designers. Most of the household goods and the decorated items are produced by themselves. The males are generally involved in wood carving and the women are experts in carpet weaving.

### **3.2.9 Economic Organization**

A few decades ago, the Monpas of tawang lived more or less in isolation due to geographical barriers. As a result, they had a subsistence economy based mainly on primitive type of agriculture supplemented by animal husbandry; a bit of trade and cottage industries. With the change of agriculture has become the primary occupation of the Monpas. A greater part of their lands is under permanent cultivation. They also practice shifting cultivation but on a smaller scale. They are adept to terrace cultivation-both wet and dry. Paddy is grown on wet fields in the lower parts of the valleys.

With regard to their agricultural practices, Miss Neeru Nanda writes, “The Monpas are by far the best and the most sophisticated cultivators in Arunachal Pradesh, matched perhaps only by the Apatanis. A number of the advanced agricultural practices being recommended these days by the Agricultural scientists have been in vogue in Monpa areas since beginning”. In a techno- economic survey carried out by the national council of applied economic research in 1967, it is reported that,” ---Another region in NEFA where a high standard in agriculture has been reached is the Monpa area of West Kameng (tawang included). Terraces have been built up on gentle slopes and, wherever possible, gravitational irrigation is provided. Ploughs are used, drawn by bullocks and *jamos* (*dzos*). The Monpas are aware of the importance of manuring. Oak leaves are collected and soaked in night soil and later the compost is spread in the fields. Maize, wheat, buck wheat, millet and paddy are important crops. The limited area on which paddy can be grown has made rice a highly valued cereal in the area. It represents only about a ten percent of the total crops. Cultural practices are a little advanced and the stand well in comparison to those who practiced in the rest of the country” (Norbu,2008).

### **3.2.10 Treating Illness**

It is generally seen that the Monpas consult a Lama during illness that in turn checks the patient with the book called *Ngak Bum*, which is claimed to have magic formulas for curing of as many as 424 diseases. The Lama then consults the religious text, finds out the relevant verses as per the indication of ailment, treats, the water with spells and offers the same to ill person to drink the same for recovery. However, in most cases the lama recommends the recitation of a particular text along with the performance of its related rituals. The lama then puts ritual materials and offerings on the alter and then make two *Tormas* to transfer the ailments from the diseased person to the *Tormas* and touches different parts of the body of the ailing person. Then the lama keeps the *Tormas* on the floor and offers some prayers and read the texts. After the rituals, these two *Tormas* are thrown at the outer reaches of the village as an offering to the evil spirits in order to please the spirit and leave the body of the ailing person (Biswal, 2006).

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