CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

To assess the ongoing processes for examining the pristine concept of disease and treatment of the Monpas of Tawang district, Arunachal Pradesh, it would be worthwhile to recapitulate the findings in the preceding chapters. An attempt is being made in this study to understand the socio-cultural and environmental dimensions of the health concept and practices of the Monpas. In this study an attention has also been paid to understand the preventive and curative measures adopted by them to cope with different diseases and ailments. People use different forest based resources to counteract diseases have been examined in the context of a Monpa village, viz., Seru village of Tawang district, Arunachal Pradesh. In order to obtain a comprehensive picture, the traditional health care system opt by them in their day to day life have been examined at various levels: concept of health and coping with disease; explanation of illness and its preventive and curative measures which reflect the knowledge, cultural value, and tradition of a society.
It is evident from the data presented and analyzed in chapter I, II, and III that the local settings, to a considerable extent, determine the patterns of social relations and community life of the Monpas, and also tried to find out answers to some of the questions raised in chapter I. In chapter IV we have tried to understand the traditional modes of treating various diseases which include herbal, magico-religious, and other devices.

The upland and scattered settlement of the Monpas have got many advantages in favour of health. In any upland site water carrying pollutants generally does not get stagnant that may ultimately turn into breeding ground for many germs and germ carriers. Besides these, the upland settlement has got some other advantages. In such places, air and water, the two major disease carrying media, remain free from dusts and similar other pollutants. Likewise, settlement also has got some positive point in favour of health. In low population areas, sewage and excreta generally do not assume a dimension that could be patent for any health hazard. Many diseases could exist only in large population and others are communicable only from man to man. Small and scattered population automatically is safe from different diseases like infantile, diarrhoea, tuberculosis, syphilis, malaria, and epidemic diseases like cholera, and typhoid, reached to their peak by this century.

The study of the distribution and prevalence of diseases and their socio-cultural and environmental determinants have been a major area of investigation of many anthropological studies. This aspect has been taken into consideration in the present study. The Monpas perceptions
of disease and illness and their remedial measures have been discussed in chapter IV. They believe that good health depends on the eating habit, disease and illness, and above all, the wrath of gods. Aspects like the different diseases that are known to the people, how the people recognize and classify such diseases, what are the different attributes according to which the people define and diagnose such diseases, etc., have been discussed in details. According to the cause there are two broad categories of diseases among the Monpas, like diseases caused by supernatural factors such as wrath of the malevolent spirits, black magic, sorcery, evil eyes, breach of taboo, divine punishment, diseases occurred due to sin committed, and natural factors like weather, food, temperature, over work and natural calamities. According to the Monpas physical forces cannot be solely responsible for any disease or ailment, which are primarily caused by the supernatural forces. One of the important findings that makes such a study interesting is that the Monpas believe that physical happenings may also be caused by the anger of deities and spirits. Unwanted physical happenings will not occur, if the deities and spirits remain satisfied. There are various diseases prevalent among them, and each disease invariably has some integral symptoms. It is an important aspect to note that except a few disease, which the Monpas in general can identify, there are a number of diseases and ailments which cannot be identified, but only through the divination of the local priest, they confirm the cause of such diseases and necessary remedial measures are also taken in a traditional way. The prevalence of different diseases among the Monpas inhabiting the study area has been
discussed. It appears that the Monpas generally suffers from cough, fever, itches, pain in different parts of body, pox, skin diseases, trouble from worms, vomiting, jaundice, liver serosys, ulcer, etc. It appears that due to extreme cold people do not take bath regularly; therefore, the diseases like itches, skin diseases, etc. are common among them, and cough, fever, pain in different parts of body are found due to cold weather. Prevalence of diseases like jaundice, ulcers, liver serosys, etc. are found among them may be due to intake of country liquor in large quantity. In respect of eating and drinking habits, it can be said that the people are not enough conscious of hygiene. Taking of food without washing hands, use of the same dish to take food one after another without cleaning it, serving food to the pets in the same dishes used by the household members, etc. are responsible for the spread of different diseases. Living conditions of the people seem to be responsible for the majority of diseases and ailments. There is no proper drainage system in the village. Sewage is found to be accumulated here and there, even under the dwelling houses. Utensils are cleaned on the floor of the residential units, and water accumulates under it. The situation becomes more unhygienic as the underground spaces of the residential units are used as pig sty. Moreover, they are not conscious enough about their personnel cleanliness and healthy sanitation practices. All these habits and practices create majority of the diseases and ailments among the Monpas of Seru village.

Ethnomedical therapy is a complex subject which includes magico-religious, mechanical procedures, etc. The diviners or medicine
man may diagnose an ailment from observable symptoms or other mystic magico-religious practices. The cause may be supernatural, that is wrath or displeasure of supernatural beings for breach of taboos or magico-religious and physical, which includes accidents, effect of weather, inappropriate food, and contact with certain organism. Naturally, in accordance with the cause of illness treatments are offered by priest or medicine man who can be classified under a broader category of ethnomedicinal specialist. So they treat as per their own traditional knowledge which may include worship of various deities or spirits, application of different objects as well as magico-religious rites that has been discussed in the chapter V. The Monpas consider that most of the diseases occur due to the evil tricks of different spirits and deities. Benevolent and malevolent powers are widely recognized by them. They perform different rituals and propitiatory rites to get rid of such evil tricks and influences of spirits and deities. The Monpas used to practice Bon faith before the conversion to Buddhism. In Bon faith, the Monpas used to appease the Bon spirits through a good number of worships and sacrifices of animals that appears to be on the wane. Now-a-days very few Bon priests are found, but they don’t practice Bon faith, because now Monpas are Buddhist by religion, and offer prayers of different type whenever they suffer from disease or illness. They also try to appease responsible spirits through different rituals. The Monpas have abandoned all sacrificial rituals which their forefathers used to perform earlier except the yedam rite, where animals are sacrificed. There are male priests in the Monpa society, who also act as magico-religious
practitioners. These priests act as the mediators between the people and the supernaturals. They try to maintain congenial relationship between the Monpas and the supernatural forces, which interfere into human affairs. The priests are organized in their medical practices, and they never charge fees for their treatment. Their belief in supernatural powers is so strong that according to them, if the spiritual powers do not want, the physical forces alone cannot cause any disease. So, along with the other traditional treatment, side by side, ritualistic activities are also performed by them. In every case, if the ailment is recovered through traditional medicinal system; Tibetan medical help, or modern medical treatment, then also they perform rituals to satisfy the responsible spirit/s with an appeal not to do harm again.

The Monpas use different materials drawing from their biological and non-biological surroundings to cure different ailments. In the Monpa society one cannot understand disease and treatment in isolation from environment. So it has become necessary to explore the extent to which health and treatment are intimately linked with environment, particularly with the forest. Hence, the study examines this aspect has been discussed in the chapter VI. Here adequate attention has been paid to understand the nature of relationships between health care practices and treatment and environment. In this regard an attempt has been made to find out the ways in which the Monpas use different floral parts having medicinal values in their traditional treatment practices. Parts of different animals have also been found to be use as medicines by the study group. It has been reported that today Western medicines make use of
some 7,000 natural compounds. Many such compounds have been
derived from their traditional uses in the past that help a lot to the
modern world to cope with disease and ailments.

A recent discourse on cultural relevance of Indian plants by
Mukherjee and Mukherjee (1995 : 73-76) revealed highly valuable
information regarding the traditional knowledge of medicinal plants,
deep rooted within the Indian Civilization itself as reflected by various
sacred texts. 'The modern medical science which was developed in the
West did not create any obstacle in socio-cultural dimensions of the
health because it is developed as a social science. Allopathic medicine
became popular in the later part of the nineteenth century and from then
it started causing flaccidity in the importance of health (Medhi, 1994 :
39). The curative properties of biological materials, particularly of plant
species are said to have been known to human beings since the period
of their emergence. The use of plant as source of medicine is as old as
human race. Through out the world several thousand of plants have
been used for medicinal purposes. In India the earliest mention of plants,
especially for medicinal purposes, is found in Rigveda, perhaps the
earliest repository of human knowledge, having been written between
4500 B.C. and 1600 B.C. Panini (7th century B.C.) coined the word
dravya (drug) from the nominal root dru (plant). In the work that
followed, particularly Ayurveda, the properties of various drugs in detail
were scripted. Later, during the Buddhist period, considerable progress
was made, and medicinal plants were cultivated under the direction of
highly qualified specialists' (Medhi and Hasan, 2005 : 24). Many ethnic
groups, more or less isolated from the influence of modern world and sophistication, continues to live in close association and vital dependence on their surrounding vegetation for this primary needs. The recognition of therapeutic activities of certain plants by ethnic group, created a modern renaissance in medicine history. It is greatly to the credit of the people of India, particularly to the people of North-East India, that they are, acquainted with a large number of medicinal plants (Medhi and Zaman, 2007: 40-41).

The Monpas of the study village have vast knowledge of medicinal plants and their uses in different diseases. Most of the inhabitants of Seru can identify and treat minor diseases with floral and other ethnomedicines. However, some of the complicated diseases can be identified and treated by the local priest only through different ethnomedicine, and appeasement to the integral deities.

The Monpas have their own herbal treatment for day to day ailments, which they rigidly keep secret. The traditional medicinal system has played a vital role in the treatment of various diseases common to the Monpas, particularly in remote upland hilly areas, where other means of treatment is not easily available. The global trend of commercialization of ethno-medicinal bio-diversity has increasingly faced the collection pressure and some of them have threatened, and some other has faced the danger of extinction. It is high time to protect them; unless the government did not take any initiative, this traditional knowledge will lose power. Recently in India a Traditional Knowledge
Digital Library has been set up which otherwise will be helpful for the researcher to patent their product. There is only a few written records and documentation of the uses of this traditional knowledge, particularly the various little known ethno-medicinal plants used by the Monpas. Keeping all these aspects in to account, an attempt has been made to enumerate various ethno-medicinal plants used by the study people. The introduction of Tibetan medicinal system and modern medicinal system could not replaced the existing indigenous methods of treatment. At present Tibetan medicine is gaining popularity among the study group. According to the Monpas, Tibetan medicine lays more stress on healthy living. It is an amalgamation of art, science, and spiritualism, and integral system of Buddhism. Introduction of different non-traditional medical systems have given rise to medical pluralism among the study people.

According to Bhasin (1997 : 43) ‘Medical pluralism may be defined as the synchronic existence in a society of more than one medicine system grounded in different principles, or based on different principles or based on different world views.’ The Monpas also lean on different system of medicines, pristine, Tibetan, or allopathic, according to the nature of disease, economic position, and facility to avail a particular system of treatment. It has been important to understand the utilization of Tibetan medical system and interaction of both the traditional and the modern medical system of treatment. The people have understood the benefits and quick actions of Tibetan medicine in few cases. However, there are certain strong specific cultural
explanations of the Monpas regarding some diseases, and they are dependent on their ethnomedicine for treatment. In many cases they practised more than one medical system, and appeasing the spirit integral to a disease is must after curing a disease.

Among the Monpas the choice of healing and treatment options are considered by many determinants. The fundamental universal concept of medicine is cure and prevention of diseases and illness. As Mahanto (1995: 105) mentioned: ‘Ever since the attainment of culture building capacity by man there have been attempt to devise cures for mental and physiological disease, associated with man’s life. Man has since his emergence remained engaged attempting to combat the most dreaded of his enemies-death. Folk on ethnomedicine has served his purpose over the last 3000 years or so in India with its own concept of causation of disease....’

For curing diseases the Monpas now avails a number of medical options. In respect of very few cases like liver serosys, delivery problem, etc, they prefer modern medicine. It has been observed that initially villagers opt for traditional medicine as their first preference. When effective results are not achieved, then immediately, they resort to Tibetan medicine. They consider ritual in combination with anyone of the three available treatment options – traditional medicine, Tibetan medicine, and modern medicine. According to the Monpas, performance of relevant ritual is indispensable for permanent relief from the disease. Several secondary factors like disease type, economy, education, location
of the village, etc, have influenced the choice of the people to consider what type of treatment they should adopt. In this context to know what option is considered for what illness and the pattern of selection of the different healing and therapeutic options are of immense value from the point of medical anthropology. Apart from academic interest such knowledge will be beneficial for medical planners and administrators engaged in modern system of health care practices and delivery.

Moreover, rituals give faith healing, which being a part of the cultural system to which the patient belong, can induce healing so far the expectations of the patient and his family members are concerned. It has been said that traditional medical practices can reinstate at least the psychological balance of the patient during the period of disease crisis signifying that any sudden change in traditional practices can cause more harm than benefit. It has been already stated that the Monpas are rigidly dependent on their traditional medicines and magico-religious practices for treatment of different diseases and ailments. Among many societies, whether tribal or caste societies, it has been observed that traditional concepts related to the diseases which are not fatal remained unchanged for long. Likewise among the Monpas the beliefs on the supernatural forces integral to diseases and ailments, clearly indicate that still they observed their traditional modes of beliefs and practices, and will hardly replaced by any other means of treatment system in near future. It also has already been revealed in course of the present study that the Tibetan medicines are gradually opt by everyone along with
traditional medicines, but till now modern medicine has not able to
create any conspicuous impact on the Monpas of Seru village.

It is not possible to get an overnight result when changing
traditional practices altogether is a difficult task. Hughes (1968 : 91)
writes : ‘Folk medicine does not easily change under the impact of
sustained contact with the industrialized world, or even as a result of
deliberate attempts to introduce new conceptions of disease and
hygiene’. In studying the Mishings of Assam in a rural context Medhi
(1995 : 68) has observed : ‘The evolution of the curative measures of
diseases has a long history through different age and phases of
development, culture, and civilization of mankind....... also have their
own system of health care to cope with the ailments which is a
conglomeration of methods, techniques, practices, cultural values,
beliefs, tradition, and ecological adaptation. Under the influence of
modernization, the ethnomedical system has already undergone
unidentifiable changes. New types of diseases have made its appearance
among the Mishings, in which the traditional system fail to offer any
remedy. As a result, the modern medicine has made its way in the
traditional system, thus making the traditional views towards the disease
obsolete to a great extent’. Same situation is observed among the
Monpas of the study area.