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CHAPTER-5

THE TAWANG MONASTERY

4.1 Tawang Monastery- Its Historical Background

Before the advent of Buddhism in the Mon region, the people here practiced a system of shamanism popularly known as the Bon Religion, the indigenous religion same as which was practiced in Tibet once. The followers of this religion are called as *Bonpos*. Bon religion is primarily concerned with propitiation of the spirits or gods such as upper gods (*teng lha*), the atmosphere and sky (*tsan*), the inhabits of the earth (*bar tsan*), and snake bodied beings called as the (*lu*) inhabiting the bottoms of the lakes, rivers, or any water-logged area. There are also spirits called as *nyen* that resides in the trees and rocks, *sadak* (lords of the ground), *yul- lha* (gods of the region), etc. it is believed that these spirits have the powers to cause disasters if they are offended or not pleased. These spirits are worshipped with the aim to bring mundane benefits to all the sentient beings. But with the advent of the Buddhism in the Mon region, people started adopting Buddhism leaving aside their own folk practices. However, we still can see some glimpses of this religion still in this region. They have not been completely forgotten.

It is quite evident that Buddhism began to spread into the Mon region for the first time in the seventh century A.D when Tawang, then known as *Yul Mandrelgang*, was ruled by a king called as *Kala Wangpo*. This reference can be seen in *Khandroma Drowa Sangmo's* biography, which says that, “after 1500 years of the passing of the Buddha,” which corresponds roughly to the 10th or 11th century). There are many stories behind the Establishment of Buddhism to these regions also stories on the construction of the Monastery. This large monastery has a network of prayer halls, assembly halls, a library, and an accommodation of as many as 500 monks. The new element that has been very recently added was the introduction of a common mess for the resident monks of the monastery. This was established with the aim to establish equality and a cordial environment in the monastery.

Buddhism is broadly divided into sects and many sub sects. They are *Nyingmapa*, *Gelukpa*, *Drukpa* and *Sakya*. The people living in the Mon region are the followers of the Gelukpa sect also known as the Yellow Hat Sect. There had always existed a bitter relationship in terms of thoughts and ideas between these sects. After the bitter battle fought between the Yellow Sect and the Black sects, then came peace and prosperity. The

Tawang Monastery grew in wealth and in fact by the end of the 19th century CE it owned a number of villages' even levying taxes on them. In 1844, the monastery signed two agreements with the British East India Company surrendering parts of its land. Finally, the area came under the complete control of British India after the Shimla accord of 1914, signed between British India Tibet and China which clearly demarcated the boundary between India and Tibet.

Today the Tawang Monastery is a complex structure of more than 65 buildings built over centuries. It holds a priceless collection of old scriptures, rare paintings, manuscripts and a towering 18th foot high gilded image of Lord Buddha right in the center of the Monastery with *Palden Lhamu* as the guardian deity protecting the people living in the region.

The monastery was not only a base for propagation of the Gelukpa tradition in the region but was also a military post against all external threats. There used to be trapdoor in the first floor of all quarters, which were used for tactical move during skirmishes. Niranjana Sarkar (1980) thus writes, "Mera Lama gave so much importance to the second aspect that he lifted all prohibitions against military activities from inmates of the monastery. This attitude is also reflected in the quantum of monthly rations. Out of the monthly allowances of thirteen *bre*¹ of cereal, as much as ten are said to be given as an inducement to actively join in the defense of this area". Many people have no knowledge about the role played by the monks in defense of the monastery and the region; hence have misconception that the monastery used to oppress the general populace by levying heavy taxes.

Up to the right side of the monastery lies the *Chamlang*, the dance ground, where rehearsal of the *Cham* (monastic/ ritual dances), are performed during the Torgya festival. Few meters apart are the sacred grove of trees on the right side and bamboos on the left side. Rows of prayer wheels are set in the niches all along the wall, which are spanned by the devotees to accumulate wisdom and merit and to purify negativities. In continuation to the wall is a small building housing a huge *Dung-gyur Mani*. At the core of the *Mani* cylinder is an axle called *Sogshing* around which is wound scrolls with one hundred million Mani mantra of *Avalokiteshvara* written on it. A bell is suspended from the roof of this building with a string. The wooden lever sticking out from the top pole of the Mani strikes

¹ a local unit of measurement of cereal, equal to about one kilogram of wheat

the string of the bell with each rotation of the Mani producing a clucking sound. Adjoined to it on its eastern side is another hutlike structure with a smaller Mani inside. This prayer wheel is stuffed with scrolls of paper with the mantras of the deity *Dorjee Namjam* printed on it. Local people believe that the water coming out of this structure has healing power to cure sicknesses caused by contamination, pollution or defilement. This complex as a whole is known as *Mani- Dungyur- Tsikhang*. (Every child from this community has its childhood memories related to this Mani). This *Tsikhang*² was the only major source of water from where the water was collected and fletched for the use in the monastery prior to the provision of modern-day water supply in the monastery. As per the old age custom, the repairing and maintenance of the structure housing of the Manis are care taken by the people of *Muktur* villages of *Dakpanang* area for free (Community Service).

A little ahead we find the gate called *Kakaling*. It measures about 7.80 meters in length and 7.25 meters. In breadth is a hutlike structure constructed with stone. Its ceiling is painted with nine *Kyilkhors* (mandala). This gateway serves as a tool for guiding individuals along the path of enlightenment. Its most important and imposing building of the monastery stands on the northern side of the courtyard. It is a double stored building built in traditional Trans- Himalayan Buddhist architectural Style. The ground floor of the monastery is called as *Dukhang*, the main prayer hall/ assembly hall.

The southern wall of the monastery is painted with the paintings of *Tsering Druk* (Six symbols of longevity) and *Thunpa Punshi* (Four Harmonious Brothers). Six symbols of longevity are represented by *Mi Tsering* (long living man), *Ja Tsering* (long living bird), *Ridhak Tsering* (long living deer), *Sheng Tsering* (long living tree), *Drak Tsering* (long living rocky cave) and *Chu Tsering* (long living water). This painting reminds us to adopt a harmonious relationship with the natural order. It speaks of unity, integrity, friendship and generosity and selflessness for the greater good.

² A natural traditional water source.



Figure 13
Entry Gate of the Monastery



Figure 14



Figure 15
People's participation during Torgya Festival

4.2 Torgya- A festival of the Tawang Monastery

The historic Tawang Monastery covering the peak of a hillock at a height of about 10000 feet, this monastery (gompa) is located in the picturesque Tawang Chu Valley in Tawang District of Arunachal Pradesh, the birth place of the sixth Dalai Lama. Although not steeped in antiquity, being about 350 years old, the monastery is the largest of its kind in the country and controls 17 Gompas in this region. It is the fountainhead of spiritual life of the followers of the Gelukpa Sect of the Mahayana School Sherdukpens of Tawang and West Kameng Districts of Arunachal Pradesh but also the socio-cultural institute having a tremendous influence on their culture and on their day-to-day life affairs.

To understand the historical background of the monastery, it is necessary to know about the introduction and spread of Buddhism, especially that of the Gelukpa sect, to the Monyul region. Before the advent of Buddhism in the region, they practiced a form of Shamanism generally referred to as Bon, the indigenous religion of the Tibet. Followers of the Bon were known as *Bonpo*.

It is quite probable that Buddhism began to spread into the Mon region for the first time in the seventh century A.D. when Tawang was known as *Yul Mandrelgang* and was ruled by a king called as *Kala Wangpo*. To establish Buddhism in Monyul region a monastery was decided to be constructed. It was Merak lama who was designated by the 5th Dalai Lama residing in Tibet to look after the overall construction of the said monastery. It was establishing earlier as an administrative post by the Tibetan government which later on became one of the most significant religious and cultural sites for the followers of Buddhism around the world.

The fifth Dalai Lama, *Nagwang Lobjang Gyatso*, gave Merak Lama the mandate to establish this monastery. He gave him a ball of yarn as the measurement of the Monastery. It was constructed in 1680-81. As the legend goes, he went out in search of the perfect site for the monastery. One day he went into a cave, leaving behind his horse, to pray for divine guidance. When he came out after his prayers, he found that his horse, who had never strayed away before, missing. After a frantic search he finally located the horse which was standing quietly on the top of a hill which was called as *Tana Man Dekhang*. There once stood a palace of one of the kings of Tawang called as *Gyalpo Kala Wangpo*. He immediately realized that divinity had guided him through the horse to the hallowed

spot where he decided to construct the monastery. He called it Tawang (*ta* – horse; *wang* – chosen). Different other versions of stories are also prevalent regarding the establishment of the Monastery but this version is considered to be the most acceptable by the people of the said community. The monastery was constructed with the help of volunteers from each village. Even today, the respective villages are responsible for the maintenance of different sections of the monastery.

The monastery occupies a commanding position on the top of a hill and is built like a fortress. The monastery covers a huge area. The monastery has the capacity for housing five hundred monks. The monastery was not only a base for propagation of *Gelukpa* tradition but also was a military post against the external attacks. It has dormitories for the Lamas, a meeting hall, school, community kitchen, monuments and the main building housing the temple – *Dukhang*. With its narrow-cobbled streets, numerous buildings and the enormous area it occupies, the complex is like a mini city.

The main temple building is reconstructed as the original one was made of wood and had almost collapsed. The interiors of the new building, which is in the traditional Buddhist architectural style, are exquisitely decorated with paintings, murals, carvings, sculptures etc. The temple is going to house the gigantic idol of Lord Buddha made of brass rising to a height of more than 27 feet. Ten hollow arms and torso of the statue contain antique and priceless scrolls of Buddhist scriptures. The library in the Gompa houses ancient scriptures written in gold. On special occasions a special room is opened to the public which contains antique statues made of gold and studded with precious stones. The most fascinating feature of the Gompas is the fact that the presiding deity of the monastery is Devi or Sri Devi (*Palden Lhamo*) so selected by the then Dalai Lama. On auspicious occasions a massive cloth painting of the presiding deity is unfurled down the façade of the main temple building so that devotees can be blessed. Still today the Painting is being displayed on the occasion of Torgya festival for the people who come to seek blessings from the guardian deity

According to tradition every Buddhist family with more than three sons has to send one son to the monastery to become a monk. Every family also contributes its share of food grains and other items for the 500 or more lamas housed in the monastery. At a distance, on another hill, is another monastery which houses women monks – rare phenomena in India.

Torgya ritual is celebrated in the form of festival from 28th to 30th day of the lunar month of the Lunar Calendar, "*Dawa chukchipa*" corresponding to 10th to 12th January of the English calendar. This festival is celebrated amidst much joy and devotion in order to get rid of any external aggression and to save themselves from any natural calamities and disasters.

Thousands of people converge at the Tawang Monastery from morning till evening. This festival is celebrated for three consecutive days. People from all around the corner of the district and people from other parts also come to witness the extravagant rich cultural festival of the Tawang Monastery.

During this festival, religious dances (*Cham*) are performed in the courtyard of the monastery by the selected monk dancers of the monastery for three days as a part of Torgya ritual. The selected dancers take part in the rehearsal of the dance in the ground outside the monastery called *Chamlang* (dancing platform). The rehearsal is done under the guidance and supervision of the *Champon* (dance master) and his assistant, *Chamjug* (verbatim: dance tail), who are appointed by the monastery authorities on the basis of the knowledge of the *Cham*. They do not put on the costumes during the rehearsal. The final rehearsal takes place from twenty-fifth to twenty-seventh of the same month after a rest of five days. On the final day of the rehearsal, a group of senior monks who have good knowledge of *Cham* inspects the performance in the evening.

Meanwhile, some senior monks prepare a *Torma* of dough in a pyramidal structure of about three feet high. Prayers are offered in the main temple of the monastery for three days, i.e., from twenty sixth to twenty-eight of the eleventh month. In the evening of the twenty-eighth, i.e., on the first day of the Torgya festival, the *Torma* (sacrificial cake) is taken out in a procession to the southern gate of the monastery where the Torgya is performed. At the spot where the Torgya is to be performed, a hut of bamboo and straw open on one side is already erected. Here the abbot of the Tawang Monastery after saying a few spells cast the *Torma* into the hut which is then set on fire. The performance of Torgya symbolizes the destruction of all evil forces, so that the people may have a peaceful life, free from disease, hunger and all sorts of calamities in the coming year.

4.2.1. Description of few Monastic dances

4.2.1.1 *Pha Cham*

In the morning of the first day of the festival this dance is being performed wearing a boar's mask by the *Champon* (the dance instructor). The dance is performed in order to clear the ground for performance of *Cham* entreating the *Sadag* (the benevolent spirit of the place/ area) to allow to use the place. This dance is performed to sanctify/ purify the ground of its evil and harmful elements so as to create the perfect conditions for performances of the ritual dances.

4.2.1.2 *Zam Cham*

With the ground being sanctified of the evil spirits the *Zam Cham* symbolizes of taking possession and safeguarding of the ground. Wearing forceful looking masks, this dance is performed by two dancers holding a small flag in the right hand and a tiny skull cup in the left hand.

4.2.1.3 *Durdag Cham*

On the external edges of the *mandala* where the assembly of the secret tantric deities reside, there are eight cemeteries. Living in these cemeteries are numerous protectors who are bound by the oath to protect these cemeteries. They are known as *Dur-dag* (Master of the cemetery). The dancers are dressed in a skin tight red costume covering the hands and the feet's, on which are outlined in white bones of a skeleton. A lion-cloth painted with demon's face is also worn by them. The masks worn by them represent human skulls. When the dance is in progress, a monk places a *Linga* in the middle of the dance circle. It is the symbol and holder of evil forces. *Durdag's* perform *Cham* around the *Linga* by whistling thereby conjuring the evil forces into the *Linga*. After the *Durdag's* retreat, a dancer retreats. A dancer representing *Shenpa* comes from the *Dukang* (butcher appears on the scene). Executing a wild dance, the *Shenpa* cuts the *Linga* into pieces symbolizing the killing of the evil forces.

4.2.1.4 *Shanag Cham*

It is performed by twelve dancers wearing *Phod Ka*, a kind of richly embroidered gown (phoidkar) reaching to the ankles and *Pang Kheb*, a colorful richly embroidered apron. The

dancers wear a black, broad brimmed hat from which the dance derived its name *Shanag* (black hat). The dancers personify Tantric priests. After executing the *Cham* for some time, two dancers *Choigei Yaabrim* representing *Dharanraja Kalarupa* and his consort, *Chamundi* accompanied by their attendants *Khor* (Sha Khor and Lang Khor) appear on the scene dancing solemnly. They are greeted by the abbot of the Tawang Monastery by offering the religious scarfs from the balcony above and offer his greetings (*Temri*) to them. After the dance is over, the abbot and the senior lamas in their ceremonial robes; some other monks in full warrior's dress with headgears, helmet, long swords and shields, who are known as *Arpos* along with all the above dancers proceed towards southern gate of the monastery to participate in the burning of the Torgya. During the normal Torgya celebration participation of 30 nos of lamas dressed as *Arpos* are required which becomes double during the celebration of Torgya Dungyar. 60 nos. of lamas dressed as *Arpos*.

4.2.1.5 Goying Cham

It is performed by eleven dancers *Goyim Zukma* wearing *Amma bha*, a kind of mask representing the faces of women. They dance for a while and then come the entrance of *Appa* (*Chang-Loggang*) from *Dukang* along with the *Mlangchungs*. (2 in nos.) The *Appa* along with the two *Mlangchungs* brothers teases these *Amma* and offers *Chang* to them. In return the *Ammas* request the *Appa* to sing songs for them. On their request the *Appa* sings for them while the two brothers copy the *Appa* and help him in singing as chorus. The teasing goes on for some time and once the singing is finished the ladies make exist while the *Appa* along with his two mates waits for the departure of all the eleven dancers simultaneously.

4.2.1.6 Dung Cham

This dance is also called as *Loiskar Chungnye*, as the dancers twelve in numbers, come to the arena one by one wearing the masks of the animals. The dancers wear the masks of the animals such as horse, sheep, monkey, bird, goat, rat, ox, tiger, serpent and thunder. Each of them has a different character. The dancers hold flag in their right hand and *Badan* in their left hand. The dancers come one by one, dance for a while and calls out the other dancer, and then the other dancer makes an entry. Likewise, all the twelve dancers arrive in the arena dance together and makes exist on by one towards the *Parkang*.

4.2.1.7 *Lenang Cham*

In this dance first comes the *Lehnang Langdong* along with *Lenang Lha Karp* and *Shingzea Chuiki Gepo*. All the three dancers make entry first, dances for a while and then *Langdong* dances alone while the other two dancers sit. After that the *Lenang pha* is called upon and it dances in front of the two dancers. Then comes the *lenang theadong* and then *lenang pra*, *lenang zha* is also called upon in the arena. After that, the entry of *Dikchung*, who comes and shows how evil a person can be by killing animals, by stealing, by doing badly to the parents. He is the person who has only done bad things in his whole life and now is being chased and is being called upon to calculate his deeds after his death. The *Duth* makes an entry who has been assigned the job to bring *Dikchung* to be presented before the *Lenang digdiphu* (yamraj) and *Lenang Duichachei* (yamrani). After much difficulty *Dikchung* is being brought and is being asked about his deeds and is found out that in his whole life he has only done evil deeds and was bound to be severely punished. But as we know that one chance is always given, so *Dikchung* is being given one chance and this time he is born as a lama known as *Shimda Pelgea Dorjee*. In this birth he clears all the evil deeds of his earlier life and is again being presented before the Gods by the *Duth*, but this time he is not being punished but attains the salvation and goes with the Gods to the Heaven.

When Lord Buddha was alive at that time there were no such kind of dances. But after the death of Lord Buddha, 500yrs with the birth of the *Lopon Rinpochea* (Guru Padmashambav) under his initiation the dances came into existence from the *Tantra Vidya*. All kinds of dances that are being performed do have a very deep meaning in itself. It is not being performed just for pleasure or for amusement but is performed in order to make the common people get acquainted with the *Sungmas* (protector). After the death of Lord Buddha with the initiation by *Lopon Rimpoche* these different kinds of masks came into existence. The masks and the dances seemed somewhat scary in their appearance; therefore, the people were made acquainted so that they might not be scared but moved along with them and participate equally by enjoying the dances being performed as it is believed that through participation too the blessings of the Gods could be achieved.



Figure 16



Figure-17



Figure 18



Figure 19

Few Pictures of monks performing the Monastic dances

4.2.1.8. Gyep Gyem Cham

On the 15th day of the 10th month of the Lunar Calendar a religious dance is performed after every three years during the year of the Torgya *Dungyur*. This dance unlike the other dances performed in the monastery during Torgya is not performed inside the premises of the Monastery but is performed in the *Chamlang* area which is located outside the

premises of the main *Dukhang* of the monastery. There are a total of 12 characters in the dance. Three female dancers enacted by the male monks of the monastery, 7 Male characters out of which three enact the act of three *Gyep*'s and one is the Interpreter (*Phrinpa*) the character played by *Dorjee Apa* along with his 2 sons (*mlengchung*). There are 5 female characters in the dance, out of which 3 are the Gem's, 1 *Aae* and 1 *Burzepah*. The *Dorjee Apa* acts as a marriage interpreter who introduces the Brides and the Grooms. It is believed among the people of the said community that the *Gyep*- was a Raja of an Indian State, but later on decided that it was better to change the Raja belonging from an Indian State to a Tibetan State because it was easy to perform as a Tibetan Raja than a Raja of an Indian Territory. And The *Gyemo* was believed to be from an Indian State. The clothes of the female actors in the earlier days are believed to be borrowed from the best dressed female member of the society and before the performance of the dances that female from the society was send an invitation from the monastery to dress the female actors of the dance. But with the change of time the monastery now possesses its own attires for the dances but a female member of the nearby village is asked to dress the female dancers. This dance shows the matrimonial alliance between the then Tibetan Government and the Indian Government. The reason behind performing this dance is that it depicts the cordial relationship which existed between the two Governments. In the dance a marriage ceremony is performed between the Raja's and Rani's of the two states. The visiting of religious pilgrimage sites is shown both in India and in Tibet by the characters of the Dance.

4.2.1.8.1 History behind *Gyep Gyem Cham*

Unlike the other entire dance performed in the premises of the monastery during the festival of Torgya, this dance is performed in the *Chamlang* area on the 10th month of the lunar calendar one month prior to the Torgya Festival. Like all the dances of the festival, this dance is also performed by the monks of the monastery after days of training. The dances performed during the Torgya festival are mostly related with the gods and goddess unlike the *Gyep Gyem Cham* which shows the mortal characters like Raja and Ranis of two different states. And place where the dance is performed is believed to be a sacred place for the dance to be performed. The place is guided by a guardian deity (*Sungma*) called as the *Neh-Dah* and *Zhi-Dah* popularly known as the *Aae* and *Meme* along with their *Burzepa* (*the servant*): the owner of the land which protects the particular place and those associated with it. So, after every three years this deity has to be pleased in order to

have its blessings for protecting everyone. It is a belief in the said community that the *Apa* and *Ama* were seen wondering in the premises where the Guardian deity resides. And so, this is considered as the sign of prosperity and wisdom. The Monpas believe that whoever sees this dance is blessed with wisdom, prosperity and happiness. Therefore, during the performance of this dance huge number of people come to witness this dance performance.



Figure-20



Figure-21



Figure-22



Figure 23

Pictures of monks fully dressed to perform Gyep Gyem Dance

4.2.2 Difference between Torgya and Torgya *Dungyur*

On the 11th month of the lunar calendar Torgya Festival is celebrated in the Tawang monastery. Torgya *Dungyur* after every three years is being celebrated on the 11th month of the lunar calendar. One month before the advent of the festival its preparation is started in the monastery. During the year of the *Torgya Dungyur* one month prior to the festival

a special *Mani Dip* is being prepared for the common people of the said community. Eight days continuous religious puja is being performed in order to purify this *Mani Dip*. In the preparation of the *Torgya Torma* (effigy) the *Torma* is prepared in a much grander and bigger scale unlike that prepared in the *Torgya*. The festival is being organized for three consecutive days in the monastery where people from far flung villages and neighboring states come to witness this festival. The people participation can also be seen in a much grander and bigger scale. On the 2nd day of the *Torgya Dungyur*, a special *wang* (Blessing) is being organized which is dedicated to *Gyalwa Jamba* also popularly known as the Future Buddha. On this day the *Mani Dip* which was prepared from one month prior to the festival is being given to the common people and the followers as *Prasad* (Blessings). Everything right from the attires worn by the dancers is new and made up of better and costly materials than the old attires. The *Bha's* (masks) worn are better decorated. The whole monastery and its premises are better decorated and cleaned. On the 2nd of the *Torgya Dungyur*: the main attraction is the old *Thanka* (Portrait) of Lord Buddha (which is believed to be from the time of *Merak Lama Lodre Gyatso* which was given to him by the then Dalai Lama to start the monastery as a token of his blessing) which is being taken out for the audience view and to have blessings from it.

In the olden days, it was believed that the *Talung Zong* the sponsors of the *Torgya Festival* had to seek permission from the His Holiness Residence to conduct the festival in the Monastery. After the permission granted from His Holiness residence of the *Talung Zong* makes offering to the then *Rimpochea* of the monastery and the festival was celebrated for three consecutive days. In the offerings the following items were offered such as Elephant tusks, animals skin, delicate and important Items. And in return the following items were given to the *Talung Zong* such as- *Tonga/Goichen*, *Phrengah*, *Zom*.etc. The mediator (*Nerpa*) / (*Dung cha*) (store keeper) was also being gifted by the *Rmpochea* like *Zeri* and *Phrengah*. In earlier days on 26th January an honorarium (*Rubab*) was given by the then Indian Government. These *Rubab* was shared among different sections- His Holiness Office, *Sum Gargin*, *Labrang*, *Nyerchang* and *Dahchang*. And a fraction of *Rubab* was given to *Arya Bob* (Domkho- Morshing) in return to the shelter being provided to the members of the *Talung Zong* gone to collect the *Rubab* from the Indian Government. The members of the *Talung Zong* are been changed after every three years. In the olden days the items that the *Talung Zong* took along with them as token of appreciation for the Indian Government were- one horse, one sheep, one gold ring,

expensive dress materials, one *Chom* bur, one expensive *Karyu*, One yak tail (White in colour), dried chilies (Red).

4.2.3. Myth Behind the Origin of Dungyur (Torgya) Festival of Tawang Monastery

Once *Shan Pradhar* and his nine sons went to collect firewood from the dense forest. There the father had asked his sons to cut down the trees for firewood. The sons could not cut down the trees as because of their tender age. The father then tried to cut the trees down; with much effort he was able to cut the trees for firewood. After collecting the firewood, they went to a place called as *Dakpa-Che-lungdung* where *Shan Pradhar* happened to see two sparrows flying far away from his sight. One of the sparrows went to the side of the *Phongmaneng* in Bhutan and the other sparrow to the Domkho-Morshing villages in West Kameng. On seeing the sparrow out of curiosity, the father followed it and went along with it to Domkho-Morshing side leaving all his nine sons behind. But this step led him to a very miserable state as because he had no other source to survive. To survive he began begging for food with a bowl in his hands. In this way he continued his journey and finally reached to a place called as “*Tsengi*”- a very big village with no human existence.

Shan Pradhar finally reached Kalaktang. On reaching to his surprise, he found the whole village absent except for an old lady and a young girl. He then asked them about the reason of absence of humans in the village. The women told him that it was because all the men were killed by the demons. She had also warned him about his life in being danger because of the demon and also asked him to leave the place immediately before the sun set. But *Shan Pradhar* was determined to stay back and fight fearlessly. He made nine balls of *atta* paste to kill the demons. With his magic powers *Shan Pradhar* fought and killed the demon except one who had escaped. *Shan Pradhar* with his poisonous bow and arrow at last killed the demon. But surprisingly, the demon transformed into a stone and disappeared. It is therefore, believed that, all the demons identified by the people at present are the progeny of that absconded demon.

With this unusual occurrence, he moved still further and reached the place called *Amartala* and *Nahteng*, respectively. There also he could not get the sight of plain area. Still, he ventured. Meanwhile, suddenly he saw a crow flying away from his vision. He shot at her with no intention to kill, and only to know from where she belonged. After the bird died, he tried to save the bird's life, but of no avail, he carried out the postmortem of

the bird and to his surprise he found a strange paddy in the intestine. Seeing that he presumed that the grain was a symbol of him showing the place that he would settle is not far. Hopefully he walked and reached *Udulguri* late in the evening. But here again he found that it was not easy to enter because he saw thorny grasses were planted and it was difficult to get in at that moment. The King of *Udalguri* welcomed him with open arms and promised him to help him to settle down and offered him food, money and land for permanent settlement.

It was also believed that *Shan Pradhar* was the representative from Tawang Monastery who settled down there and has been given the right to receive their revenue on their behalf of Tawang Monastery and in return promised to get performed various pujas at Tawang Monastery to counteract the natural calamities. It may be one of the reasons why Tawang Monastery received “Posa Payment” which in local term is called as “*Bi-bab*”.

Since that time the three people from the three “*Tsok, Manvul lhawa, Yulsum*”, have expressed their readiness to help the Gompa authorities in the performance of various rituals and ceremonies connected with different seasons of the various rituals and ceremonies.

4.2.4. Rules for performing the Monastic dances

All the dances that are being performed in this category are performed by the young and the old experienced lamas of the Tawang monastery. All the dancers are to follow these rules without any fail or fines are imposed upon them. The rules which are to be followed are as follows-

- (a) All dancers are to first respect the dances and then learn the dances.
- (b) Proper dancing patterns should be followed.
- (c) Laymen are not allowed to perform these dances, only the lamas participate in the dances.
- (d) Under proper guidance these dances are to be learned.
- (e) Dancers of the *Gelukpa* sect are more bound with the rules and regulations.
- (f) Dancers are to meditate before the dances are being performed.
- (g) Restrictions on the consumptions of certain food items are to be maintained, such as onions, garlic, non-vegetarian foods. It is believed that if the dancers do not follow these rules and regulations some bad incidents occur in their lives. (*Bartse*)

- (h) Some customs which are considered as sacred like that of the deity of the monastery *Palden Lhamo* are to be worn after reciting special prayers as these are pious and gets contaminate very easily.
- (i) The dancers are to practice the dances before the commencement of the festival in a special place called the *Chamlang*. The practice goes on for days in order to teach the new students the steps of the dances properly by the dance instructor.
- (j) During the practice session the dancers are to start the practice from 5 am in the morning till 5pm in the evening. No student is allowed to leave the practice ground without permission, otherwise fine is imposed upon them.
- (k) All the dancers are to reside together in another place separate from the other lamas of the monastery during the festival. They are not allowed to leave the premises without permission.

A very important role is played by the orchestra in the dances that are being performed. The orchestra players are attired in usual monk's dress. The instruments that are being used are the same instruments used in normal religious ceremonies, such as long trumpets (*dungchen*), clarinet (*gyaling*), conch shells (*dungkar*), *damaru*, drums (*dha*) and cymbals (*sil nyen* and *bubcha*). Their beats and tunes indicate the steps and rhythm in the dance. The musicians take seats in the outside of the arena which is generally reserved for them. They are as important as the dances during the festival.

4.3 Monastic System of Tawang Monastery

The Tawang Monastery has an organized system of administration of its daily affairs known as "*Lhangye Khang*". It comprises of *Lopon*, *Um-Dze*, *Gyeko* and *Chupa* who are collectively known as *Uche-shi* (The four Heads). *Laadrang* (establishment of the abbot) represented by his *Changzae* (Manager), *Nyeir-tsang*, *Nangma druk* and twenty-five other senior monks, with the abbot as the head in the hierarchy.

After the construction of the monastery, *Mera Lama Lodre Gyatso* put in various prayers to the then 5th Dalai Lama for his help and guidance in establishment and running the monastery. The abbot is generally the re-incarnated lama. The abbot is the head of the monastery. He has all the control over the functionaries of the monastery. He looks after the important functions and prayers of the monastery. He is confined to the religious functions of the monastery. The abbot has its own establishment known as the *Laadrang*. It consists of the abbot himself, his *Changzae* and few other assistants; these assistants

are selected among the other senior lamas of the monastery. The positions are not permanent; it changes with the appointment of every new abbot. However, the *Changzae*, looks after the moral conduct of the monks inside and outside of the monastery. Any monk who wishes to go out of the monastery should first seek permission from them in writing. Even visiting of the family members of the monks requires prior information and permission from them. The *Changzae* has the power to inflict, the law and order (rules and regulations) in and outside of the monastery.

A list of abbots of Tawang monastery from the beginning was published in a Souvenir book of Tawang monastery in 1994.

Sl.No.	Names of the Abbots of the Tawang Monastery	Status
1	Lama Lorde Gyatso	I
2	Nawang Tsultim,	II
3	Nawang Norbu	III
4	Nawang Namgyal	IV
5	Lobsang Namgyal	V
6	Lobsang Tashi	VI
7	Lobsang Gyaltsen	VII
8	Jampa Delek	VIII
9	Khetsun Gyatso	IX
10	Nawang Tomden	X
11	Sunrab Gyatso	XI
12	Palsang Gyatso	XII
13	Dakpa Yarphe	XIII
14	Kesang Khedup Dakpaql	XIV
15	Serkong Dorjee Chang (Records not available after him till 1950.)	XV
16	Lama Kelsang Phuntsok from Mirba village Tawang	XVI
17	Genden Rabgay from Phomang village Tawang	XVII
18	Lobsang Rabyang from Mukto village Tawang	XVIII
19	Lobsang Sherpa Grengkhar village Tawang	XIX
20	Rigya Rinpoche	XX

Table No: 3 Names of the different Abbots of the Tawang Monastery

Next to the hierarchy of the abbot is the *Lopon*. He acts as second in command and acts in charge of the monastery in absence of the real abbot himself. Meeting of the *Lhangye-khang* are normally presided by him in absence of the abbot.

The whole management of the monastery is being looked after the *Lhangye-khang* (Governing Body). It has control over each and every aspect of the monastery. During an important decision making, the whole governing body holds a meeting and takes decision in accordance of the meeting.

On 6th and 7th July 2000, a workshop was organized by the District Administration and the Centre for Buddhist Cultural Studies, Tawang Monastery to discuss on the various dimensions of the traditional system and functionary of the Tawang Monastery, to evolve in its system of administration so that it could be more efficient and will be able to serve the society in much better way. In that meeting it was decided that the overall management of the monastery should be taken by the registered society of the monastery. i.e., *Ganden Namgyal Lhatse* welfare and charitable society, with full autonomy to *Lhangye khang* in religious matters. In that meeting it was recommended that the society should have an executive body consisting of the abbot of the monastery as the chairman, 4 *uches*, and one senior administrative officer from the district administration, district Art and Cultural officers and 5 to 6 members selected from the monks or from the laymen of the society as executives. An initiation started where common laymen could also be an active member in the monastic affairs which would help to develop a cordial and friendly relationship between the monastery and the laymen. Except the religious matters of the society, this committee would be actively participating in the other welfare affairs.

The entire life in and around the monastery starts with the regular repeating cycle of liturgical assemblies, scriptural recitals, rituals and some mundane works of the monastery. The whole environment is purified with the recitals of the holy recitations by the monks and also by the locals living in the society at their respective homes. The day starts at dawn with the beating of a large drum from the rooftops of the *Rhumkhang* for three times with intervals of few minutes in between. In a month, there are regular twelve days of sessions of regular services (*Chosthog*) from the 8th to the 19th followed by eighteen days of intervals (*Chos- tsam*) from the 20th to the seventh. At least three sessions are held during the period of *Chosthog*.

Extra services are held on specific days of each month. Propitiation rites of *Palden Lhamo* (Guardian Deity of the monastery) and *Namsey* are performed on the 10th day of every month. Besides, these monks also observe seasonal rites. On the 1st day of the 1st lunar calendar month (*Lossar*) invocation of the tutelary deity of the monastery is done for the general well-being of all sentient beings for the ensuing year. During this festival each and every person small or big, young and old, rich and poor all together come to the monastery to offer their prayers and pray for the general well beings of each and every being of this universe.



Figure 24



Figure 25

Murals and statue inside the monastery

4.3.1 Daily Routine of a monk in Tawang Monastery

Monks are to get up by the bat of the drum and the blowing of *Dung* (trumpet), daily in the morning at 3.30 am hours for attending the morning prayer session wearing proper robes at 4.00 am in the main prayer hall (*dukhang*). Senior monks are exempted from attending this prayer. Next session is held between 2 to 4 pm. In a month 10 days are reserved for manual works and services to the monastery by each monk. Besides these routine activities there are special monthly and annual activities. At 6.30 am they have their breakfast and at 7.30 am to go to attend their schools or do respective various chores at respective *shaa* (monk residence). The school closes at 12.00 pm and after lunch the monks used to go to fetch firewood in earlier times.

From 4.00 pm to 8.00 pm all the monks of the monastery are required to read religious scriptures in their respective *shaa* under the guidance of the senior learned monks called

as *Shaa Gyergen* i.e. Guru. Dinner is consumed at around 8.00 pm and then all the monks go to rest.

Once a boy from the village joins a monastery as a monk has to attend the morning assembly session *Tso* regularly for a month in proper robe with their heads shaved. The breach of this practice entails him to pay fine in the form of offering community tea for all the monks of the monastery. During the initial period of one month if a novice lacks or fails to dope up with the system and norms of the monastery, he is required to seek apology from the marshal i.e., *Gyergo* with a white khada (scarf) and a fine of Rs.5 for his apparent absence.

The novice is required to sweep and clean inside the monastery regularly for three months under the supervision of *Chhabra* from the 6th to 19th day of the month, he is to clean and sweep twice daily (morning/evening) and from 20th to 5th day of the next month once daily in the morning. Cleanliness session begins after morning prayers. He has to contribute a broom on the 7th day of the fourth and seventh month of the lunar calendar.

Next stage is the *Khang-nyer* (sentry). Only two *Khang-nyers* are put to work for closing and opening of the four gates of the monastery for six months. The *Khang nyers* are also required to clean the premises of the main prayer hall by dividing it into two zones, viz. the northern and the southern zones. The senior of the two *Khang nyers* are preferably gets the northern zone. They are also required to carry 15 pieces of split firewood daily from the main stock meant for the abbot.

After completion of the stage of *Khang nyer*, the newly inducted monk is deployed as a *Chhulinpa* whose duty is to fetch drinking water for the occasional mess *Rumkhang* and used in the *Dukhang* as water bowl offered to the object of refuge *Yonchhap*³ for another six months.

Afterwards he performs the duty of a helper to the cooks (*Thapyo*) for six months and his duty is cooking and preparation of tea, food, etc. for any ceremonial puja held in the *Dukhang*. Besides this he has to fetch firewood in earlier days dumped outside the southern gate for cooking.

³ A ritual of offering water to the deities in seven bowls.

Next come the stage of a dance practitioner/performer. Altogether 57 dancers are selected for rehearsal at *Chamleng* for twelve consecutive days from 8th day onwards of the eleventh month in accordance with lunar calendar. During these practice sessions, two *Cham nyers* (managers) provide breakfast and lunch to the dancers by seeking donations and collecting fees from the temporary stalls erected during the three-day celebration of Torgya. This practice is still continued. Tea is provided by *Labrang* (the abbot establishment) and *Nyer tsang* (store) at the rate of two and four *dobs* (tea pots) respectively. Even dancers are required to contribute a load of firewood, a bundle of dry bamboo, one breh of rice and fifteen rupees on daily basis from 10th to 15th of the eleventh month as per lunar calendar. Again from 16th to 18th of the eleventh month this contribution is made applicable to each dancer towards *Champon*, *Cham Syu*, *Dobshey Apa*, *Gochhan Ganpa* and *Gochham Shyonba*. In case of an inclement weather condition, *Nyer Tsang* provides firewood for heating and cooking purposes. On the 19th of the eleventh month a board consisting *Chhampon*, *Chham Syu*, *Dobshey Apa*, *Gocham Shyonba* and two *Cham nyers* conduct a test and select 16 dancers and two dancers as cook for performing dances during the Torgya festival.

Dancers representing the form of *Palden Lhamo*, *Choige Yab* and *Yum, Shan Yawate* are strictly required to adhere to standing dietary restrictions of the institution followed by meditation from 20th day of the eleventh month till the festival is over. The qualified dancers are to take part in the practice session which is from 5.00 am to 6.00 pm with effect from 25th to 27th of eleventh month. The *Cham nyers* arrange breakfast and lunch for them during this period. Two dancers are selected as cooks to arrange the sitting near the parkang (library) besides preparation of tea, food, etc. to all the dancers and *Champon*, *Cham-Syu*, *Dobshey Apa*, *Gocham Ganpa*, *Gocham Shyonba* and even to the common people who come etc., witness the three days of extravagant dancing.

Finally, on 27th of the eleventh month, the 16 qualified dancers are made to perform few dances before the aforesaid board from 10.00 am to 12.00 pm and thereafter, including the *Cham Nyers* and the two cooks, all dancers are required to stay in the parkang for four days and food is arranged by *Labrang* and *Nyer tsang*.

4.3 .2. Tonggo Practice

After being in the monastery for about thirteen years, the monks are required to work as caretakers for the Tawang Monastery and other branches of the Monastery in a rotation

process. These duties are imparted to them on seniority basis including the caretaking of the main prayer hall of the main monastery (*Dukhang*). On becoming a senior monk, they are deputed to *Talung* and *Dirang* as *Dzongpon*. During this period, because of the services they provided to the villagers assigned, they are repaid back in terms of mostly food grains. The villagers of these villages fix an amount to offer to these monks in terms of food grains as per the conventions fixed between the monastery and the villages. Thus, the system of *Tonggo* practice was evolved to show gratitude to the monastery for providing all the necessary in order to bear all the expenses for the periodical monastic rites. This can also be seen as a medium through which the monks are given an opportunity to earn their merits. As a monk it is being taught from the beginning of their monkhood to give up all kinds of wealth in any form. This system was therefore evolved so that the wealth provided to them could be properly utilized. Therefore, it is mandatory for all the Lamas of the Monastery to donate a certain amount of their earnings to the monastery as a token of their gratitude. Every monk has to bear the responsibility to feed the inmates of the monastery at various fixed stages. The expenses were mostly required to feed them with tea and porridge, and on the other paraphernalia required for the performances of the rite on that day. These expenses are beard mostly by the Lama and its family members. Those Lamas who are not able to bear the expenses are provided help from the common people of the society as donations.

This practice has been carried out right from the foundation of the Tawang Monastery. It is a practice where the monks residing in the Gompas show their gratitude towards the Tawang Monastery and its caretakers. This ceremony can be considered as the Graduation ceremony of the monks from the formal and religious form of education received from the monastery. After this the monk has no formal liability towards the monastery. A monk can go into the society and serve the members of the society by imparting and performing religious holy scripture readings on different occasions. This practice thus shows the long relation of the monastery with the common people of the Mon Area. The monks act as a link between the Tawang Monastery and the people living in and around since many centuries.

4.3.2.1. Occasions and the persons responsible for the bearing of the expenses of the Tonggo Practice are as follows:

Date	Rites/Rituals	Persons responsible for the management of the expenditure
1 st day of the 1 st month	<i>Lhamo Tenbul</i>	<i>Nyeir- Tsang</i>
2 nd Day of the 1 st month	<i>Dhueshak Tsog</i>	<i>Laabrang Nyeir- Tsang</i>
8 th day to 18 th of the 1 st month	<i>Monlam Chenmo</i>	<i>Nyeir Tsang</i>
11 th day of the 1 st month	<i>Sangwa Dhuepa</i>	<i>Caretakers of Ugyelling and Brakar Gonpas</i>
15 th day of 1 st month	<i>Tongchoe</i>	<i>Nyeir- Tsang</i>
2 nd day of the 2 nd month	<i>Choechok zokpar</i>	<i>Gyanma</i>
	<i>Sangwa Dhuepa</i>	<i>Caretakers of Khromten, Sharmang and Tsangbu gonpas</i>
14 th day of the 4 th month	<i>Sangwa Dhuepa</i>	<i>Caretakers of the Tawang monastery assembly hall.</i>
15 th day of the 4 th month	<i>Tongchoe</i>	<i>Nyeir- Tsang</i>
16 th day of the 4 th month	<i>Lama Tongo</i>	<i>Caretakers of Shakti and Monpa gompas</i>
17 th day of the 4 th month	<i>Sangwa Dhuepa</i>	<i>Nyeir- Tsang</i>
20 th day of the 4 th month	<i>Kyilkhor Luuchok</i>	<i>Nyeir- Tsang</i>
11 th to 16 th day of the 5 th month	<i>Kangyur Dhogjang</i>	<i>Contributions from the general public</i>
4 th month of the 6 th month	<i>Namgyal Tongchoe</i>	<i>Nyeir- Tsang</i>
15 th month of the 6 th month	<i>Demchok Drubchoe</i>	<i>Barshawa</i>
16 th month of the 6 th month	<i>Demchok Drubchoe</i>	<i>Caretakers of Thongmon gonpa</i>
17 th to 19 th day of the 6 th month	<i>Netan Chagchoe</i>	<i>Nyeir-Tsang</i>
23 rd to 26 th day of 6 th month	<i>Dechok Drubchoe</i>	<i>Nyeir- Tsang</i>
27 th of the 6 th month	<i>Kyilkhor Luuchok</i>	<i>Nyeir- Tsang</i>

29 th of the 6 th month	<i>Jinseg</i>	<i>Nyeir- Tsang</i>
8 th and 9 th of the 7 th month	<i>Jigje Drubchoe</i>	<i>3 Tsom Gyergan</i>
10 th of the 7 th month	<i>Tongchoe</i>	<i>Nyeir- Tsang</i>
11 th to 14 th of the 7 th month	<i>Jigje Drubchoe</i>	<i>3 Tsom Gyergan</i>
13 th of the 7 th month	<i>Jinseg</i>	<i>Nyeir- Tsang</i>
14 th of the 7 th month	<i>Kyilkhor Luuchok</i>	<i>Nyeir- Tsang</i>
8 th of the 8 th month	<i>Menlha Luuchok</i>	<i>Nyeir- Tsang</i>
8 th & 9 th of the 8 th month	<i>Sangwa Dheupa</i>	<i>Barshawa</i>
10 th of the 9 th month	<i>Kangso</i>	<i>Nyeir- Tsang</i>
11 th & 12 th of the 9 th month	<i>Sangwa Dheupa</i>	<i>Sa thrai Tonggo</i>
13 th of the 9 th month	<i>Sangwa Dheupa</i>	<i>Barsha Tonggo</i>
14 th of the 9 th month	<i>Sangwa Dheupa</i>	<i>Caretakers of the Ayagdung & Kyimnas gonpas</i>
22 nd of the 9 th month	<i>Lhabab Dheuchen</i>	<i>Nyeir- Tsang</i>
6 th to 8 th of the 10 th month	<i>Kadam Thigley Chudruk</i>	<i>Nyeir- Tsang</i>
18 th of the 10 th month	<i>Choechok Zokpar</i>	<i>Caretakers of Kharung & Morshing gonpas</i>
24 th of the 10 th month	<i>Sangwa Dheupa</i>	<i>Barshawa</i>
25 th of the 10 th month	<i>Ganden Ngamchoe</i>	<i>Nyeir- Tsang</i>
28 th to 30 th of the 11 th month	<i>Torgya</i>	<i>Nyeir- Tsang</i>
11 th to 19 th of the 12 th month	Recitation of <i>Kagyur</i>	Offerings received from general public

Table :4 Table of dates, time and names of rituals performed

Source: Fieldwork

4.3.2. Branches of Tawang Monastery

To have a better understanding regarding the administrative policies of the Tawang monastery, we need to also understand the different branches of the Tawang Monastery. the entire Mon region is characterized by the presence of small monasteries in almost entirely all moderately villages of the region. These temples are in fact managed by the monks of the Tawang Monastery. there has not been any formal survey regarding this but as per say, the Tawang Monastery had 18 (now 12 nos.) of such branch monasteries, where it is required to send good monk students on rotation basis for a period of three

years for three tenures to work and look after the daily business of these monasteries. These monks are to perform all the rituals related to these monasteries, they have to perform reading of religious scriptures in these Gompas and also sometimes in the houses of the village people. In earlier days they had been seen solving small disputes if occurred in these villages.

Following is the description of the few branches of the Tawang monastery:

1. **Ugyengling Monastery:** This monastery is located about 5-8 kilometers away from the Tawang Township. This place is the birth place of the 6th Dalai Lama. Many stories are associated with the origin of this monastery.
2. **Khyimnas Monastery:** About one and a half kilometer away from the Jang town ship this Monastery is located. It is believed by the locals of this region that during the 14th century the 3rd *Karmapa Rangjing Dorjee* has come and had established this monastery. This monastery is being considered as the first monastery in the Mon region.
3. **Brakar Monastery:** This monastery is located above the Singsur Ani Gompa. It is believed to be founded by *Thukdam Pekar*, a Drukpa practitioner in the late 16th century. The name *Brakar* means “*Bra*” which means cliff and “*Kar*” which means “white”.
4. **Thongmin Monastery:** This monastery is located at a distance of 26 kilometer east of Tawang, which was founded by *Bodong Chokley Namgyel Gyachen Karma Thrinley*, popularly known as the *Thongmin Gelong*, is considered as the Guardian deity of the *Thongmin* monastery.
5. **Shakti monastery:** This monastery is situated in the village of Shakti at a distance of 46 kms away from Tawang under Lumla division. It was originally founded by the *Trangpo Dhar*. Later on, it was looked after by *Lama Trangpo Dhar*.
6. **Kharung monastery:** This monastery is situated in the *Kharung* village at a distance of 23 kms from Jang division. It is believed that the founder of this monastery is Lama *Tenpei Donnemey* in the 16th century A.D.
7. **Tsangbu monastery:** This monastery is situated at a distance of about 2 kilometers away from the Tawang township. It is believed to be founded by *Lama Rigsum Gampo*.

8. **Nehru Dolma Lhakhang:** This monastery was originally a mandala constructed by the people of *Tsoksum*. Afterwards it was converted into a monastery which was looked after by the monks of the Tawang monastery.
9. **Khromten monastery:** This monastery is situated at about 6 kilometers north of Namet village. This monastery was originally a hermitage of a *Maha siddha*, *Lama Sonam Gyaltsen*.
10. **Bangajang monastery:** This monastery is dedicated to *Dorjee Phagmo*, located 18 kilometers south of Sela Pass. It is regarded as one of the most sacred places for the Mon people.
11. **Gyagong ani monastery:** This monastery is a nunnery which is situated at a distance of 13 kilometers North West of Tawang monastery. This nunnery is believed to be constructed for the sister of *Merak Lama Lodre Gyatso*. This monastery was given monthly provisions by the Tawang Monastery. This arrangement is still being constituted. Each nun of the nunnery is still being given monthly allowances by the Tawang monastery and in return they were to perform little chores related to the *Dukhang* of the Tawang Monastery as and when required.
12. **Thupten ga-tsel monastery:** This monastery is situated in the capital city of the Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar. The foundation stone of this monastery was laid down by the 14th Dalai Lama during his visit in the year 1982. At present this monastery is being looked after by the Itanagar Buddhist Cultural Association of Itanagar with the help of few monks from the Tawang monastery.

The above mentioned Gompas are still under the administrative rule of the Tawang Monastery. The monks of the Tawang monastery on rotation basis provide their service to these monasteries. It is necessary for a monk to serve in any of the monastery for tenure of three years on rotation basis before completion of their regular religious teaching and practices in the monastery.

4.3.3 Relationship between the Tawang Monastery and the villages of Monpa society

Although more than 300 years have passed since the construction of the Tawang Monastery, it still remains the central focus of Buddhism and people's religious lives in the Tawang district. On the construction of the monastery, it was believed that *Merak Lama* had appealed to the people of Tawang to extend their assistance for the running of

the monastery. In response to the appeal, villagers voluntarily responded and offered a part of their agricultural produce, and dairy products (*Brokpas*) to the monastery as ‘*buiwa*’ (offering). On this the monastery authorities surveyed the cultivable land owned by each Monpa family and fixed on the basis of fertility of the land rather than on the size of the land and started collecting food grains by deputing a group of monks to the villages at the time of harvest. However, with the passage of time it became mandatory and later came to be known as ‘*bru-khrai*’ (*bru*- foodgrain; *khrai*- tax) and the land under which tax is levied is called as ‘*khrei-leng*’ (*khrei*-tax *leng*-land cultivable).

For collection of offerings Tawang Monastery was divided into three main parts: (a) *Dhagpaneng* area which comprises of *Mu-khob- Shaksum tso*, *Sanglung tso*, *Kharbong tso*, *Woongla tso*, *Sakpret tso* and *Pamakhar tso*; (b) *Shar Nyima Tsogsum*, consisting of *Ser tso*, *Lhou tso* and *Shar tso*; and (c) *Pangchen Dhingduk* consisting of six villages. Each household pays one *khraikang* twenty *bres* of barley during summer and twenty *bres* of millet during autumn. Today each household have to pay only 5 *bres*. Each household of Rho and Jangda villages pays 5 *bres* of garlic and 5 *bres* of bitter buckwheat annually. The contributions received from the villagers in the form of food grains are distributed to every resident monk every month. The people of Pangchen area having very less cultivable land and are mainly dependent on animal husbandry, offer their contribution to the monastery in the form of butter. On an average, a family offers two kilograms of butter to the monastery annually.

With the increase in the strength of lamas, to meet the additional requirement of food grains the system of *Tsong Drem* and *Ma Benda* were devised. *Tsong Drem* is a trading system whereby *Nyeir tsang* of the monastery advances certain mechanism through the village headman to some well-off villagers from whom one can expect in return certain quantity of food grains during the next harvest. As the land of the *Dakpaneng* was more fertile, the system of *Tsong Drem* was applied more in *Dhagpaneng* area. The quantity of food grains in return for the articles in this system, however, is not fixed. Much depends on the personal relationship between the official of the *Nyeir- tsang* and the village headman. Later, *betang* (silver coin) replaced the articles. Normally against one *betang* advanced to seven *bres* of paddy. *Ma Benda* is another mechanism devised for collection of additional food grains from affluent villagers. In this system a ceremonial scarf called ‘*zong-kheir*’ and in some cases *khapse* (deep fried cookies) were presented to the villagers through their headman. In return, each such household were required to offer 10 to 12

bres of food grains to the monastery. every household of the villages from Tawang to *Thongleng* were to supply a fixed quantity of firewood to the monastery while far flung villages had to supply fixed quantity of food grains in lieu of firewood.

A form of land lease system called *boima* is common in the Tawang area. With this system, a farmer cultivates a plot of land owned by the Tawang Monastery and the harvested rice was divided between the farmer and the monastery. Monastery receives a quarter of the harvest. The background of this system is the frequency of farmers' migration from Tawang to Dirang and Kalaktang and also Bhutan owing to the severe taxes imposed to *Dzongpon* sent from Tibet. The monastery took over many parcels of land as it took over a number of ownerless properties while some pieces of land were donated by the villagers. This practice continues till today. In this system the cost of labor for harvesting is shared 50-50 by villagers and the monastery. In the harvesting season six to ten members of the monastery arrive at the villages and stay in the community hall for a week. This is period where the monks' duty is to confirm the harvest yield. During that week the villagers provide food, fuel wood, and sleeping mats to the monks and prepare their foods. After staying for 1 week the monk transports half share of the harvest to the monastery. this practice is still extensively followed in many villages of the Tawang such as *Tengsheng*, *Saikharteng* and *Bekhar* of Tawang area.

4.3.3.1 Importance of religious calendar in celebration of festivals

Before describing about the religious calendar and its significance to the society one has to understand the difference between the calendrical festivals, celebrated by the monks which responsible for the cultic acts, and the participation of the general laymen in these festivals. The monks act the actors and the common men acts as the spectators. Perfect example of this is the celebration of the monastic festival *Torgya*, which is held every year in the 12th month of the lunar calendar. But the changes can be seen in the cultural aspect as last year this festival was organized not in the fixed period but was organized on month after the stipulated time. Due to the absence of many lamas from the monastery this decision was taken. Then grew a fear among the common laymen that this was not a good sign of not organizing the festival in the stipulated time and hence many young and old representatives from the nearby villages went with the prayer to the present abbot and its representatives to organize the festival. But their prayers went in vain as the festival was organized later. Thus, this shows the pure example of the power of the

monastery. These types of festivals are such were the monk's acts as the actors who perform in the premises of the monastery for the spectators displaying the long and old traditional history of the monastery. The laymen are the direct beneficiaries of these religious performances, because these religious performances generate merits and which are generally spread out on everyone. Through the acts of good deeds, it brings out good results on everyone. The believers are therefore encouraged to do donations and servings in order to contribute to the fruitful performances of the sacred ceremonies conducted inside of the monasteries, through donations and other services, since it helps the common laymen to their moral advantages.

Large scale festal occasions are not only an affair of the monks. The functions of these ceremonies, exorcism of the evil forces, invoking a better era, calling up of the good fortune for the year grant them an all- embracing range. The performance of these festivals, with its common hopes and struggles, not only for the welfare of an individual but for the good of the community as a whole, integrates the monkhood and the lay world into a social totality. It is not surprising to see that these occasions have become a community festival of the whole of the Monpa Community. Even if the common man is not called upon to participate directly in these rituals, but are merely present as spectators, their presence underlines the participation of all the central impulse of the monastic community. The common man bears an active joint responsibility for the efficiency of the rituals; he makes his contribution to the process of accumulation of good and wholesome powers, among other things by taking part in the ritual circumambulation of the sacred building, which also includes the monastic press. Through such religious acts he pays homage to the gods and goddess of the monastery and collects merit not only for his personal salvation but also for the collectively whose future welfares the communal rituals ensure.

The Buddhist Lunar calendar plays a very important role not only to the monks of the monastery to conduct their cults and rituals of the monastery but also plays a very important role to the common laymen of the Monpa community. Right from the time of birth till the day of death, with all rites and rituals performed and every other religious festival being organized, everything is done with the consultation of this calendar. The Buddhist calendar also has 30 days with twelve months and seven days in a week with a new element (Fire, Water, Wood and Air) and a zodiac sign which represents among the twelve zodiac signs that follows that change every year. This year the calendar represents

- Water-Earth Dog year. (2561). It is believed that the year that represents the zodiac signs, the person belonging to these zodiac signs are mostly affected by the astronomical occurrences. The Lunar Calendar is a classification scheme that assigns an animal and its reputed attributes to each year in a repeating 12-year cycle. The year 13th, 25th, 37th, 49th, 61th, 85th and so on are considered bad year for both man and women of the society. These years the particular zodiac sign people are told to be more cautious. Many pujas are asked to be done for longevity and good health. This in traditional term is called as the *Kah* years. These years brings bad luck in terms of everything. There is a traditional believe that the 61th year is bad in terms of death. If a person surpasses this age, then he or she will live healthily for many more years. The dates of the lunar calendar are determined by the traditional method of calculation and are not always on the same day as the astronomical occurrences. It is believed that a person's destiny can be determined by the position of the planets and the positions of the Sun and Moon at the person's time of birth. Chinese believe that our birth year can determine our attitude and potential and that animal birth signs have symbolism and represent a specific behavior. Based on this astronomical position at the time of birth *Keskar* (Janam- Patri) is prepared which not only discusses about the happenings of this life but also talks about the previous lives.

The table is given below:

Days of Week (English)	Local Term	The element
Sunday	Nima	Sun
Monday	Dawa	Moon
Tuesday	Mikmar	Mars
Wednesday	Lhakpa	Mercury
Thursday	Phurbu	Jupiter
Friday	Passang	Venus
Saturday	Penba	Saturn

Table: 5 Names of week in local term with the element

Source: Field work

According to the traditional system of belief, the mentioned dates with the zodiac signs are considered auspicious dates for the respective signs. Any good deeds or any new project undertaken in these dates are considered to be successful if done in the stipulated date. These signs are also required to do away the last rite of the person deceased as the

particular signs with the astronomical calculation will decide how and when the last rites should be performed.

Like the traditional calendar, the lunar calendar is also divided into twelve months. This calendar plays a very crucial role not only to the Monpas of the Tawang region but also has an important role to all the people who are Buddhist by religion. The lunar Calendar followed by the people of the Monyul area consists of 12 months along with 360 days with 30 days in a month. The days are known as follows.

The dates marked in red are considered to be auspicious days by the said community for carrying out of any meritorious deeds.

1 <i>Che Thi</i>	2 <i>Ches Nyei</i>	3 <i>Ches Sum</i>	4 <i>Ches Bli</i>	5 <i>Ches Lengey</i>	6 <i>Ches Gro</i>	7 <i>Ches Nyis</i>	8 <i>Ches Gyet</i>	9 <i>Ches Dugu</i>	10 <i>Ches Chi</i>
11 <i>Ches Chi Thi</i>	12 <i>Ches Ching Nyei</i>	13 <i>Ches Chik Sum</i>	14 <i>Ches Chi Bli</i>	15 <i>Ches Chi lengey</i>	16 <i>Ches Chi Gro</i>	17 <i>Ches Chi Nyis</i>	18 <i>Ches Chip Gyet</i>	19 <i>Ches Chi Dugu</i>	20 <i>Ches Khali</i>
21 <i>Nyishu Thi</i>	22 <i>Nyishu Nyei</i>	23 <i>Nyishu Sum</i>	24 <i>Nyishu Bli</i>	25 <i>Nyishu Lengey</i>	26 <i>Nyishu Gro</i>	27 <i>Nyishu Nyis</i>	28 <i>Gyaei Tong</i>	29 <i>Gui Tong</i>	30 <i>Tong chin</i>
Zodiac Sign				Local term			Auspicious day		
Rabbit				Yos			Friday		
Dragon				Bruk			Tuesday		
Snake				Brui			Friday		
Horse				Thae			Wednesday		
Goat				Luk			Monday		
Monkey				Twee			Sunday		
Rooster				Za			Wednesday		
Dog				Khi			Friday		
Pig				Pha			Tuesday		
Rat				Ziwa			Thursday		
Ox-				Lang,			Saturday		
Tiger				Ta			Saturday		

Table: 6 Names of dates and Zodiac sign in a lunar calendar in local term along with auspicious date and day

Source: Fieldwork

4.3.3.2 Calendar Celebration of different rites and rituals of the Tawang Monastery

A. First Month- *Dawa Dangpo* (Lossar)

The first month of the lunar calendar is celebrated as the New Year (Lossar) by the said community. It's a harvesting festival celebrated with pomp and show. According to the Buddhist Lunar Calendar the whole month is divided into two sections- 1st -15th Day-*Dawa Yarngo* and 16th – 30th Day- *Dawa Marngo*. During these days a special puja is done by the monks of the monastery called as the *Shozang* which means *Sho*- Virtues and *Zong* means to kill *Dikpas* (Sins).

1-Day- *Lhamo Temri*

2-Day- *Labrang/ Neychung* (Monks Offering)

3rd Day to 7th day- (Lossar Vacation)

8th to 17th Day- *Monlam Choithuil* (*Gey Lama Lobsang Dakpa*) (Lord Buddha's Wisdom Preaching)

10th day- *Kangsho Choikah*

15th day- *Sangwea Duipa*

19th Day- *Menlah*

29th day- *Kangsho*

B. Second Month- *Dawa Nyipa*

1-Day- *Lhamo Temri*

2-Day- *Labrang/ Neychung* (Monks Offering)

3-Day- *Tongoh Phuishi*. This act is performed by the Gelong of the monastery and this act is known as *Tongoh*.

8th to 17th Day- *Monlam Choithuil* (*Gey Lama Lobsang Dakpa*) (Lord Buddha's Wisdom Preaching)

19th Day- *Menlah*

29th day- *Kangsho*

C. Third Month (*Dawa Sumpah*)

1-Day- *Lhamo Temri*

2-Day- *Labrang/ Neychung* (Monks Offering)

3-Day- *Tonggo Phuishi*.

This act is performed by the Gelong of the monastery and this act is known as *Tonggo*. This act is performed by the lama of the monastery which is done turn wise according to the seniority of the Lamas and this act is known as *Tonggo*. In this act

all the expenditure for the day is being taken care by that particular lama. This act can be seen as a return Thanksgiving act of the Lama and the Lamas family to the monastery and the monastic values in which the lama resides for his whole life. The food, the butter tea for all the lamas has to be sponsored by the lama. This act is performed by the Gelong of the monastery and this act is known as *Tonggo*

8th to 17th Day- *Monlam Choithuil (Gey Lama Lobsang Dakpa)* (Lord Buddha's Wisdoms Preaching).

18th day- *Kharung Mengshing*- Caretaker offering to the Gompas now which is done by the *Changzae* of the Monastery.

19th Day- *Menlah*

29th day- *Kangsho*

D. Fourth Month (*Dawa Zhi pah*)

1-Day- *Lhamo Temri*

2-Day- *Labrang/ Neychung* (Monks Offering)

3- Day- *Tonggo Phuishi*. This act is performed by the Gelong of the monastery and this act is known as *Tonggo*.

9th- Day- *Kingkor* (Mandala Preparation)

14th to 19th Day-*Denzu* (Scripture Reading)

19th Day- *Zin She* (Hawan)

20th Day- *Kingkor Lui She* (Offering of the King Kor to the water diety) *Luh* (There is a practice of offering the *Kinkor* in a particular place called as the *Leh Chemey Rong* which was in the earlier days a river now a drain).

19th Day- *Menlah*

29th day- *Kangsho*

E. 5th Month (*Dawa Nyapa*)

1-Day- *Lhamo Temri*

2-Day- *Labrang/ Neychung* (Monks Offering)

3- Day- *Tonggo Phuishi*.

19th Day- *Menlah*

29th day- *Kangsho*

F. 6th Month (*Dawa Dukpa*)

1-Day- *Lhamo Temri*

2-Day- *Labrang/ Neychung* (Monks Offering)

3- Day- *Tonggo Phuishi.*

18th to 22nd day- *Heruka* (Mandala Preparation)

19th Day- *Menlah*

23rd to 26th Day- *Demcho* (Scripture Reading)

26th Day- *Zing She.*

20th Day- *Kingkor Luh She* (Offering of the King Kor to the water diety) *Luh*

29th day- *Kangsho Yarnge*

From the Sixth Month, Day 15th to the 30th day of the 7th Month there is a common belief among the monks of the Tawang monastery that they are abided to go to the areas which is covered in greenery as it's considered an act of impiousness for them. The areas are *Bram dung Chung* on the north to Manjushree in the South and from *Sangeling Gompa* on the West to the *Changbu Gompa* in the East. For 1 month and Fifteen days the monks are abided to go beyond the above-mentioned places. If in any case the monks are to go beyond these places then the particular monk has to seek permission from the Tawang Monastery (*DahChang*).

G. 7th Month (*Dawa Dunpah*)

1-Day- *Lhamo Temri*

2-Day- *Labrang/ Neychung* (Monks Offering)

3rd Day to 7th Day- *Yamedaga* Mandala Preparation

8th to 13th Day- *Zigshe* (Scripture Reading)

13th Day- *Zing she*

14th day- *Kingkor Luh She* (Offering of the King Kor to the water diety) *Luh*

19th to 29th Day- a special puja (*Dung Phe Wangchin*) is being organized by the lamas of the monastery where for 10 consecutive days a religious text called as the *Lemrim* is being read and after that a Sung che is being organized for the common people of the said community.

H. 8th Month (*Dawa GyeaPah*)

1-Day- *Lhamo Temri*

2-Day- *Labrang/ Neychung* (Monks Offering)

12th day/ 13th Day/14th Day- *Ramneh Chenbu*

On these days all the Idols of Gods and Goddess of the monastery are re-purified. The Idols brought by the common people are also purified.

19th Day- *Menlah*

29th day- *Kangsho*

I. 9th Month (*Dawa Gu pah*)

1-Day- *Lhamo Temri*

2-Day- *Labrang/ Neychung* (Monks Offering)

8th to 15th Day- *Ghu po Tongo* (This act is performed by the lama of the monastery which is done turn wise according to the seniority of the Lamas and this act is known as *Tonggo*. In this act all the expenditure for the day is being taken cared by that particular lama. This act can be seen as a return Thanksgiving act of the Lama and the Lamas family to the monastery and the monastic values in which the lama resides for his whole life. The food, the butter tea for all the lamas has to be sponsored by the lama.

8th -15th day- *Redi Kingkor* (Mandala Preparation)

22nd day- *Lhabap Duechin* (Lord Buddha actual descend from the realm of thirty-three days)

19th Day- *Menlah*

29th day- *Kangsho*

J. 10th Month (*Dawa Chu pah*)

1-Day- *Lhamo Temri*

2-Day- *Labrang/ Neychung* (Monks Offering)

15th Day- *Gyep Gem Cham*

18th day- *Choizea Zokpah*

25th Day- *Ganden Nyamchod* (His Holiness Jay Lama *Chongkapa* had attained his Moksha form the mortal world)

K. 11th Month (*Dawa Chuk Chi pah*)

1-Day- *Lhamo Temri*

2-Day- *Labrang/ Neychung* (Monks Offering)

28th Day – 1st day of Torgya

29th Day- 2nd day of Torgya

30th Day- 3rd day of Torgya

L. 12th Month (*Dawa Chung Nyi pah*)

1-Day- *Lhamo Temri*

2-Day- *Labrang/ Neychung* (Monks Offering)

19th Day- *Menlah*

4.3.3.3 The Religious Rites and Rituals of Tawang Monastery

The organization of monastic communities deserves particular attention within a study of the Monpa religious life. Not only are the monasteries highly respected and extraordinarily fruitful centers in which Buddhism received its impetus and from which it spread itself; the entire political and cultural history of the Mon region was and is still dominated by the Tawang Monastery. The conditions and demands of everyday life, as well as the continual growth in the power of the monasteries as they become more and more involved in secular activity had strict monastic observance. The entire monastic life is ruled by the regularly repeating cycle of liturgical assemblies, spiritual recitation, rituals, and some mundane works.

In describing the ritual practices of the Tawang Monastery, a general picture of the customs usual practiced by the monks of the monastery is as follows- at about 5 am in the morning there takes place, for example, the meditation. After which includes the recitation of the religious texts, where all the monks gather in the monastery for the religious recitation. Along with that begins the day of the people of the said community with recitation of holy religious scripts, offering of water and thus purifying the environment and also their respective homes.

Besides the services mentioned in the earlier presentation, the monks observe seasonal rites. On the first day of the first lunar calendar, invocation of the tutelary deity of the monastery, *Palden Lhamo*, is done for the overall well-being of the all-sentient beings for the ensuing year. Offering of Torma (a ritualistic offering) is done on the occasion. When the monastery was established, *Merak Lama* is said to have appealed to the people of the Mon region to extend assistance for the sustenance of the inmates as well as for the maintenance of the monastery itself.

There is no doubt that the Tawang Monastery, has been the largest Buddhist monastic institution in the entire north east Himalayan region of India, and will be the main seat of Buddhist learning. But the monastery's traditional educational system of confining to development of only spirituality is not proving useful in the preservation, practice and promotion of the rich cultural heritage of the region in the fast-changing modern world. Therefore, it was felt necessary by the monastery authorities that the traditional monastic

education system should have a restructuring and reorientation by introducing modern languages, social and general sciences in their curriculum.

The Monastery school was established in the year 1974 under the guidance of “*Rigya Rimpochea Thupten Gyelek Khunkhen*”. Initially the school started with only 4 subjects- Buddhist Philosophy, English, Hindi and Social Science. Gyen Thutan Gombu was the first appointed Headmaster of the school who is also a monk of the monastery. Earlier only the Lamas were admitted into the schools but later on children of poor economic conditions of the laymen were also admitted in the schools. Now, at present the school is CBSE affiliated and runs classes from nursery to class 8. This school was started with the aim of promoting the modern education system into the lives of the lamas who resided in the monastery. The stakeholders of the monastery felt a necessity for the monks to also receive equal rights of Education to improve their daily lives. After passing out from Tawang Monastery School the lamas then go to other affiliated Colleges and Universities in Varanasi or in Dahung, CICS (Central Institute of Cultural Studies) to pursue higher education. Now we find many young monk scholars from the community, some are pursuing research works and some are rendering their services to the monastery as school teachers and are working in the monastery school.

4.4 Death – an important aspect in Buddhism

From its inception, Buddhism has stressed the importance of death, since awareness of death is what prompted the Buddha to perceive the ultimate futility of worldly concerns and pleasures. Realizing that death is inevitable for a person who is caught up in worldly pleasures and attitudes, he resolved to renounce the world and devote himself to finding a solution to this most basic of existential dilemma. Buddhist teachers strongly advise their students to meditate on death and impermanence, since they are powerful counteragents to short sighted concern with the present life and one’s own transitory happiness.

Tibetan Buddhism places a particularly strongly emphasis on instructions concerning death, and Tibetan literature is full of admonitions to be aware of the inevitability of death, the preciousness of the opportunities that a human birth presents, and the great value of mindfulness of death. A person who correctly grasps the inevitability, of death becomes more focused on religious practice, since he or she realizes that death is inevitable, the time of death is uncertain, and so every moment counts.

As Dr. Richard Kalish states,

Death is blasphemous and pornographic. We react to it and it symbol in the same way that we react to pornography. We avoid it. We deny it exists. We avert our eyes from its presence. We protect little children from observing it and dodge their questions about it. We speak of it only in whispers. We consider it horrible, ugly and grotesque.

From its inception, Buddhism has taken a different course. Anyone who has studied with a Tibetan lama has been regularly reminded of the importance of mindfulness of death. Teachings on death and impermanence are found in every facet of Tibetan Buddhist teaching. Buddhist teachings emphasize the idea that although one's destiny is always influenced by past Karma, every person has the ability to exercise free will and influence the course of both life and death. We all shape our own life and death. We all shape our own destinies, and in every moment, there are opportunities for spiritual advancement. According to many Buddhist texts, death presents us with a range of important possibilities for progress.

Buddhist believes death is a natural part of the life cycle. They believe that death simply leads to rebirth. This belief in re incarnation that a person's spirit remain close by seeks out a new body and new life is a comforting and important principles. For Buddhist death is not the end of life, so it is not something to be feared. Where and how a person is reborn depends on their good and bad actions of past lives.

According to Buddhism, everything that happens is the result of Karma- the law of cause and effect. Every action throughout a person's lifetime, both good and bad, has an effect on their future. The way a person lives his or her life also affects the way they die. So, it is very important for a Buddhist to prepare for death by living in good and kind manners. They are encouraged to be true to themselves and to care for and those around them. This is how they can achieve calmness and control at their time of death. Death according to Buddhism is the consequences of the process of maturation of Karma which has effect at a particular time and in a particular manner; it is also a separation of the life principle, *blah*, from the body, which can be traced back to factors which are fortuitous rather than karmic in a true sense. This separation is, however, not irreparable, for there are

appropriate techniques available to call the *blah* into its bodily shell and so give life back to the body.

The *Bardo Thos Grol* also known as The Book of the Dead plays a very important role in the life of a Buddhist. This script is to be recited by the pillow of the dying or dead man intended to awake the liberating consciousness in his consciousness principle. This book stands at the center of the Lamaistic technique of liberation.

Before understanding the book of the dead one needs to understand the importance of the Wheel of Life (*Sepah Khorloh*) in Buddhist sense. In the Wheel of life at the center most part of the wheel we see the pictures of three animals Pig, Snake and Cock. The Pig represents ignorance (*Tig Muh*), the snake represents Anger (*Nya gyel*) and the cock represents Attachment (*Deh Cha*). These three are called as the *Nima Tak Sum*. The 2nd Sphere is divided into two parts. The 3rd sphere is divided into six parts- God (Long Life), Human Beings, Demi Gods (*Lhama gyee*), Hungry Gods (Stingy person), Hell Beings (sufferings never ending) and Animals (*Dhun dho*). Gods, Humans and Demi Gods are considered as the fortunate beings and animals, hell beings and hungry ghosts are considered as the Unfortunate beings. A man can be freed from the worldly things only when he is free from Self Love. i.e., Anger, Ignorance and Attachments. The image of the Snake and Cock coming out of the Pig's mouth symbolizes that Ignorance is the main reason for anger and attachment. The images in the Wheel of Life shows that the deeds of human beings done in their life results in the next phase of incarnation. The anger leads to rebirth in Demi Gods. Attachments lead to re birth in hungry ghosts. Ignorance leads to rebirth in animals. It is believed that if a man does a lot of sins in his life, he is directly re incarnated as hell being. If a man is freed from ignorance, anger and attachments then he reaches the ultimate one, the Enlighten One (*Zangchu Zemba*). To resolve all these ones has to follow the *Koncho Sum-Sange*, *Choi* and *Gendan Sangah*. One has to follow the *Dehneh Sum* i.e *Duai Deneh* (*Tsutum*)/ Rules, *Dohteh Deneh* (*Samteh*)/ Concentration and *Ngyupeh Deneh* (*Sherap*)/ Concentration to obtain salvation, free from all the desires and wishes according to Buddhism.



Figure- 26

Painting of Wheel of Life (Sepei Kharloh⁴)

4.4.1 Bardo Thos Grol- The Book of the Death- an interpretation and analysis

Thoi literally means Hearing and *Dhoral* literally means Liberation. So, it means liberation through hearing. In the *Bardo Thos Grol* the consciousness which the lama performing the practice attempts to awake in the consciousness principle of the dead man has purification as its object. The lama who whispers the syllables of the book in the ear of a dead man still retaining a trace of his own consciousness principle is in reality a *psychopomp* who accompanies the dead person step by step on his difficult path during the forty-nine days of the intermediate state between death and re birth. If the recitation of the book does not succeed in awakening the consciousness of the dead man, and so in bringing about his transition into a better form of existence, then his consciousness principle will be led before the god of the dead for the last judgment. However, he does not arrive in front of his judge alone, but attended by two accompanying figures; one is the “demon of evil works born with man”, the other the god born with man. One is black, the other white; one has black pebbles in his hand, the other white, to reckon at the moment of judgment the good and bad actions committed by the dead man. These spirits, who exist and are present simultaneously in man, enter into existence together with him grow to maturity along with him as the embodiments of the good and evil deeds he has

⁴ Six realms of existence- Realm of hell, of hungry ghosts, of animals, of humans, of demi gods and the realm of god.

accomplished. The script is divided into three parts- 1. *Chikha Bardoh* (Before Dying) 2. *Chungyi Bardoh* (After Death) 3. *Sipei Bardoh* (Rebirth).

4.4.1.1 *Chikha Bardo* (Before Dying)

This is the first stage; this is the time in between when the person is in between Death and the moment till he dies. It is known fact that the human body is made up of five elements- Earth, Water, Air, Wood and Iron. When a human being is on the verge of dying different changes can be seen both in his body and mind. After a human being dies his meat goes into Earth, Blood changes into water. At the time of dying the feelings in the five sensory organ changes; a sense of suffocation appears in the mind. One feels as if we are drowning in the water. We feel presence of water as water droplets in the mind. Heat turns into Fire. A burning sensation happens in the body and the mind too seems to be burning as if red burning coals appear in the mind. Breathe turns into air. The body feels very light at the time of dying. In the mind we see the flames of fire burning in the mind.

4.4.1.2 *Chungyi Bardo* (After Death) (Day 1- Day 13th)

After a person dies from day one it is believed among the Buddhist that the departed soul wanders in the living world for 49 days. Each day a deity comes appears before the departed soul in order to help the soul to attain the path of Salvation. This part of the text talks about the different deities that come one by one before the departed soul from the living world.

Even after the 13th day if the death person is not able to transcend to the other world due to its ignorance, then he or she has to repeat the stages again and again till the 49th day of the death. At the 49th day the soul has to transcend to one world or the other mentioned in the Wheel of life

4.4.1.3 *Sipei Bardo* (The Process of Re Birth) (24th and half day till 49th day)

Within the Buddhist community, death has important religious meaning. It marks the moment when new life begins through rebirth. For those left behind, it is a powerful reminder of Buddha's teachings. Every Buddhist must be prepared for death, because it can happen at any time. Because of this, it is important to make every moment count. Human birth is precious, and life has great value. When death is near, Buddhists are taught

to think about their holy writings. Giving one's final thoughts to Buddha and his teachings brings good luck to a new existence.

This stage starts from the 24th and Half Day when a person dies. Till this stage the death person does not realize that it has died and have left the mortal world. From this day the death person starts to realize when it does not see any kind of response from the other persons alive. The dead person gets suspicious when he does not see his shadow, his footprints, his relatives does not respond to him when he tries to talk to them. Slowly he then realizes that he has died and then he gets scared and becomes unconscious. After this slowly he realizes that he has died and has left the mortal world.

This is the time when his 49 days of journey from the mortal world to the enlighten world starts. During this period even the relatives and close and dear ones of the dead person are advised to follow the path of Dharma. The actions of the relatives sometimes also tend to decide under which realm the dead person would be born into.

The 49th day (*La Lubteh Lubu*) is the most crucial one because this is the last day of the dead person in the mortal world. On this day the soul of the dead person has to go to any one of the realms of life.

The monks residing in Tawang Monastery play a very important role in performing the rituals associated whenever a death occurs in the Monpa society. They are being called into the homes of the bereaved family to perform rituals for the departed soul. The rituals are performed by for a period of 49days. Some people prefer to perform these rituals in the Tawang Monastery. The book of the death is being recited by the Lama. The book is considered to show path to the departed soul and those listening to the script the path to Salvation. So, all those who come to bid farewell to the departed soul are being encouraged to listen to it.

4.5 Three Principles of Buddhism followed by the Monpas

Who is A Buddhist? If this question arises then, accordingly lies answer in the three Buddhist Principles:

I. *Tompalah Zugpeh Goh Kyamdoh*” which means that if you are a true Buddhist then you need to take refuge or shelter under three things called as the Three Jewels:

1. Buddha
2. Dharma
3. Sangha

In practical sense we can say that, Buddha can be considered as the Doctor who cures the illness. Same in this manner Buddha is the Doctor who has given rules and values to cure Ignorance. Then, *Dhamma* is the Medicine, which means the Scriptures containing Rules and Principles which has been laid down for the common people as the medicine for Ignorance. This means that if a person practices the Scripts (*Choi*) a lot then he will be able to get relieved of his pains and sufferings caused mainly due to the Ignorance. Lastly the *Sangha*, they are the nurses who help the common people in teaching them about the uses of the medicines. The Nurses are the holy gurus and preachers of the society who help the common people.

4.5 .1 *Tharpeh Goh Nye Chung* (Enlightenment)

The real essence of Buddhism is to attain Enlightenment. The Ultimate Salvation, a process which enables the human beings to attain Salvation which frees human beings from all kinds of sufferings and pains. The Buddhist teachings tell us that a man can attain salvation only when he is free from the six realms of life.

4.5.2 *Thakpeh Chembu Goh Semkeh* (Selfless Service)

The third and also one of the most important practices is the practice of Selfless Love. Others before self: an important mantra for a Buddhist to follow. Right from the time of birth till death one must always act and think about the well-being of the others. One must always think not only for the human beings but must think about the welfare of the whole sentient beings.

These three principles are the founding aspect of a Buddhist. Right from the time of birth of a child in a Monpa society the elders of the family emphasis their children to practice these principles in life. Children are being encouraged to learn and recite the daily prayers, offer morning prayers in the prayer chamber of their respective houses. Have compassion and tolerance among all the sentient beings of the universe. A child in a Monpa society is encouraged to follow Buddhism through practice and perseverance.

4.6 Taxation System- A traditional way of Correspondences between the villagers and the Tawang Monastery

At the time of the establishment of the Tawang Monastery, *Merak* Lama had appealed to the people of the *Monyul* to extend their support for the sustenance of the Monastery as well as for the inmates of the Monastery which would be the people from the said community. In response to the appeal the people very happily agreed to offer a part of their agricultural and dairy products to the Monastery which was called as *Buiwa* (Offerings). On the basis of this voluntarily agreement between the people of the Mon region and the Monastery the monks from the monastery were sent to the villages to survey the cultivable lands of the people. This was called as the *Kang*. (A local unit of land measurement fixed on the basis of fertility of the land rather than on the size of the land) and thus started the initial collection of offerings from the villages by the monks of the monastery. With the gradual passage of time and increase in the numbers of inmates in the monastery this system of offerings had become mandatory and thus later came to be known as *Khrai*. This was divided as *bru-khrai* (food grains- *bru*, *khrai*-tax) and the land against which the tax was levied upon was called as *khrai-leng* (taxable cultivable land) or *khrai-sah* (taxable land). For the collection of the offerings/ tributes the said community was divided into mainly two parts by the then Tibetan Government:

1. *Tsok Shum*
2. *Dakpaneng*
3. *Rho and Jangda* (Independent)

I. Tsok Shum: - It comprised of further sub divided into parts:

1. *Ser Tshok and Sher Tshok* (*Khung*)
2. *Shar Tsok and Shar Tsok* (*Khung*)
3. *Lhou Tsok and Lhou Tsok* (*Khung*)

This distribution had a number of villages under it. The table below will show the clear distribution of these villages:

Divisions	Further Divisions	Villages
<i>Tsok Sum</i>	<i>Ser Tsok</i>	<i>Seru Toth, Seru, Berkhar, Toth Wakhar, Meth Chok Sen, Meth Wah Khar, Gor Choi Mey, Sha Shing Tsok Tshan, Sha Shing, Sha Shing(meth),</i>
	<i>SerTsok (Khang)</i>	<i>Bomjak, Khet (TotPah), Khet (meth), gyamdong, zorphae, Teli, Nagmet, Themah (Khrimu),</i>
	<i>Shar Tsok</i>	<i>Paider, Bombak, Bumteng, Chea Tak, Umkhar, Gangkhar, Gangkhar Thea Khang, Gangkhar Khem Chengmu, Khartoth, yulbu, dharmakang, Paikhar, Kungelling, Audung, Zea Gui, amkhar, Sharnup, Khardung, Dengkhar, Bomdir, Woikher.</i>
	<i>Shar Tsok (Khung)</i>	<i>Nagmet, jung(yul-chenbu), shum thang,</i>
	<i>Lhou Tsok</i>	<i>Lhou topah, thea khang, yontak, singkhar, nangkhar, che kor, deh leng, thea leng, meth pah</i>
	<i>Lhou Tsok (Khung)</i>	<i>Sha ropa, jang (marmang), Jang (noh-mah-shing), jang (Kharsa and Muchut)mibra, gomkeleng, mukto, gongkhar.</i>

Table:7 Table showing the distribution of villages for collection of tax
Source: Field Work

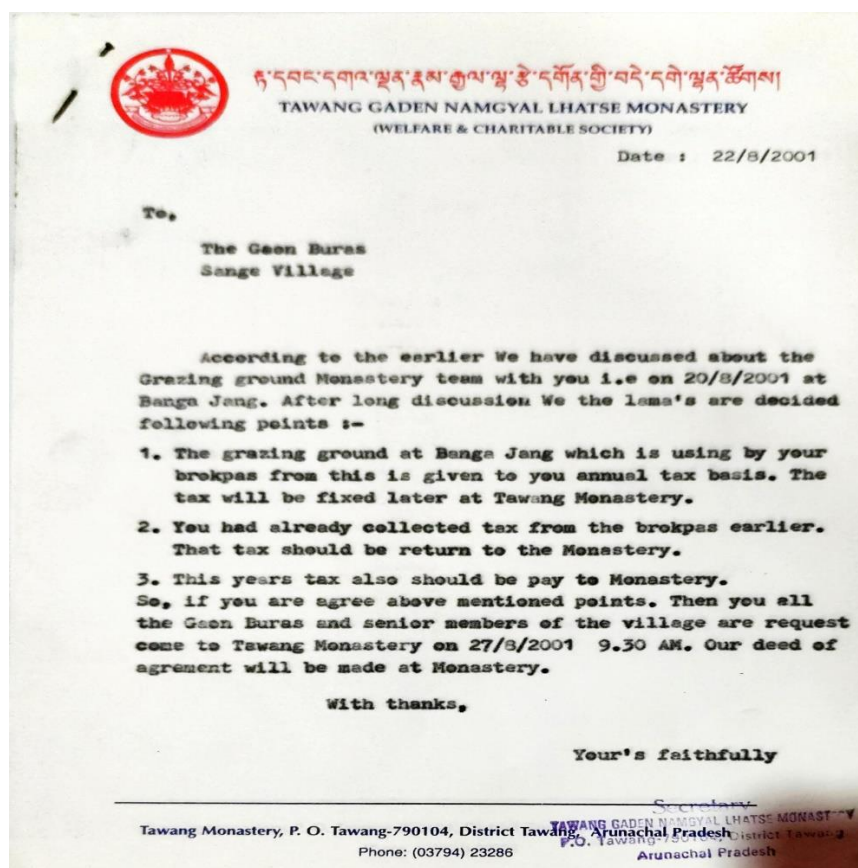


Fig. 27
Official Document sent to one of the villages for tax collection,
Source: Archive of Tawang Monastery

Each household in the *Tsokshum* villages having *Khrei leng* had to pay tax to the Monastery. The amount of tax depended upon the fixation made by the Monastery. As stated earlier the taxes were in forms of agricultural and dairy products. Barley, Buck wheat, bitter buckwheat, garlic, sheep wool, *betang* (local coins), woods for the kitchen, was collected by the monastery as taxes. Every *Tsok* had to give wools from 60 sheep. The calculation was done in two seasons- summer and winter season. Each sheep had to produce 2 kgs of wool in summer i.e., a total of (2X60=120 Kgs) and in winter season a total of 3kgs from each sheep i.e. (3X60=180kgs). Therefore, each *tsok* had to offer 300 kgs of sheep wool to the monastery. A total of 600 kgs of wool was collected for the monastery annually.

The monastery to in order to maintain a cordial relationship with the people had also provided some special deductions or favors for the villages in collection of Taxes. They were mainly of three forms:

1. **Cho Chak-** (*Cho* means *Tsorgen* and *Chak* means Deductions) Deduction made for the *Tsorgens* of the villages.
2. **Goh-Chak-** (*Gho* means workers and *Chak* means deductions) Deductions made for the workers who work during the cultivation and harvesting of crops in the villages.
3. **Kah Chak-** (*Kah* means Letter and *Chak* means deduction) a special letter by the Tibet Government for a particular community for deduction in taxes.

During the collection of taxes, the mentioned criteria were also looked into and then the total amount of tax to be collected were decided by the Monastery. Each household in the *Tsoksum* area had to give their share of food grains to the monastery. The collection was done once in a year in the *Tsoksum* villages but in the *Dakpaneng* area it was collected in two seasons- summer and winter seasons. And the tax collected varied according to the season. In summer the amount of Taxes collected was more in quantity rather than that to which it was collected in the winter season. This distribution was made because the numbers of monks admitted from the *Dakpaneng* area in the Monastery were more to the numbers of monks admitted from the *Tsoksum* areas. At present too, the numbers of monks from the *Dakpaneng* are more to that of that of the other areas. (60-40). There are generally two different types of traditional measuring instrument used to measure the food grains which are called as *Tah Deh/Tong Bre* and *Bre*. They vary in the size. *Tong Bre*

belongs to the Monastery and the *Bre* is the measuring instrument belongs to the villages. The other traditional measuring tools used are *Tshrang* (Weighing Machine) and *Gyamoh* (Measuring machine slightly big in size) and *Boh*. When the *Khrei* Land (landed property) is divided among the heirs of the family, the offerings or contributions made to the monastery is also equally divided among the heirs. The contributions made to the monastery in form of taxes especially the food grains are equally distributed among the monks of the monastery.

The people of the *Pangchen* area i.e., the present Zemithang have very little cultivable land and they are mostly dependent on the animal husbandry. A part from the products of the animals in the form of butter are offered in the monastery. The offerings are collected on the basis of number of cattle a household owns. On an average, a family offers two kilograms of butter to the monastery annually.

With the passage of time, the numbers of monks increased in the monastery. Hence, to meet the additional requirements of food grains the system of *Tsong Drem* and *Ma Benda* were formed. *Tsong Drem* is a trading system whereby *Nyeir- Tsang* of the monastery advances certain merchandises through the village headman to some comparatively well-off villagers from whom one can expect in return certain quantity of food grains during the next harvest. As the land in the *Dhakpaneng* area is more fertile this system of *Tsong Drem* is more applied in the *Dhakpaneng* area. The quantity of food grains in return for the articles advanced in this system, however, is not fixed. This depends on the personal relationships between the official of the *Nyeir Tsang* and the village headman (*Tsorgen*). *Ma Benda* is another mechanism devised for collection of additional food grains from the affluent villagers. In this system, a ceremonial scarf called “*zong- kheir*” and in some cases a *Khabse* (sweets of the said community) as well were presented to some villagers through the village headman. In return, each household was required to offer 10 *bres* of food grains to the monastery. In addition to this, every household in the villages adjacent to the Tawang monastery, from Tawang to Thongleng village to be specific, were to supply a fixed quantity of fire woods to the monastery, where the far-flung villages were to supply food grains in place of fire wood.

The monastery is also supported with some landed property; from which they draw some revenue. Their landed property is divided mainly into two: cultivable and grazing land. Most of the cultivable lands owned by the monastery were leased out to tenants on crop

share basis. From the grazers using the grazing land of the Tawang Monastery local butter was collected as tax. Other sources of revenue collected were rent from few houses the monastery owned, donations from the devotees, remunerations received for the conduct of religious services by the monks for the laity.

Before the administrative control came under the Government of India the monastery in earlier days was totally dependent on the taxes it collected from the villages in various forms. The monastery was not in so good condition economically. But now a good amount of Corpus fund is provided for sustenance and maintenance of the monastery by the Government of India. Tax collected was basically required for maintenance of the monastery and for the monks living in the monastery. Earlier the collected tax in form of Local Butter (*Maar*), *Churpi*, foodgrains were equally divided among the inhabitants of the monastery depending upon the number of household and members present. Later with the establishment of Common Kitchen (*Cheethap*) these taxes were decreased in numbers which had erased a good amount of burden from the villagers and the *Brokpas* of the community because of the help provided by the Government of India in terms of Corpus fund. Still today the Monastery is being administratively functioning properly with the help of such Corpus fund.

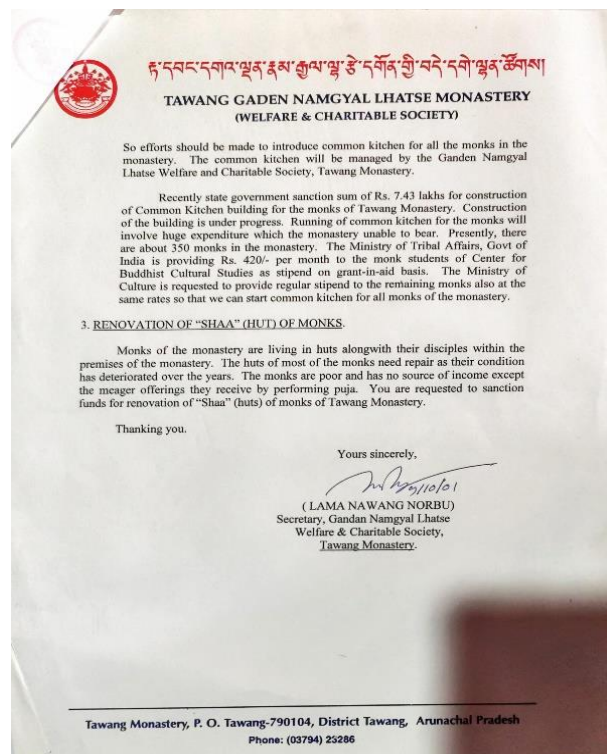
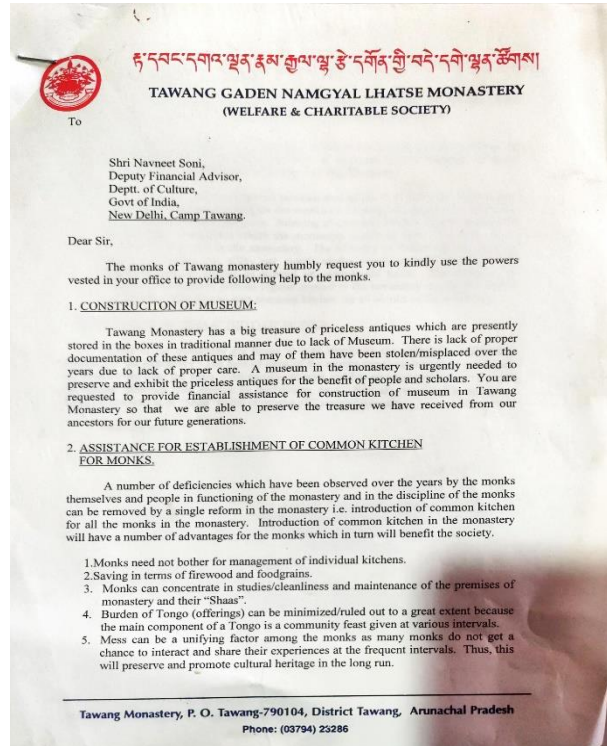


Fig. 28 and 29

Letters written by Tawang Monastery seeking Monetary Assistance for maintenance of the Monastery