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CHAPTER-5

TAWANG MONASTERY AS A SITE OF MEMORY: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Basis of the Religious Festivals, Rites and Practices

Written and oral memory system utilize both word and image to convey and remember the past. Equally important as cultural memory system are the more material monuments of past cultures as well as the plastic and other representative arts such as paintings. Buildings and monuments, sculpture and painting are tangible and visible means of maintaining cultural continuities across the centuries and also of engineering change. Artists and artisans, like historians and poets, create works that reflect and help shape the culture of their times. And like the written and oral transmitted work, works in stone or paint-pottery and pictures, buildings and statues are records of culture (Candice Goucher, Charles Le Guin, and Linda Walton, 1998)

As human cultures reproduce themselves over generations, people construct memories of the past embedded in cultural forms and practices through which they transmit that past in a purposeful way. Some cultures stressed the keeping of formal historical records and transmitted the past in an explicit, conscious fashion through written texts, or through oral traditions. All cultures, whether explicitly or implicitly, found ways to impart a particular understanding of their past through formal and informal means, through institutions and organizations, community rituals and distinctive structures. In this way they negotiated, produced, and reproduced culture in the very process of expressing and transmitting it. It is no accident that words: “memory” and “commemorate” are related. The institutionalization of memory through commemorative rituals of the past is an essential means of cultural reproduction and transmission. (*ibid*)

Buddhism first arrived in the land of Mon in the 6th century AD. The biography of *Khando Drowa Sangmo*¹ says, “Before Droma Sangmo was born, no words of Dharma were heard at *Mandal Gang*². There were no monks. No one knew how to contemplate Avalokiteshvara. No one used to recite his six-syllable mantra (mani). It is therefore clear

¹ Khando Drowa Sangmo was a dakini who was born to a very poor parents in India.

² A place which had no religion.

from the above passage that Buddhism had not spread in Mon before the arrival of *Drowa Sangmo*.

Tsangton Rolpai Dorje, the disciple of the First Dalai lama was a great holy man who possessed all the three qualities-learnedness, industriousness and nobleness who was asked to go to Mon to work for the benefit of Dharma and beings. As requested, he went to Mon and resided at *Lhaou Todrak* Monastery and starting giving teachings to the local people and satiated their thirst for Dharma. He wanted to build a *Geluk* Monastery and for this he performed a divination to choose the site to construct a monastery. He filled his dough (torma) plate with water and after praying earnestly, threw the plate into the air and the place where the plate landed was the place where the first *Geluk* Monastery was constructed, and named it as *Aryak Dung* Monastery.

According to the biography of fifth Dalai Lama, the *Gaden Phodrang* (presently in Tibet) promised to provide guidance and instructions regarding the monastery's curriculum and religious activities, such as prayer ceremonies, monastic debates and rituals performed in the monastery. Presently, the monastery's curriculum is internally management by the management committee of the monastery, the rituals, pujas and all the religious activities is being guided by the Dharamshala, the official office of the present 14th Dalai lama.

Initially the monastery did not have a monastic charter that dealt with the rules and regulations of the monastery. However, all the prayers and practices of the monastery were already implemented during the time of Merak lama.

In order to preserve the noble religious tradition and culture, one boy from each family with three sons is admitted in the monastery. This is called as the *buchum barma* (the middle son). Since may years this has been practised in the Monpa society where the middle son of a family is sent to be a monk in the monastery. For the maintenance of the monastery, grain tax is collected from the subjects. Butter tax is collected from each family of the Pangchen village. Nowadays too butter tax is collected from grazers who are allowed to graze their herds in the lands of the monastery. Merak Lama had a palm sized stone, which was used as a standard size to measure the size of the butter tax. The stone weighs approximately 1.5kg. Merak Lama looked after the monastery and branch monasteries that were under his leadership. Today the monastery is being looked after by an abbot which is being appointed by the office of the Dharamshala. He along with his council of members looks after the everyday affairs of the monastery and its branch

monastery and in return the villagers where the monastery is located has to offer their service in terms of labour or tax whenever required.



Figure 28
Picture of Taxation book (in Bhoti Script) used by the monks at the time of collecting taxes from the villages.



Figure 29
Picture of the stone of believed to be given by Merak Lama to be used as a weighing tool at the time of collection of taxes. The stone weighs 1.5kg approx.



Figure- 30

**Picture of the God *Zambala*³, kept with the stone at the time of collection of taxes.
It is believed to be a symbol of Wealth**



Figure 31

Small box where statue of Zambala is kept along with the stone

Tawang monastery in collaboration with the common masses had performed many rituals and festivals in the monastery. On such ritual is the conduction of 1000,000-fold offering (*bumtsok*) with the help of *Lawok Yulsum*, *Dakpa Tsogye*, *Pangchen Dingdruk*, *Makthing Lungsum* and *Hro Jangdak*. Even this day these kinds of offerings are being done with the help received from the common people. The monastery and the common people jointly presented a statue of Buddha Amitabha, a single volume of 8000 verse scriptures

³ God of Wealth.

in gold, and a bronze Bodhi Stupa as representation of body, speech and mind of an enlightened being. They also made other offerings, including a set of monk's robes, religious articles, an elephant tusk and a large amount of cash to HH 14th Dalai Lama when he visited Tawang. Such offerings are always made by the common people in becoming a part of Monastery.

5.1.1. How the Taxation System Started in Tawang Monastery

Lama Tanpei Droma, an eminent Buddhist Scholar embarked a journey to do a land survey in the eastern part of the Mon. At that time there was a lake named *Tsolung* Lake at the upper part of the *Phudung* river. The lake used to take lives of many people. He tamed the lake and bound it with vows. He looked around all the Indian areas to see which route would be better to travel. Before travelling he offered a puja called as *slab sha*. This was done to predict whether his journey to Indian States will be good or not, and he found that the results were excellently auspicious. Therefore, he went to *Lhagyaltse*. The gods prophesied to him that he should prepare a dzong or a fortress (*Taklung Dzong*) there. At Nub (*Cheleng Drung*), there was a couple who had nine sons. The youngest son had run away and had come to seek shelter under Lama tanpei Droma in the eastern Mon. He addressed himself as *Trangpo Dar*, and had come from another place called as *zhan sprang po dar*. Later, another boy named *Bun Tholong* was vanished from his village and he also took shelter under Lama *Tanpei Droma*. Later lam had agreed to take them under his shelter and become their guru. After that all together travelled to the east where there were a few demons which troubled the villagers a lot. As prophesied by the Lama, all the demons were killed and subdued. After that they reached *Khalaktang*, and met a girl who was manifested as Goddess Tara and had become Lama's attendant. The girl came to the lama informing them about a palace called as *tsing dang khar*, a place where the demon kills and eats people. He collects human taxes. She was worried as her mother was offered as human tax (*mi de lab de*) for the demon. The lam a had promised the girl that the demon will be killed and subdued and in due course of time the demon was killed and subdued.

Later, *Trangpo Dar* started collecting tax from the Indian villages (*rgya gar*), he saw that the people of *Jomo Nakteng* offering hen and a chicken to Shar Ama. When enquired about the reason pf such practise, the people informed that the demon had been born near the Shar Ama Mountain and therefore they had to make such offerings to the demon. The *atsaras* (Indian men) who came to receive the lama had put leaves on the stone steps

along the road, stating that they did not want their Lord's feet to become dirty. The road hence came to be known as *Atsara*. He started collecting taxes from the people known as *ali* which is still continued till this day. After that, the lama gave all the patrons to the *Trangpo Dar*, but the descendants of *Trangpo Dar* due to their internal conflicts among the brothers, they gave the rights to collect all kinds of land taxes to the Tawang Monastery. This is the reason why the Tawang Monastery had started collected taxes which is still continuing.

After the year 1642, with the support from *Gaden Phodrang* monastery (*Sanglamphel*) expanded and developed into the present Tawang Monastery. Earlier, before the establishment of *Gaden Phodrang* Monastery *Merak Lama*, the founder of Tawang Monastery had to face lots of harassment and huge losses for founding the Tawang Monastery. This has been well explained in the *Dga' ba'I dpal ster*. It states that," as *Lama Lodre Gyatso* was without supporters, he along with his disciples, went to seek help from the Tsona district official *Dingpon*. *Dingpon*, being a monk and follower of the Dalai Lama, without going under the influence of money, power investigated the case impartially. *Lama Dzogchenpa* and *Lama Kongpo* lost the case. The district official sent its official to *Gamo Shong* to *Sanglamphel* and all the bamboo huts were burnt down within a day".

The strong establishment can be seen in the lines written in the Fifth Dalai Lamas "*She bam*". It reads

Since the time of the All-knowing Dalai Lama Gendun Gyatso, just like a dynastic lineage, the successive uncles and nephews of Pawo Dungpa Choeje the disciples who upheld the doctrine of the Gerluk School in the eastern Mon. moreover, when the priest patron commands are implemented in Mon in accordance with the edict sent from here, without having to use violent methods, such as military expeditions, Namkha Druk and Merak Lama Lodre Gyatso, by means of skilful and diplomatic methods, should put all the monastic estates and patrons of all the main and branch monasteries in Mon, located between Nyingsang, Galing at Indian border and All under his jurisdiction. If this happens, you can impose a monk-tax to establish monasteries in eastern, western, northern and southern parts of the Mon. you are allowed to collect 10 dres measures of grain as offering in every summer and autumn from each of the families that are under our

jurisdiction. The rituals for the living and the death should be done only by the monks of your monasteries in order to avoid adulteration of pure rituals with impure element. This edict also authorizes you to impose core service in all the communities below Tsona.

Explanation of the passage was done by, “*Denma Gyalsey Trulku*”, served as abbot of Tawang Monastery from 1978 to 1997.

The successive Dalai Lama and *Gyalsey Tanpei Dronmey*, uncles and nephews, shared a teacher-disciple relationship in *Geluk* tradition. After the *Gaden Phodrang* establishes its rule in Tibet, when *Desi Sonam Choephel* and *Gushri Khan*, as priest patron, attempted to extend its control over Mon region, the Dalai Lams advised them that rather than leading a military expedition to the region, *Merak Lama Lodre* could be appointed as the leader of the region. Accordingly, *Merak Lama* and *Tsona Dzong* officer *Namkha Druk* were appointed. At that time, the communities below *Nyingsang*, *Galing* at Indian border and above *Ali* were patrons of the *Geluk* monasteries in *Merak* and *Sakteng*. The fifth Dalai Lama proposed that instead of subjugating those lands through military campaign, the *Merak Lama* should put all those lands under the jurisdiction of Tibet by means of peaceful and diplomatic methods. If he agreed to do so, he would be appointed as the leader of the monasteries in Mon below the Tsona in addition to the existing monastic estates, and would be empowered to collect monk-tax from the families. He would be given also the authority to collect 10 *dreys* of grain as an offering of faith (*dad’ bul*) from each of the families that belonged to the jurisdiction in every summer and in autumn season. It was also proposed that he would be granted authority to impose core service from all the villages below Tsona.

The fifth Dalai Lama had proposed to offer many such rights and privileges to *Merak* lama and the Tsona officials in order to accept the terms and conditions. In due course of time, they agreed to the terms and with the rules laid down by the Fifth Dalai lama they were able to bring all the villages under their jurisdictions without any force and without any kind of wars. The reference to this can also be seen in the *She Bam* of Fifth Dalai lama, which states that,” As I and my monks, out of pure sincerity, issued a gentle command in order to put all the areas from *Mago* and *Thempang* in the east and *Kuri* in the west up to *Dungzam* under the rule of the Tibetan King. The mission was a great

success. After these regions came under the happy rule of our priest-patron administration, the *Geluk* tradition has spread in the region of Mon as much as possible”.

5.2 Role of the Tawang Monastery in preserving Memory and Practices

Beyul Kyimo Jong, *Lawok Yulsum* and *Lachen Tsosum*- found in the old records of the Buddhist religious scriptures refer to the same place which is called Tawang in recent times. The name *Beyul* refers to the hidden place sanctified by Guru Padmashambhav. *Yulsum* refers to three lands and *Tsosum* refers to Three Tribes *Lhawutso*, *Shartso* and *Serutso*. Some people believe that *Tetron Pema Lingpa* granted empowerments of Eight Instructions and Hayagriva at the site where the present Tawang Monastery stands and so the place got its name Tawang, meaning “Empowerment of Hayagriva”. Some people believe in the *Merak* lama’s horse visited the place frequently, he considered it as a good omen and so decided to build the Monastery. Therefore, the monastery was named as Tawang Monastery. However, the place had already got its name as tawang before *Merak* lama arrived there, as it is evident from the passage,” there was a small monastery called as Tawang” written in the biography of the sixth Dalai lama. (Nectar to the Ear: Transmigration of the Fifth Dalai to the Sixth). In ancient times, this place was visited and sanctified by many holy souls like *Dakini Drowa Sangmo*, *Guru Padmasambhava*, *Karmapa Rangjung Dorjee*, *Mahasidha Thangtong Gyalpo*, *Tetron Pema Lingpa*, *Tsangton Rolpai Dorje*, the *Dalai Lama Sonam Gyatso*, *Gyaltsey Tenpei Dronmey* and other holy beings. Hence, the place is very sacred and blessed. The land is being described in old holy scriptures as:

The mountains in the backdrop appear like the white curtains, while the front hills appear as if devout disciplines are attending a teaching. The lower end of the region is lowland due to which thirteen different types of Indian crops grow there. The middle part of the region grows thirteen different types of Monpa crops. The upper part of the region is rich in thirteen different types of Tibetan crops.

Tawang is endowed with three different qualities of pleasant sight-snowy mountains in the upper end, rivers in the lower end and fertile lands in the middle. The land itself is gifted with ten good qualities: it is good for construction of houses, its soil is good for cultivation, its water is good for drinking and agricultural purposes, it has boulders for the construction of buildings, it has stones good for making hearths, its trees are excellent for woodwork and carpentry and fire wood, and its pastures for both local and remote

nomads. As for the landscape, Tawang is said to have a resemblance of a fully filled golden mandala offering tray. However, according to Tawang's history, it is said to appear like the anther of a fully bloomed lotus with eight petals. In the words of *Teytron Pema Lingpa*, "He bestowed empowerments and teaching such as *Eight Sadhana Teachings of Sugatagarbha* on his younger brother *Ugyan Sangpo* and many other fortunate ones. He also sanctified the land and prophesied that in future someone named *Lodre* would find a large extraordinary monastery called *Namgyel (Ganden Namgyel Lhatse* popularly known as Tawang Monastery). His deeds would be very successful and spread in all the ten directions, and would have a long lifespan".

5.2.1 Foundation of the Tawang Monastery

In the year 1680, the Iron Male Monkey year of the 11th *Rabjung* cycle, in order to make the prearrangement to build the monastery, *Merak lama Lodre Gyatso* called all the follower monks, nuns and common people from the villages a meeting or to register their names in participating in the construction of the monastery. This can be confirmed from the old registers created at that time which is still present in the monastery. The list was made in the Tibetan handmade paper and there was a seal at the bottom of each page. The list contains the names of the old monks, novice monks, would be monks, nuns and of the common people as well as of the lamas and monks of the monastery and its branch monasteries. The list contained the information's of total nos. of monks from each community and it was as follows:

Names of villages	Nos. of monks representing each village
<i>Nyingsang</i>	11
<i>Gamri, Kyaleng, Phajo, Kharpa, Tsangri, Dromaling, Leydung and Monlam Tungpa</i>	13
<i>Jon kharpa</i>	1
<i>Tholongpa</i>	1
<i>Sakteng</i>	3
<i>Merak</i>	3
<i>Domkho</i>	5
<i>Tukphenpa</i>	5
<i>Sher</i>	3
<i>Dirang</i>	3
<i>Thempang</i>	11
<i>Lhou tsokhong</i>	23

<i>Shartso</i>	18
<i>Seru tso</i>	51
<i>Trilam</i>	14
<i>Ungla tso</i>	5
<i>Drasa tso</i>	5
<i>Kharungpa</i>	3
<i>Panglengpa</i>	6
<i>Melong Khar</i>	5
<i>Pangchenpa</i>	5
<i>Shaktipa</i>	2
<i>Mukturpa</i>	6
<i>Sang Lumpa</i>	5
<i>Gyangpo, Drondosum, Tsenkhar, Shalipa and Shaksim</i>	0
<i>Kyinyima</i>	2
<i>Dak</i>	2
<i>Kholongpa and Balang Dunpa</i>	1
<i>Mizimpa</i>	1
<i>Gompa</i>	3
<i>Chitsang</i>	1
<i>Kuru</i>	1
Total	244

Table: 8 Showing the list of villages and the number of monks attending the meeting for construction of Tawang Monastery

Source: Field work

Several monks who had become lay people had also attended the meeting, there were 13 lamas and monks of the branch monasteries, 16 nuns and 47 lay tantric practitioners called as *ral chen* (braided hair) who followed the same monastic norms. Approximately, 337 members, lay or ordained, registered their names for the aforesaid meeting. The strong relationship between the monastery and the common people can be seen from the earlier times. The people willingly participated in the activities of the monasteries which is still continued.

Shakabpa's Political History makes the mentions of five lama residence (*bla khag Inga*) of Monpa. Those five were *Merak lama*, Abbot *Ngawang Tsultrim* of Tsona Monastery, *Merak Kukye Chonyi Tenzin*, *Saktrey Trulku Lobsang Trinley* and *Gompa Trulku Lobsang Tenzin Gyatso*, as each of them had a lama residence called as *Labrang* at that time.

During the above-mentioned meeting a unanimous decision was made to build the monastery and for this a petition to the then Dalai Lama, the fifth Dalai lama was sent to seek permission to build the monastery and to request him to give advice regarding the site of the monastery and to provide workers for the construction of the monastery. In the petition, a request was also made to consider about providing the rights and privileges, annual grant and guidance to the monastery once the construction of the monastery is completed. The Dalai lama then replied to the petition as follows:

Earlier Tetron Pema Lingpa prophesized that a monastery should be built near the small monastery called as Tawang. Now, is the time to build the monastery there. The name Lodre mentioned is his prophecy refers only to you, Merak Lam Lodre Gyatso, as there is no other person with the same name. all the people of the Monyul should volunteer to work on its construction.

After the advisory received from the Dalai Lama, on the auspicious sixth day of the Seventh Tibetan month of the Iron Male Monkey year (1680), which was the auspicious day, led by Merak Lama, along with a large number of monks the foundation stone of the monastery was laid with due ceremony. After that the leveling the earth, masonry, carpentry, painting and other works started. On 28th of the ninth Tibetan month of the same year, the Fifth Dalai Lama sent an edict called as the She bam, written on a yellow brocade scroll, bearing his seal, to *Merak Lama Lodre Gyatso*. The edict ends with the line “Seal of the Dalai Lama, Omniscient One, Varjadhara, the leader of the Buddhist Doctrine in the northern superior Land.” (The edict contains all the rights and privileges granted to the Tawang Monastery). The edict reads as”

The Quing army conducted military expeditions into our country several times, as you all monk and lay people of Tibet and Mon must be well aware of. In future also, you should render services for the preservations, protection and spread of the temporal and spiritual tradition with pure sincerity, without deviating from the dedication you showed in the past. Except for the monastic estates and pasturelands of the new monastery and its branch monasteries, the offerings received from the people for the religious services made for living and dead people, and grain offering received from the people, all other kinds of taxes imposed on different territories under the jurisdiction of the monastery have been abolished. As done in the past during the time of district officials Dingpon

Namkha Druk, except under certain circumstances when it is necessary for the purposes of Dharma, all the big and small monasteries in different regions must be excused from new taxes, core services and compulsory military services.

It further states that,

In order to disseminate the doctrine of Geluk school there, the district official of Mon, delegation sent from here and Merak lama should take the whole responsibility. All the lay and ordained people of high and low status must obey the instructions of the lama.

(The above passages have been copied from a document, which bears a cross vajra seal, preserved with other documents in Tawang Monastery)⁴

And since then, till today all the followers of *Geluk* traditions are following the rights and rules laid down during the construction of the monastery. Each and every member of the society takes it as a moral responsibility to protect, preserve and promote the sanctity of the monastery and will be protecting till many more generations to come.

The people of *Tsosum*, *Dakpo*, *Pangpen* and *Lepo* villages voluntarily took the responsibility of digging and leveling, fetching stones and started the construction. Construction was completed on the 8th month of the Iron female Bird Year, 1681 and a grand celebration was organized to celebrate the completion of construction. Lama *Merak Lodre Gyatso* conferred the name as *Ganden Namgyel Lhatse* to the newly constructed monastery. He made extensive prayers for the success and longevity of the monastery for the benefit of Dharma and sentient beings. He was said to have planted his walking stick and a juniper tree on the circumambulation path and the tree is said to have grown from that stick. When there was a shortage of stone for the construction, he discovered a stone source in the valley of the *Le Chumig Rong* and dug out a holy spring water from the bottom of the monastery, the place is today called as *Lama Chukhang* and the water is used for making mani pills. Washing and other activities is prohibited from the water source. In earlier times, the people who resided near the monastery used to collect water from that source for praying and drinking purposes. The water is considered so pure that it has the elements of curing a body of any kinds of skin diseases and still people believe

⁴ The passage talks about the official letter received from 5th Dalai lama before the construction of Tawang Monastery

it and collect water from the *Lama Chukhang*. The monks from the monastery used to fetch water from the source. Once when a lama went to fetch the water died and his foot prints were left on the stone. This stone is put on display near the door of the monastery's library.



Figure 32



Figure 33
picture of Lama Chukang



Figure 34
Picture of old building of Parkang



Figure 35
Picture of newly constructed Parkang

After the construction of the monastery many sacred objects and paintings were brought for the monastery. One of the most important is the Thangka painting of *Palden Lhamo* which is said to be painted with the blood from the nose of the Fifth Dalai lama. He bound the deity with an oath and appointed it as the protector of Tawang Monastery. And since then, *Palden Lhamo* is worshipped as the Guardian deity for the monastery as well as for the branch monasteries. And still today the *Thangka* (painting) is being displayed every three years during the Torgya Dungyur for the common people to view and to be blessed. Legend has it that when Merak lama with few of his monks came to Tawang after Sakteng Monastery was closed, he brought with him two tall stone tablets inscribed with mani mantra. By using his magical powers, he rolled the slabs like sheets of paper and carried

them. One of the stone tablets is found near the southern gate of the monastery and the other one is present at *Wudung*. In the chapel of the main assembly hall, there is a gold and brass gilded reliquary of *Gyalsey Tenpei Droma* to the left side of the Buddha statue. It is also said to have been brought from Merak. Therefore, it seems that certain numbers of status, thangkas, scriptures and religious objects have been brought from Merak.



Figure 36
Picture of the Guardian Deity Palden Lhamo displayed during Torgya for the common masses.

The first abbot cum principal (*lopon*) of the monastery since its inception was *Lama Merak Lodre Gyatso*. He was succeeded to the post of abbot by *Tsona Khenpo Ngawang Tsultrim*, *Kyormulung Khenpo Ngawang Norbu* and *Khenpo Ngawang Namgyel of Chongye* in succession. Since then, many abbots have been appointed to look after the works of the monastery. The present abbot of the monastery is *Sheling Tulku Thupten Tendar Rimpochea*. During the tenure of the Abbot *Ngawang Namgyal*, the present charter (*bca'yig*) of the monastery was adopted. The charter reads as:

In the 11th month of the Wood Dog Year (1694), the great ruler Desi Sangye Gyatso instructed me to prepare a draft of a new charter for the monastery in case the monastery did not have one and to send the draft to him. I did as per his instruction. This charter was implemented at the monastery on the fifth day of the first month of the Wood Pig year. Since then, the monastery has been functioning based on this ca yig continuously like a flow of a river. This charter, including the homage verses in the beginning and aspiration prayers and auspicious verses at

the end, was prepared by me, Ngawang Norbu from Chongye, who hold a title of a lama, on the seventh day of the tenth month of the Earth Tiger Year (1698) at my residence at the Tawang Monastery.

The term *bca yig* or monastic charter refers to monastic laws. The document contains mainly guidelines and instructions in accordance with the Vinaya teachings of the Buddha to manage overall behavior of the member monks. Till today this monastic law is being followed by every member who inducts himself as a monk in the monastery.

To become a monk, one has to get one's head shaved and take a novice monk's vow (*dge tshul sdom pa*), and afterwards a full monk's vow (*dge slong sdom pa*) from an abbot and a teacher. After entering monkhood, one has to wear the three dharma robes (*chos gos rnam gsum*)⁵. After that a monk has to start reading and writing, and other fields of knowledge. After becoming trained in reading and writing, one has to become able to understand the meaning of scriptures and then has to engage in mind training practices. The monk has to perform various other duty and responsibility as per the instruction received from the abbot of the monastery. The monastery charter provides the guidelines to monks regarding their overall charter of duties and their behaviorism like for example how to eat, what to eat, how to choose a company, sleep, walk, care and protect their own lives as well as the lives of the other sentient beings. A fully ordained monk has to follow 253 rules. The most important from them are to refrain themselves from any kind of sexual relations with the women, theft, murder and claiming to have any miraculous powers. Anyone who commits these offenses have to leave the monastery. As for the other monastic rules, if a monk breaks them, he has to make atonement (*bshags pa*) depending on the seriousness of his offense, but he can stay in the monastery. Senior monks are to guide the younger monks of the monastery, whereas the younger ones must obey the elder monks and pay respect to them. All the monastic activities must comply with the monastic code of rules and regulations.

⁵ Snam sbyar (shirt), bla gos (monk's shawl) and mthang gos (lower robe)



Figure 37

**Picture of monks performing their morning prayers in the main Prayer Hall
(Dukhang)**

In the event of major renovation work needed in the monastery, the committee has to appeal to the government of India for financial support unlike earlier times when all the expenses were bore by the Tsona presently in Tibet. The changes were made with the discussion with local people and all the stakeholders of the monastery. This tradition is still practiced in the society. At present the administrative committee has become an office in accordance with the modern system and its legal registration is under according to the procedure. So, now the office is in the overall in charge of the monastery.

Since 1950, *Drepoung Loseling Monastery* used to send abbots to the monastery. Earlier appointments are not known. Later, the Indian government and Tawang Monastery jointly decided to appoint one of the senior monks as the abbot of the monastery. After four successful appointments, as per the wishes of the common people after consulting the Indian Government, the monastery entrusted the authority of appointment of the abbot to the office of the HH 14th Dalai Lama. Since then, the appointment of any new abbot is being made from the office of Dharamshala.

The Tawang Monastery and Tsona monastery (presently in Tibet) shared a very cordial relationship right from the construction of the Tawang Monastery during the time of *Merak Lama*. Both the monasteries together performed a ritual called as *mtsho sna 'I sku rim* meaning “long life religious service” in summer and in winter. In summer the monks from the Tawang Monastery would reside in Tsona monastery and the monks from Tsona monastery used to reside in Tawang Monastery during winter. However, later, according to the oral narratives, due to the arousal of a dispute between the two monasteries their

relationship became bitter. The statue of the Lord Buddha in the main prayer hall of the Tawang Monastery is said to have been brought from Tsona monastery. The statue had no Lotus throne at that time. It was built later during one of the renovations done of the monastery.



Figure 38



Figure 39

Pictures of the statue of Lord Buddha inside the Dukhang

The monastery spent 3300 rupees, 25 sacks of grain and 1 *ltang* (bale) of butter for the organizations of teachings. Since then, it has become a tradition to organize an annual *Lamrin* teaching every year. This has provided an opportunity for the people of Mon to become a member and follow the noble path of Lord Buddha.

Tawang monastery had its own monastic way of education, but always wanted to accord the modern system of education in the monastery. *Rigya Rimpochea* decided to create a school for young monks in compliance with the rules and regulations of the monastery. With his continuous effort the modern way of education started in the monastery with the help received from the Indian Government. In the year 1974, the school building was constructed with the help from the people of *Dakpa*, *Pangchen*, *Tsosum*, *Rojandak*, *Mago* and *Thengbu* communities collectively. And since then, the monastery school imparts traditional Buddhist Teachings as well as the modern Education system to the young monks of the monastery.

In front of the Tawang Monastery there is a tall wooden flag, which was put there more than 300 years ago during the foundation of the monastery. It is almost about 90 feet in height. Every three years the flag is being taken out by from the post during the time of

Torgya Dungyur and a new flag is being decorated. The flag weighs so much that more than 20 people are required to take down the flag. The common people residing near the monastery comes to help in taking down the flag before the celebration of *Torgya Dungyar*. The top of the flag is decorated with rolls of paper inscribed with mantras, including that of *Dukar*. Below the top ornament, there is a victory banner (*rgyal mtshan*) that represents victory against all negativities. The main flag consists of five colors representing five wisdoms. The flag bears wood block printed mantra of a deity called as *Gyaltsen Tsemo Pungyen*⁶. It has many significances and benefits, but its most important significances are that it symbolizes the spread of Buddhism.



Figure-40

Picture of the prayer flag installed in front of the main building of the monastery.

It is 90 feet in height

At present there are approximately, 400 monks at Tawang Monastery. The monastery's religious traditions and practices, disciplines, facilities and economic conditions is improving day by day. This monastery is a Center of Buddhist religion and culture learning, not only in the Mon region but also for the entire northern part of India. All the

⁶ *Gyaltsen Tsemo Pungyen*, whose name translates roughly as 'Ornament on the Top of the Victory Banner', is a female deity whose Dharani is a particularly treasured as a method for enhancing wind horse.

people of Mon are expected to make concrete efforts and are making efforts to protect and support this monastery as much as they can, as they did in the past, as long as the sky exists.

5.3 Case Studies from the Field

The following are interviews of select people from the Monpa Community from different age groups. The people who were interviewed were young lamas from the monastery, older lamas from the monastery, old and young nuns from the nunneries, educated and employed member of the society, old men and women of the community, villagers from different villages, students studying in college and schools. The interviews were conducted to understand the importance of Tawang Monastery in their respective lives and to see its importance on their social lives.

Case Study 01: Respondent- Thutan Tsering, Age -35, Occupation- lama (Teacher in Tawang Monastery) Sex: Male



The respondent is a Lama in the Monastery since the age of 7years. When he was asked about the importance of Tawang Monastery and his role as a Lama. He said-

Tawang Monastery is an example for the followers of Buddhism since many years. I have and am a part of this monastery since the age of 7years. I have completed my Shastri (Graduation) and decided to serve in the school of Tawang Monastery as a Teacher. My life as a lama has not been easy. I come from a very poor family and so when I was admitted in the Monastery as a lama, I had to follow all the rules and regulations that any lama has to follow to become a fully ordained monk. I am still on the path. I am proud

of my religion. I had to follow the 6 realms of Buddhist Philosophy. In this age of modernization, it becomes very difficult for me to follow the path of Lamaism but I remember my purpose of existence to spread happiness as quoted by my Guru H.H. the 14th Dalai Lama. He then quoted Lord Buddha and said, No Monk No Buddhism. So, my part as a lama is very important and so I have dedicated my whole life to protect the Monastery and work for the betterment of all sentient beings and then only I will be called as a fully ordained Lama.

Case Study 02: Respondent- Lham Chotten, Age -39, Occupation- Assistant Professor
Sex: Female



I was born in a village called as Mandrelling near Tawang Monastery. Since Childhood I share a close relation with the monastery spiritually, emotionally and physically. I have a very strong emotional attachment with the monastery. I always visit the monastery on 15th and 30th of every month of Lunar calendar to offer my prayers and gratitude which gives me immense pleasure and satisfaction emotionally. There is always a new experience every time I visit the monastery. I always actively take part in all the rituals and rites performed in the monastery. No one forces me to do so. As a single mother of two kids, I always want to inculcate good practices to my children so every time I go, I take my children with me to attend that programme. I want my children to stay connected with our cultural values and tradition the way my parents used to take me along when I was a child. I like the practical application of Buddhism as a religion. Equal treatment of all sentient beings. No separate rules for the women folk of the society, even during our menstruation we can visit the monastery. Since from my childhood I have seen my parents and the residents of Shyo village and Mandrelling village willingly participating in providing any help to the monastery whenever called for. So, we share a very long history of cordial and strong relationship with the monastery which I want my children too also continue.

Case Study 03: Respondent- Gyeshi⁷ Thutan Gendun, Age -65, Occupation- Retired Teacher (Tawang Monastery) Sex: Male



The respondent was a lama but due to personal problems he had left the monastery and now is no longer a Lama.

By birth I am a Monpa. By years of practice and experience I became a Buddhist. I have served the school of Tawang Monastery as a Head Master for 21 years. I share a very close bond with the Tawang Monastery and the Lama residing in this monastery. Following the path of Buddhism has taught me to Question things instead of believing everything I hear. My way of life has increased. I may not be a part of the Lamaism any more but I am and will always be a part of Tawang Monastery. In conversation with the respondent, he was worried about the long-term existence of the Tawang Monastery Lamaism. Since the time I have served the Monastery and now I have seen a decline in the new admission of younger monks in the monastery. This is a serious issue which must be looked upon and an immediate solution must be found or the very existence of Lamaism is in danger few years later.

Case Study 04: Respondent- Lhendup Chosanj, Age -54, Occupation- BJP vista Raj/Mandal President. Sex-Male



⁷ A person who has done PhD in Buddhist philosophy

The respondent is a resident of Seru village. When asked about the importance of tawang Monastery in his life he said-

Since childhood I have seen the villagers of Seru village sharing an important relation with the Tawang monastery in terms of Taxation system which still exists. I have seen the lamas of the monastery coming to my village for collection of tax or donation for Tonggo and also for collection of foodgrains for the Monastery. I remember being very excited during the Torgya festival, wearing new clothes and going to see the various monastic dances and actively participating in the fairs that was conducted during this festival. The situation now a days has changed. With the coming of modernization and new changes the Monastery has today become very accessible to everyone. In earlier times we had to prepare ourselves one week before to visit the monastery because of the lack of any modern transportation. I remember enacted the dances seen in the monastery after coming back to the village. Every member of the Monpa society share a very close relationship with the Tawang Monastery in some way or the other which is still continued.

Case Study 04: Respondent- Sichu, Age -59, Occupation- House wife. Sex: Female



The respondent belongs to a village called as Jangda.

Everything has changed with the change of time. I remember the preparation to go to witness Torgya started one month before. But now a days no one does that. Life has become easier, Tawang Monastery can be now reached within half an hour from my village. Earlier it used to take at least one day on foot. People participation during the festival has decreased. Earlier there used to be a situation like stampede due to the

overflow of people coming to witness the festival from all parts of the Tawang district. But now a days people are more interested in the fairs conducted outside the premises of the Monastery where items of different sorts from different places are being sold. Earlier monks of the Tawang Monastery used to come to the villages asking for donation in cash and kind for the monastery as well for the kitchen. They used to stay there for few days and perform rituals in the village for the betterment of all the beings of the village. Now the Lamas are more confined to the Monastery. Their visits have become lesser than the earlier times.

Case Study 05 Respondent -Yontan Zopa, Age-25, Occupation- Research Scholar, Sex-Male

The respondent is from Seru village.

As he was the middle son in his family, following the tradition of Buchum Barma he had to go to the monastery to become a monk. At a very early age of 10yrs he became a monk in the Tawang Monastery. He shared his experiences as a monk of the monastery. He said that the life of the monk is very difficult. It takes a lot of patience and virtue to follow the path of monkhood. His early years had passed quickly but as he reached the age of adolescence it became difficult for him to continue the path of monkhood. So, after 8 years of Monkhood he finally left the life of a monk and became a layman. But the ideas and principles that was imbibed in him still makes him to follow the path of Dhamma. He emphasized on the importance of learning Monpa dialect to the younger generations as it is this which connects them to their cultural and social roots. As being an oral society, it becomes very difficult to preserve the rich traditional practices and customs without the understanding of the local dialect. He also laid his concerns regarding the decreasing numbers of lamas enrolling in the monastery. He suggested that a little flexibility has to be made in this regard. The Tawang Monastery administrative officials must not be rigid in this matter. They should collaborate with the common laymen and find a solution for it.

Case Study 06 Respondent -Jambey Wangdi, Age-53, Occupation- Chairman of Department of Karmik and Adhyatmik (*Chos-Rig*) affairs, department of Arunachal Pradesh, Sex- Male



The respondent is from Temilo village.

As an official working for the overall development of the society in terms of its preservation and developmental activities shares a strong bond with Tawang Monastery and with the people of Tawang District. His interest in Buddhism and its philosophy made him to learn Tibetan Language at a very later stage. With years of practice, he is now fluent in the language and understands the deeper impact of Buddhism philosophy in the lives of those who follow it. He has attended many religious talks, conference both in India and outside of India. He in order to preserve the rich oral tradition of the society has established MIPA (Monpa Institute of Performing Arts). This platform is for those young budding entertainers who wants to showcase their talent in terms of singing, dancing, composing and preserving the rich cultural heritage in Monpa dialect. Many young and old artist of the society has been benefitted by it. Scholarships are also being provided to the members of this group. He talked about one of the most important decisions in relation to the establishment of Common Kitchen (Cheetab). He believes that this decision has created a sense of oneness among the members of the monastery as they share their meals together. There is no distinction in stature in the monastery now. Every member of the monastery shares the same food which did not exist before the establishment of the common kitchen. He also emphasized upon the digitalization of the Buddhist Manuscripts of the monastery. This will be a very important decision as this will enable the common people to access to these manuscripts which are now not easily accessible. A project on this is in progress now in Tawang Monastery. He requests the

younger generation to connect themselves with their roots and for this he emphasized on the preservation of Monpa dialect.

Case Study 07 Respondent- Thupten Kalden, Occupation- Superintendent Engineer of Hydropower, presently working as Field Director of Dokaa (on deputation) Age- 57, Sex- Male

The respondent belongs from Khrimu village of Tawang District

As an active member working for the development and preservation of the cultural practices and heritage of Monpa people he understands the importance of Tawang Monastery and is also aware of the dangers that lies ahead for the younger generation in upholding and preservation the rich cultural practices and rituals of the Monastery. He emphasized on the importance of Establishment of a school in the monastery which has helped and is helping the young monks of the monastery to achieve scholastic education. He also talked about how the establishment of Common Kitchen has laid down burdens from the young monks from the menial works like fetching od water, firewood, cooking. Now the monks can totally focus on receiving good education in terms of Buddhist philosophy or other subjects. He also talked about separating the history from oral narratives. History is something which needs validation in terms of document and photos and etc. whereas oral narratives are that which is imaginary and is passed on from one generation to other orally. Many young scholars are not able to distinguish between these two and hence confusion arises at times of its interpretation.

Apart from the above interviews many interviews of the people coming to the monastery during festivals and rituals were been conducted. Most of the respondents had some kind of memory associated in Tawang Monastery. It was like a festivity for them to visit the monastery from far flung villages of the Tawang District. They prepared one or two days ahead for the journey as in those times availability of transportation was limited like what we have today in ample numbers. They wore their best of the outfits (local dress) to visit the monastery, offer their prayers and offerings for the longevity of themselves, their loved ones and of all the sentient beings of the world. The celebration in the monastery is now in a much grander scale with participation of people from all parts Tawang, West Kameng, Bhutan and Himachal Pradesh too. Some Bhutanese and Himachali traders were also interviewed. They mostly came to Tawang to visit Tawang Monastery as well as to business during these festivals. Many of the Bhutanese respondents stated that this has

been continued from many generations. Earlier their parents and grand parents used to come to Tawang and now they do with the purpose of Business and religious visits. The above case studies have been included and studied in detail as they were directly related to the topic of the thesis.

Case studies of some of the respondents from the Monpa society reveals the importance of Lama and Tawang Monastery not from today but from the earlier times. With the passage of time their relationship has grown stronger and people have begun to realize the importance of them in their daily life and existence. Common people have actively started participating in all the rites and rituals conducted in the monastery. Their accessibility to the monastery has become easier and stronger. Right from admitting a new monk, conduct of any programme the Tawang Monastery and the villagers are inter dependent upon each other. As Lord Buddha has quoted “No Monks No Buddhism”. In new times, “No followers no Monks and hence no Religion”. All three are inter related to each other supporting their existence.

During the 8th Century a very learned scholar named, *Duerap Gyepah* “*Lopon Pema Jungney*”⁸ in the book called as *Kahtang Duepa*, has prophesied four things. They are as follows:

དུས་རབས་བརྒྱད་པའི་ནང་སློབ་དཔོན་པད་མས་བཀའ་ཐང་བསྐྱུས་པར།

1. དགེ་བཤེས་དམག་དཔོན་བྱེད་པའི་དུས།
(Gyeshe makpon zehpeh due)
2. ཚོས་མཁན་འཕྲོངས་ར་འགྲིམ་པའི་དུས།
(Choikang Phongrah Zingpeh due)
3. ལྷ་ཁང་བུད་མེད་ཀྱིས་འཛིན་པའི་དུས།
(Lhakhang Buemeh Ki Zimpeh due)
4. བུད་མེད་སྐྱེས་པ་སློང་བའི་དུས། ཞེས་གསུངས་འདུག།
(Buemeh Kehpah long weh due)

Explanation of the above passage

1. There will be a time when the monks of the monastery will act as war sepoys and will be going to wars.

⁸ He was a very powerful saint who knew strong mantras.

2. The monks of the monastery will focus only on the entertainment and visit stadiums of entertainment. This act of monks is considered very inauspicious.
3. There will come a time when all the activities of the monastery will be looked after the women folk living in and around the monastery.
4. Prayer offering and all the daily activities of the monastery will be looked after by the women of the society. The whole control of the monastery will come into the hands of the women folk of the society.

The prophecy of the *Lopon Pema Jungney* seems to be coming true. With the advent of modernization, the existence of Lamaism has become a danger in the Monpa society. The monastery at present has more than 530 lamas residing in the monastery. But the numbers of new enrollment of lama in the monastery has seen a rapid decline in last few years. Many developmental activities have been introduced like the introduction of Common Kitchen, Corpus Fund for the monastery, introducing modern education in the Tawang Monastery school. But the decline of new enrollment is a serious matter which is caused by many factors. Such as:

1. *Buchum Barmah*: This age-old tradition of admitting the middle son of a Monpa family to the monastery is no longer applicable in today's time.
2. New Profession: with the growth in the living standards of the Monpa people the parents of the children are now no longer interested in sending their child to become a monk. They want their child to become a doctor, engineer, public servant etc. than becoming a monk.
3. Less opportunity: The lama admitted in the monastery have very less opportunity to grow professionally.
4. Family Planning: the concept of *Buchum Barmah* has failed due to the introduction of family planning. An average Monpa family nowadays have not more than two kids so the applicability of Middle son becomes irrelevant.

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