CHAPTER: I
INTRODUCTION

Geographical Background:

Arunachal Pradesh, which lies in the north-eastern part of India, is home to a number of tribes, exhibiting their unique culture and tradition. It lies between 26°28’ to 39°31’ North latitudes and 91°30’ to 97°30’ East longitudes. Arunachal Pradesh holds an important position geographically, as it shares its international borders with the countries of China, Myanmar and Bhutan and national border with the States of Nagaland and Assam. The land is mostly mountainous and stretches from snow-capped mountains in the north to the plains of Brahmaputra valley in the south. Arunachal Pradesh is the largest and youngest state of the North East India covering an area of 83,743 square kilometres.

Till 1972, Arunachal Pradesh was known as the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). It gained the status of Union Territory on January 20, 1972 and renamed as Arunachal Pradesh - The Land of Rising Sun. Arunachal Pradesh was created by 55th Amendment of the constitution of India, passed by the Parliament on 3rd December, 1986 and became the 24th state of India. It became a full-fledged state on February 20, 19871. At present, it has seventeen districts namely, Tawang, West Kameng, East Kameng, Papum-Pare, Lower Subansiri, Upper Subansiri, West Siang, East Siang, Upper Siang, Upper Dibang Valley, Lower Dibang Valley, Lohit, Changlang, Tirap, Krun-Krungmey, Anjaw and Longding2.

1 R.D. Pradhan, Dragon’s Shadow over Arunachal, a Challenge to India’s Polity, p.4
2 Longding is the newest district which is curved out of Tirap district in 2012.
The major rivers that are flowing through the State are Kameng river, Subansiri river, Siang river (Brahmaputra in Assam), Lohit river and Tirap river. The Tawang Chu and Nyamjang Chu are the main rivers of Tawang district. Kameng river is the main river of West Kameng district.

Out of 83,743 sq kms of the State, about 51,540 sq kms are under forest coverage, i.e., about 62%. The forest of Arunachal Pradesh can be classified in five broad forest types with a sixth type of secondary forest. These are tropical forests, subtropical forests, pine forests, temperate forests and alpine forests. There is an abundance of bamboo, cane orchids besides various economically important tree species. These forests are known for its rich biodiversity with over 5000 plants, over 500 birds and a large number of butterflies, insects and reptiles.

The state has a number of rare endangered flora and fauna. The four cats i.e., Tiger, Leopard, Snow Leopard and also rare feline species like Golden Cat, Marbled Cat, some species of primates and three goat antelopes etc., are found in the forest. The great Indian Hornbill (Bucero and Bicornis) is also abundantly found and attained the status of state symbol. The forest also provides verity of tree of high economic value like diptero carpus, Terminalia, share, Mesua, etc. Different varieties of bamboo, conifers, rhododendron, and other wild ornamental plants are found abundantly. The Forest Development Corporation of the state has established an Orchid Research and Development station at Tippi in West Kameng district for propagation and conservation of these species and some of which have been declared endangered. A floriculture mission has been launched recently. Beside these, a wide variety of medicinal plants abound the region. Mammals,
reptiles, snow leopard, musk deer, barking deer, bear etc., are also some of the most widely found animals in the region.

As per 2011 Census Report, Arunachal Pradesh has a population of 13.82 Lakh, of which male and female are 720,232 and 662,379 respectively. The population density is 17 persons per sq kilometre. Arunachal Pradesh provides homeland to 26 major tribes which is further divided into more than hundred sub-tribes. The Adis, Apatanis, Nyshis, Sherdukpons, Monpas, Khamptis, Tagins etc., are major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Of these tribes the Monpa tribe of Tawang and West Kameng districts have been taken up for the study.

Table: 1

Population and density of Arunachal Pradesh as per 2011 census³:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>District Headquarter</th>
<th>Area in sq. Km</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tawang</td>
<td>Tawang</td>
<td>2,085</td>
<td>49,950</td>
<td>29,361</td>
<td>20,589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Kameng</td>
<td>Bomdila</td>
<td>7,422</td>
<td>87,013</td>
<td>49,568</td>
<td>37,445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Kameng</td>
<td>Seppa</td>
<td>4,134</td>
<td>78,413</td>
<td>38,974</td>
<td>39,439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papum-Pare</td>
<td>Itanagar</td>
<td>2,875</td>
<td>1,76,385</td>
<td>90,447</td>
<td>85,938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Subansiri</td>
<td>Ziro</td>
<td>10,135</td>
<td>82,839</td>
<td>41,935</td>
<td>40,904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Subansiri</td>
<td>Daporijo</td>
<td>7,032</td>
<td>83,205</td>
<td>41,974</td>
<td>41,231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Siang</td>
<td>Along</td>
<td>8,325</td>
<td>1,12,272</td>
<td>58,589</td>
<td>53,683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Siang</td>
<td>Pasighat</td>
<td>4,005</td>
<td>99,019</td>
<td>50,467</td>
<td>48,552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Siang</td>
<td>Yingkiong</td>
<td>6,188</td>
<td>35,289</td>
<td>18,657</td>
<td>16,632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Dibang Valley</td>
<td>Anini</td>
<td>13,029</td>
<td>7,984</td>
<td>4,396</td>
<td>3,552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Dibang Valley</td>
<td>Roing</td>
<td>3,900</td>
<td>53,986</td>
<td>28,127</td>
<td>25,859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lohit</td>
<td>Tezu</td>
<td>11,402</td>
<td>1,15,538</td>
<td>76,544</td>
<td>68,994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changlang</td>
<td>Changlang</td>
<td>4,662</td>
<td>1,14,731</td>
<td>77,289</td>
<td>70,662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tirap</td>
<td>Khonsa</td>
<td>2,362</td>
<td>1,11,997</td>
<td>57,992</td>
<td>54,005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krung-Krungmey</td>
<td>Koloriang</td>
<td>6,340</td>
<td>89,717</td>
<td>44,226</td>
<td>45,491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anjaw</td>
<td>Hawai</td>
<td>8,600</td>
<td>21,089</td>
<td>11,686</td>
<td>9,403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>83,743</strong></td>
<td><strong>13,82,611</strong></td>
<td><strong>7,20,232</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,62,379</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

³ Source: Economic and statistics Department, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh
The Monpas: Land and Its People

The Monpas are a tribe who are basically found residing in the western highlands of Arunachal Pradesh mostly in the districts of Tawang and West Kameng. On 1st June 1980, the West Kameng district was formed. Earlier it was combined with East Kameng district which was then together known as Kameng district. The district gets the name as the West Kameng district because of its location on the western side of the Kameng river and district to the east of it is known as the East Kameng district. On 6th October, 1984, again the West Kameng district was bifurcated and Tawang district was formed out of it for administrative convenience. The West Kameng district approximately lies between 91°30’ to 92°40’ East longitudes and 26°54’ to 28°01’ North latitudes whereas the Tawang district is lying approximately between 27°25’ and 27°55’ North latitudes and 91°35’ and 92°20’ East longitudes. The two districts are bounded by Tibet (China) on the north, Bhutan on the west, Sonitpur district of Assam on the south and East Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh on the East.

The highest peak of Arunachal Pradesh is Kangte peak (7090 M), which is situated in the West Kameng district and the highest pass, the Sela pass (14700 feet) is again in the district of Tawang. Sela pass is the only corridor to enter Tawang. The altitude of the Tawang area varies from 3400 meters to 2176 meters and it gradually comes down to 1497 meters at Dirang area of West Kameng district. The Bumla pass separates Tawang from Tibet; Ningsangla pass in Mukto village separates the Tawang district from Bhutan.

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With variation of the mountainous ranges, the climate is also varied in both the districts. It is highly humid in lower belt and extremely cold at high altitude. During winter the temperature of the Tawang region goes down to the freezing point. Snow fall occurs from mid-November to February. The annual Rainfall of the two districts varies from less than 1500 mm to more than 4000mm.

The Monpas form a large tribal community, encompassing the areas of Tawang and West Kameng district as stated above. They were generally isolated from the outside world for a long period of time. Its dense forest, high snow capped peaks, fast flowing rivers and extreme climate all make access to the area more difficult. Tawang is home to the Monpas and few Tibetans residing near the Tawang monastery and within the Tawang town ship, whereas, West Kameng comprises of five major tribes Monpas, Mijis, Sherdukpen, Akas and Khowa with minority tribes like Lishpa, Chugpa and Butpa (Sartang). Interestingly, in both the districts Monpas are in majority with 98% in Tawang and 78% in West Kameng.

Presently, the Monpas are living in the three geographical units of Arunachal Pradesh - Tawang (Northern); Dirang (Central) and Kalaktang (Southern) areas of West Kameng district. The Monpas of West Kameng are called as Shershokpas by the Tawang Monpas, meaning people residing to their east and their dialect is known as Tsangla. The Tawang Monpas are known as Bhrami by the West Kameng Monpas. The Monpas are differentiated from other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh mainly on the basis of their dialectical variations, customs and customary laws, dress, food habits and habitat.

It is only a recent trend that education has been given a lot of importance in Arunachal Pradesh. Today Arunachal Pradesh has a number of reputable schools,
colleges, and institutions. The state has seven government colleges and three private colleges in different districts with the objective of promoting higher education. Rajiv Gandhi University is the only university in the entire state. The North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology (NERIST) play a significant role in technical and management education. The total literacy rate according to the Census of 2011 is 66.95% out of which 73.69% is male and 59.57% is female\textsuperscript{5}.

As can be perceived, among the Monpas imparting of formal modern education was almost absent till recent times. Being highly influenced by religion most of the parents sent their wards above 7 years to the monasteries and nunneries to become novice. For a long time the Monpas were denied any formal education and educational intuitions were set up only at a very later stage. However, till date, the rate of education among the children is very low.

The first school in West Kameng was established through the initiative of the Assamese educationist, who taught the people in Assamese medium. The first school of Tawang was called Head quarter Primary School which was established in 1952 as a primary school. However, later on, this school was upgraded which is now known as Tawang Higher Secondary School\textsuperscript{6}. Even after establishing schools, the ignorant parents could not see the utility of educating their children as they ultimately had to work in the agricultural fields and do household chores. Therefore, the Government of India, in consultation with tsorgens (village headmen), made it compulsory for every parent to send at least one child to school, failing which they were liable to pay fines. A lottery was conducted and whoever

\textsuperscript{5} Source: Economic and statistics Department, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh.
\textsuperscript{6} Source: Office of the Deputy Director of School Education, Tawang
name comes, he/ she was compelled to get admitted to the school. Even then, very often they did not refrain from sending a substitute to school as they were busy in the fields and tending to the animals. However today, the level of enrolment of boys and girls in schools is quite encouraging and the parents even send their children outside the region for providing them higher and better education at the schools, colleges and university level. They are also taking up professional and other vocational courses. Today, they can be seen working as teachers and as government and semi-government employees. In the changing circumstances, the social attitude towards female education is undergoing changes in a positive and favourable direction. As per 2011 census, the total literacy rate of Tawang is 60.61% out of which male constitute of 68.54% and 48.57% of females are recorded as literate. In the same census it is recorded that the total literacy rate of West Kameng is 69.40% out of which 75.66% male and 60.80% are females. However, the entry of the Monpas into certain occupation as doctors, engineers, lawyers or so on is quite low and marginal as compared with other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The following table shows the number of educational institutions and students:

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7 Interview with of Dorjee Phuntso of Jang, 87 years on 27th Oct., 2011
Table: 2
Educational Institution and number of Students (Tawang district, Session- 2012-13)⁸:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Govt. of A.P</th>
<th>Others/Private</th>
<th>No. of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Govt. Boys</td>
<td>Private Boys</td>
<td>Govt. Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Secondary</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>1135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2776</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table: 3
Educational institution of the West Kameng district as on 31-03-2011⁹:
(in number)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Higher Secondary School</th>
<th>Govt. of A.P</th>
<th>Others/Private</th>
<th>Govt. of A.P</th>
<th>Others/Private</th>
<th>Govt. of A.P</th>
<th>Others/Private</th>
<th>Govt. of A.P</th>
<th>Others/Private</th>
<th>Govt. of A.P</th>
<th>Others/Private</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Degree Arts College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>06</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table: 4
Stage-wise number of Scheduled Tribe Students of West Kameng district during 2010-11 (All Management)¹⁰: (in number)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Primary</td>
<td>2329</td>
<td>2328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>3241</td>
<td>3376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>1339</td>
<td>1492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Secondary</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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⁸ Source: Office of the Deputy Director of School Education, Tawang
⁹ Source: Statistical Abstract of Arunachal Pradesh 2011
¹⁰ Ibid
**Historical Background:**

The origin and migration of the Monpas to their present habitat in Arunachal Pradesh has been handed down from generation to generation through oral tradition which has been the original mode of recording the history of the people. Certain myths and legends are associated with it. The Monpas are said to have migrated in batches in different periods of time, from Tibet as well as eastern Bhutan.

The term “Monpa” is from Tibetan language, ‘Mon’ meaning low or down land, and ‘Pa’ meaning people. Hence, it means the people of the low or down lands and the Monpas are found residing in the south of Tibet. This term itself indicates that the Monpas have migrated from Tibet in the past. One version of migration prevailing among the Monpas of Tawang narrates that the higher or richer sections of the Tibetans conducted a **puja** called **Dokpa** (to ward off evil spirits from the village), to save their homeland from untoward incidents and for the purpose, selected some lower class Tibetans, dressed them in colourful attires and sent them towards the south. These persons are said to have carried the evil spirits along with them. Those who came to the south, later on, came to be known as Monpas and the colourful attire became their traditional dress. Today, the Monpas also conduct this **puja** called **Dokpa** but now instead of sending poor people, they throw away the statues of ghost and devils called **luth**. This invariably suggests that caste distinction prevailed in the Tibetan society. It was considered that the sole responsibility to drive out the evil spirits from the land rested on the higher sections of the population and this they did by forcibly sending the poorer and weaker ones to face the wrath of an unknown land. There must have

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11 Plate No. 1 (a)
been successive stages of migration of these people in the lowlands suggesting their concentration in the Tawang, Dirang and Kalaktang region of Arunachal Pradesh.

However, according to Verrier Elwin, “the Tawang valley was first inhabited by immigrants from the plains under a Prince Rupati, sometime immediately after the beginning of the Christian era”. According to him, the kye clans are the descendents of Prince Rupati\textsuperscript{12}. According to another version, it is believed that the Kalaktang Monpas came down from Tibet following two routes. One group came down via Tawang and another group via Bhutan. The first group had settled in the eastern part of Bhutan to stay away from the trouble which they faced frequently both from monastery officials as well as the Tibetan agents. With the second group, some Bhutia families also migrated from Bhutan and settled with them in the Kalaktang region. The villagers of Komalangchan, Shamphong and Brakpalangchan claim that their ancestors had migrated from eastern Bhutan and intermixed with the Monpas of Kalaktang\textsuperscript{13}.

The folklores prevalent in the region also provide an insight into the political history of the Tawang region. As there are no documented sources available, the folklore forms the basis of reconstructing the history of this region before the advent of Buddhism. King Kala Wangpo, ruler of Tana (Tawang) in the 7\textsuperscript{th} Century C.E., and his queen named Khando Drawa Zangmo of Lhagayala (West Kameng) are the most popular figure in the Monpa folklore. It is said that they had their palace at Tana Mandae Khang, the very place where the Tawang Monastery stands today. One day when the king went out for hunting in the forest along with his dog

\textsuperscript{12} Verrier Elwin, Democracy in NEFA, p.56
\textsuperscript{13} D.K. Dutta, op. cit., p.3
and soldiers, his faithful dog got lost in the wilderness. The king went out for its search and eventually came to a lonely house amidst the interiors of the forests. There, inside the house he was greeted by an old couple. They had a beautiful daughter who then was in deep meditation. This girl was actually a fairy, Khando Drawa Zangmo. No sooner did the king set his eyes on her, he was bewitched by her beauty and at once took her as his bride to his kingdom, Tana Mandae Khang. However, the king had another wife, his first queen, named Hasang Dyunmo who was a witch. She was of a bad temperament and when King Kala Wangpo married Khando Drawa Zangmo as his second wife, she felt insulted and was bent upon taking revenge. Meanwhile, King Kala Wangpo and Khando Drawa Zangmo had two children, a son named Lhase Gyapo and a daughter named Lhachin Kunzang. The king and his subjects were filled with joy. However, the happiness was short lived as Dyunmo, the evil queen, tried to harm the second queen Khando Drawa Zangmo and her children. The queen, Khando Drawa Zangmo could not bear the dirty tricks of Dyunmo and flew away to the realm of the gods, leaving the king and her two children. The king could not tolerate the departure of the queen and eventually took to heavy drinking, neglecting the affairs of his kingdom. Dyunmo, who now became more powerful, imprisoned the king and declared herself the ruler of Tana Mandae Khang. She then tried to kill the two children and pretended to be very ill. She informed her courtiers that she could be recovered only if she was fed the hearts of the two children of Khando Drawa Zangmo. Men were sent to kill the two children but when they found the two children playing, they hesitated and instead killed some dogs of the village and fed their hearts to the Dyunmo, claiming it to be the hearts taken out from the bodies of the children. But soon,
Dyunmo came to know about the forgery and this time she sent her close assistants to capture the children. They somehow managed to catch the prince, Lhase Gyapo, and tied him up with ropes and dragged him away to a place called Larong Dromche, near Mukto village in Tawang and pushed him down the cliff.

It is believed that when the prince was pushed down the cliff, his mother Khando Drawa Zangmo, who was watching all these events from the realm of gods, turned into a mountain eagle and saved him. He then happened to reach Yule Pema Chen Land (identified as Thembang in West Kameng). There he found that the people were without a king and there was no order in the society. The people thereupon approached the young prince Lhase Gyapo to be their king. Lhase Gyapo agreed to be their king.

Meanwhile, Lhachin Kunzang, the princess, who was still alive, was banished from the kingdom and while roaming about from place to place, she happened to reach Yule Pema Chen, the kingdom of her brother. She was a beggar now. While begging for food, she once came to the hut of a yak herder and begged for little milk and butter. But a ferocious dog guarding the hut broke itself loose and bit her on her leg. Fortunately, the yak herder and his wife hearing her cries, immediately came to her rescue. They drove away the dog and dressed up the wounds of the princess. But she was not cured properly and she became lame forever. When the people saw the sad plight of the poor lame beggar, they brought her before the wise king. The king at once recognized her to be his sister and rushed to meet her. On knowing the whole story from his sister, the prince immediately raised a strong army against Dyunmo and marched towards Tana. In the battlefield, Dyunmo was shot through her heart with an arrow. Although, she
attempted to run away towards Shakteng Mera in Bhutan, she died on her way near Damyan Chu. The people of the valley buried the wicked queen and constructed a black stupa (chorten) over her corpse, so that she would never rise again. After the death of Dyunmo, Lhase Gyapo became the ruler of both the kingdoms of Tana and Yul Pema Chen land.\footnote{Interview with Leki Phuntso of Jang, 76 years of age on 12 March 2011 who interpreted the book 
*Namdar* of King Kala Wangpo written in Bothi script.}

There are no recorded materials available which suggests the reign of any ruler in this region. Hence, this folklore is of great importance as it highlights that Tana and Yul Pema Chen areas were under a monarchical form of government. This story reflects the expansion of the kingdom of Tana to the Yul Pema Chen of the Kalaktang areas of Arunachal Pradesh. The usurping of power by the wicked queen Dyunmo, may suggest a palace rebellion that might have taken place which resulted in a woman being set up on the throne. The black stupa which was constructed after her demise is still present adding evidence to her rule. This story may have been created to provide legitimacy the rule of Lhase Gyapo by providing him with a divine origin.

The traditional structure of the Monpa region was divided into nine specific region called *tso* or *dhing* meaning area or region. A list of the traditional division of the Monpa region\footnote{Tsewang Norbu, *The Monpas of Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh*, Pp. 15-19.}:

a) Lepo Tso-zhe b) Dakpa\footnote{Also known as Dakpaneng} Tso-gyeth c) Pangchen Dhing-grou
d) Shar Nyima Tsosum e) Mag-Thing Lungsum f) Rhebla Gangsum
g) Shauk Rho Jangda h) Dhrang-Neng-Chu-Gyen i) Hrong-Neng-Toe-Me
Lepo Tso-zhe\textsuperscript{17} comprised of four small tsos i.e., Lepo Sinmo tso, Gomni tso, Gyipa tso and Shinle tso. These tsos were situated in the borders of Tawang and Tibet\textsuperscript{18}. Dakpa Tso-gyeth means eight tsos of Dakpaneng which lies in westward towards the border of Bhutan. The eight tsos of Dakpaneng were Sanglum-tso, Kharung-Bongleng tso, Pamakhar tso, Woongla tso, Thrilam tso, Sakpret tso, Thonglek tso and Mukhob-Shaksum tso. Presently Dakpaneng falls under Lumla sub-division of Lumla circle of Tawang district\textsuperscript{19}. Pangchen Dhing-grou means six dhings or regions of Pangchen area that adjoins Tibet. These six dhings were Toeth shok-tsen (upper), Bar shok-tsen (middle), Meth shok-tsen (lower), Lempo, Muchot and Kharman. Now it also falls under Lumla sub-division of Zemethang circle of Tawang. The three tsos of Shar Nyima Tsosum were Lhou tso, Shar tso and Sher tso. Most of the villages of these tsos fall on the northern bank of the Tawangchu river. Today Lhou tso comes under Lhou circle of Jang sub-division, Shar tso under kitpi circle and Sher tso under Tawang circle of Tawang sub-division. All the villages from Gongkhar to Mibra village fall under Rhebla Gangsum which adjoins Bhutan. It falls under Mukto circle of Jang sub-division. Shauk Rho Jangda consisted of three villages such as, Shau, (now under Tibet), Rho and Jangda (Jang circle of Jang sub-division). Mag-Thing Lungsum consisted of Mago, Thingbu and Lunguthang which falls under Thingbu circle of Jang sub-division and lies in the extreme north eastern corner of Tawang. Dhrang-Neng-Chu-Gyen (present Dirang circle) consisted of six tsos such as, Sengnyuk tso, Chug tso, Lii tso, Sangti tso, Dirang tso and Namshu-Thembang tso. Hrong-Neng-Toe-Me (present Kalaktang

\textsuperscript{17} Tso means region and zhe means four. Hence, Lepo Tso-zhe means an area comprising four regions.

\textsuperscript{18} These regions are now under China after Chinese occupation of Tibet (1959).

\textsuperscript{19} For administrative purpose Tawang is divided into three sub-divisions i.e., Tawang, Jang and Lumla.
circle), comprised of four tsos such as, Toe tso (upper) comprised of Murshing, Dhomkhok and Phudhung villages, Meh tso (lower) comprised of Bokhar, Shampong and Tzingki villages, Sheir tso, Tukpen tso, Rahung tso and Khuldham.

As is typical in most of the rural societies, the Monpa society was also deeply rooted to supernatural beliefs and practices. In one of the folk accounts of the Tawang Monpas, there was once believed to be a person named Ngonchin Yule who lived in Jang village of Tawang district. He was believed to be a Sangey, an enlightened one. He had the power of performing miracles and infusing life into dead bodies. Once he was invited by a Sherdukpen family of Dutmelongkhar village in West Kameng area to revive their dead son. Ngonchin Yule readily accepted the invitation and successfully infused life in the dead body of the boy. The Sherdukpen family thereupon offered to provide the Sangey with anything that he asked for as a reward. The Sangey however, only asked for a stone utensil on which cows and maan (mithuns- bos frontalis) were fed. The Sherdukpen family readily agreed to offer him whatever he had wished for. Interestingly, the stone utensil transformed into a mithun who started following the Sangey on his return journey to Jang. The Sangey had actually known that the stone utensil had the spirit of a mithun and the Sangey wanted to take the mithun to his native land as no mithuns could be found beyond the Sela pass. On his return journey to Jang, the mithun started mowing and produced sounds which shook the whole earth. Hence, those places came to be named as Birmang and Dirang respectively (birr and dirr refers to shaking in Tawang Monpa dialect). Continuing the journey, the Sangey and the mithun reached the place where it became very difficult for mithun to move forward. This place came to be known as Lish from the term leu, means feeling
heavily tired out. Next they reached the place where the mithun fell sick. Accordingly this place came to be known as Nyomdung from the term nyolok. The mithun, however, felt better on the journey further, and that place where the mithun got well, gradually came to be known as Sengdzong, Seng meaning feeling better. Likewise, the place where the mithun drank water was named as Maan-tse-thong-mei. However, when the Sangey and the mithun reached Sela pass they were restricted from crossing over to the other side of the pass by the guardian of the lake at Sela pass20. The Sangey thereupon sent message to his home at Jang and asked for his sisters to come at the lake at Sela pass with necessary items required for spiritual offerings. But the sisters were wrongly informed about the items required and so the puja could not be held. Finding no way out, the Sangey decided to fight the spiritual guardian of the lake but he died in the process. The mithun seeing the fate of his master came to tears and the place where the tears of the mithun fell turned into a lake which came to be known as Mak-tse-khang. This small lake is just above the main Sela lake.

After the Sangey, Ngonchin Yule, died in his battle with the guardian of the lake, his right hand came floating up the waters which his sisters managed to fish out from the lake. His sisters had to sadly return back to their village Jang with the right arm of their brother. They wrapped his arm with khada (ceremonial scarf) and placed it in their cupboard. However, when the sisters went out for work in the fields, the villagers complained the hearing sounds of drums beating and performing of pujas. Once, instead of going to the fields they decided to secretly stay back and verify what was going about in their house. To their surprise and

20 Plate No. 1 (b)
astonishment, they found the hand of their brother coming out of the cupboard. The five fingers turned into five fairies that started beating drums and performing *pujas*. The two sisters tried to defile the fairies by throwing their old gown called *shingka* over them. However, the sisters could only get hold of the little finger and other fingers jumped into different places. It is believed that the thumb jumped and reached Pamghar near Bomdir in Tawang and so the supreme seat of the *Bonpos* (priest of *Bon* faith) is situated at Pamghar. As the little finger (considered smallest in rank) was caught by the sisters, so the *Bonpo* who was smallest in rank had his seat at Jang. It is therefore believed that Ngonchin Yule was responsible for the creation story of the seats of *Bonpos* among the Monpas of Tawang\(^{21}\).

The story is an attempt by the simple people living in the highlands of Arunachal Pradesh to highlight the importance of the various places where they dwell and at the same time, also justify the derivation of the names of the various places of Monpa region. It also features the *mithun* which is still regarded as a very important animal of the state. But this animal is not available in Tawang region. Whatever biological and geographical factor may be accounted for it, the Monpas tried to justify it by their folkloristic accounts. Till today people belonging to Ngonchin clan can be seen in Jang village who claim to be the descendents of *Sangey* Ngonchin Yule.

Tawang Township is also known as Pungteng, meaning to assemble or to gather. During festivals, which are held regularly at the Tawang monastery many people assemble or gather at the place to rejoice or pay their homage to lord Buddha. This is how the place got the name.

\(^{21}\) Interview with ex- *tsorgen* of Jang, Shri Nombay, age 72yrs on 05-04-2011
Beside these, various views has been provided regarding the names of the villages and settlement of other villages. It is believed that the village of Murshing was earlier known as Munshing meaning the land full of jungles, while one section believe that the land was known as Nyuishing, a plant found abundantly in the locality. Domkhar means bear of white stone as Dom means bear, and Khar means white stone. The tradition tells us that once a bear sucked milk from a white stone which was considered as a good omen for the people to settle in that area and since then people started living in Domkhar. The village of Komalangchen was started by a group of Komo Community. Gradually, the people of the neighbouring areas began to settle in the area\textsuperscript{22}.

**Political Background:**

The Monpas were earlier under the Tibetan authority and they were put under the authority of Tibet. For the sake of administrative convenience the whole Monpa region was divided into three divisions with three offices called dzong\textsuperscript{23} which were run by the dzongpons. The three dzongs were- Gyangar dzong (Tawang), Dirang dzong and Talung dzong\textsuperscript{24} (Kalaktang) which were placed under the jurisdiction of the Tsona dzongpon by the Lhasa Government. Tsona dzong, 32 ¼ miles (51.9 km) from Tawang, was a place of considerable importance for trade, hence was put directly under the supervision of Lhasa dzong, the capital city of Tibet\textsuperscript{25}. The Gyangar dzong was the winter head quarters of the Tsona dzongpon as Tsona was chilly cold during winter. However, it is to be noted that two monks of

\textsuperscript{22}D. K. Dutta, op. cit., p. 12
\textsuperscript{23}In Tibet and Bhutan an administrative office is still known as dzong and its officers as dzongpons
\textsuperscript{24}Plate No.1 (c)
\textsuperscript{25}North-East Frontier of Assam in continuation of Captain St. John Mitchell’s Report, vide File No.167J. of 1884, p.2
Tawang monastery were assigned as dzongpons in Dirang dzong and Talung dzong each, who collected taxes and paid it to the Tsona dzongpon. The main duty of the dzongpon was to collect tax but they even tried to settle local disputes. The dzongpon led a very luxurious life and they were assisted by a number of other officers. The taxes were in the form of grains, medicinal plants, herbs, firewood and timber. Each household had to pay five bres (a special kind of bowl having a capacity of one kilogram) of finger millet and wheat every year. In addition, they also paid different plants and dry fruits, such as arba, barba, kyurba (amla), bagha (flower of indigenous paper tree), shoo, suiteh rabha, konglin, akphekar (wild orchid), laish, amre etc., as taxes. The Monpas collected these articles from other areas, mostly from the plains of Assam. The Monpas also had to pay timber logs called dungring of 12 feet, dungthung of 6 feet, thapang of 6 feet and bamboo sticks of 15 feet long. These were mostly used for constructing monasteries and houses in Tibet. The Monpas could not raise their voice against these obnoxious taxes and nothing could precisely be said as to when the Monpas came under the Tibetan authority. It is also said that due to the continuous pressure from the Tibetan rule, many of the Monpas migrated and settled in Bhutan.

After the treaty of Yandabo, 1826, the British Government took over the administration of Assam and the North-Eastern Frontier Tract. Though they interfered in the administration of the Ahom kingdom, they rarely interfered in the affairs of North-Eastern Frontier Tract. In 1913, Captain Bailey was the first British officer to visit Tawang who submitted his report “Explorations on the North-East Frontier 1913” to the British Government in Calcutta. He described the

26 Interview with late tsorgen Pem Gombu Lhou village, 85 years of age on 25th Sept, 2010
region as low lying and well wooded and villages as large and prosperous. He gave a beautiful description of the customs, dress and language of the Monpas. According to him, the dialect of the Monpas is quite distinct from the Tibetans and has a greater resemblance to the Bhutanese language. However, this similarity can be seen among the Monpas of West Kameng and Bhutan. The dialect spoken by the Monpas of Tawang is quite different and has no resemblance to the dialect spoken by the Monpas of West Kameng.

Soon after his visit to Tawang, there occurred certain political developments in India, China and Tibet. A tripartite conference was held at Simla on 6th October 1913 between the representatives of these three countries. India was represented by Sir Henry Mc Mahon, the British Plenipotentiary, China by Iban Chen and Tibet by Lonchen Shatra, a leading minister of the Dalai Lama. As a result of Simla conference in 1914 a boundary line known as Mac Mohan line was drawn between India and Tibet. According to M.L. Bose, MacMohan line “runs over a distance of 820 miles of which 640 miles are between India and Tibet from the tri-junction of Bhutan, Tibet and the Kameng district of the present Arunachal Pradesh of India through the crest of the Himalayas to the Diphuk pass (Talok –La) to the south of the north-west of Burma where India, Burma and Tibet meet”.

Thus Tawang came under Indian jurisdiction as it was situated south to the line.

In 1914 Captain Nevill, who was the then political officer of the western section of the North-East Frontier, visited Tawang and recommended for the appointment of a European officer to be in-charge at Tawang. He further suggested

27 Nerru Nanda, Tawang-The Land of Mon, p.2
28 M. L. Bose, History of Arunachal Pradesh, p.137
some other measures for the benefit of the local people\textsuperscript{29}. However, no attention was paid towards his report, and due to World War I no affective measures were taken for several years\textsuperscript{30}. Although the British Government had not paid much attention towards the area, in 1944 an Assam Rifles’ outpost was established at Dirang. In May 1945, Mr. Mills, the then advisor to the Governor of Assam, visited Dirang dzong and tried to stop illegal revenue collections by dzongpons. After that, although the Tsona dzongpon issued notices to the people of Kalaktang for the payment of taxes, they failed in their attempt.

Shortly, after independence, at the instance of the Government of India the Naga officer of the Indian Frontier Service and then the Assistant Political Officer at Charduar, Major R. K. Khating also called Bob,\textsuperscript{31} marched out for Tawang with a party in 1951. Major Bob Khating and his team were accompanied by Late Pema Gombu\textsuperscript{32} of Lhou Village and two other interpreter of Dirang. There was no motorable road, therefore, the team walked along the difficult terrain. After crossing Sela Pass they reached Jang Village and stayed for two days. They sent Pem Gombu to the dzongpons of Gyanger dzong to inform about the arrival and mission of Indian officer and his team. After discussing with the secretary of Dzongpon Ngyerpa Konchok La and other Tibetan officials he returned back to Jang to give his report to Major Khating\textsuperscript{33}. However, on 6\textsuperscript{th} of February 1951 the team arrived at Lebhrang Changbu and there they hoisted Indian flag. Major Bob Khating had a meeting with Tibetan officials on 9\textsuperscript{th} February and the argument

\textsuperscript{29}L. N. Chakravarty, \textit{Glimpses of the early history of Arunachal}, p.22
\textsuperscript{30}R.D. Pradhan, op. cit., p.31
\textsuperscript{31}Ibid, p-32
\textsuperscript{32}One of the most renowned tsorgen of the time
\textsuperscript{33}Interview with late tsorgen Pem Gombu 85 years of age on 25\textsuperscript{th} Sept., 2010
expanded over the territorial issue\textsuperscript{34}. In between, the Tibetan officials sent their messengers to the capital city, Lhasa, to report the matter. The Lhasa Government thereupon called them back as the area, according to the Simla convention, fell under Indian jurisdiction. The Tibetan officials agreed to not to collect further, any taxes and to return. They, however, requested Major Bob Khatung to collect their remaining arrears and to give them free service of twenty labourers daily. But their request was turned down and as the area was already subjugated by the Indian Government. Since then it came to be governed by the same sets of rules and regulations that are followed in the rest of the country. It also marked the end of the collection of the unfair dues by the Tibetan dzongpons from the Monpa people. It is to be noted that the Monpas of West Kameng had to pay taxes even to the Akas, a tribe of Arunachal Pradesh\textsuperscript{35}. The taxes were in the form of rice, maize, barley, cotton clothes etc. However, with the establishment of Indian administration, these collections of illegal taxes were stopped. The Indian Government henceforth, aimed at the economic and political development of the Monpas without disturbing their culture and traditions\textsuperscript{36}.

Presently, the administration of Tawang district is divided into three sub-divisions: Tawang, Lumla and Jang. Tawang sub-division is divided into two administrative circles: Tawang and Kitpi. Lumla sub-division is divided into three administrative circles: Dudunghar, Lumla and Zemithang. Jang sub-division is divided into five administrative circles: Jang, Mukto, Bongkhar, Thingbu and Lhou. There are three Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly constituencies in Tawang district: Lumla, Tawang and Mukto. All these belong to Arunachal West

\textsuperscript{34} R. D. Pradhan, op. cit., Pp-31-33
\textsuperscript{35} P.T. Nair, \textit{Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh}, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{36} Nerru Nanda, op. cit., p.3
Lok Sabha constituency. For administrative purpose West Kameng is divided into three sub-divisions such as Thrizino, Rupa and Bomdila and twelve circles, including Dirang, Bomdila, Kalaktang, Balemu, Bhalukpong, Jameri, Sinchung, Nafra, Thrizino, Rupa, Thembang and Shergaon. Out of these twelve circles the Monpas are residing in Dirang, Bomdila, Kalaktang, Rupa and Thembang.

The study mainly focuses on the different aspects of socio-economic and cultural life of the Monpas. The geographical area is limited to the areas presently inhabited by the Monpas namely, Tawang, Dirang and Kalaktang areas of the state of Arunachal Pradesh. The work has been done with the following objectives:

i) to study different aspects of the socio-cultural life of the Monpas.
ii) to study the religious life of the Monpas.
iii) to look into the economy emphasizing on their trade relation with the neighbouring state of Assam and with that of Tibet and Bhutan.

Methodology:

Historical method of investigation, predominantly on the basis of hitherto unexplored primary source materials (oral source) is followed. For the purpose, extensive field survey was done and interviews with the knowledgeable persons were conducted. Field work was carried out for a course of almost three years from 2009-2012 on different occasions, especially on days of important religious or cultural festivals. The researcher hardly found any written documents which portray the society and the life of the Monpas. The researcher having been born and brought up at Jang village of Tawang district and still being a resident of the same village has had the advantage of observing people’s participation in the festivals, in social activities and gatherings. However, the researcher has observed that the
knowledge and information with regard to the tradition and culture of the Monpas is confined to a handful of learned people. Another major problem faced by the researcher in course of field survey was that the customary rules and regulations vary from place to place. The respondent sometimes could not give the accurate information. The primary datas were collected from the village elders, learned lamas (Buddhist priest) and tsorgens. While the elderly people and lamas have provided information based on folklores, myths, legends, the tsorgens have presented first hand information on village administration. The interview technique was carried out to collect information as the people’s sense of the past, understanding, and perception are of great value for conducting the study. The field work has been supplemented by consulting library and archival works. Secondary sources include both official and non-official documents, published and unpublished materials. These were collected from various libraries and archives. Intensive library work was conducted on the libraries of Tawang Monastery, District Library-Tawang, District Library-Itanagar, District Library-Guwahati, Rajiv Gandhi University, K. K Handique- G.U, ICHR- G.U Campus, Departmental library of folklore- G. U, Tribal Research Institute-Guwahati, DHAS- Guwahati, Kamrupa Anushadan Samiti, Assam State Museum library-Guwahati and Archives of Guwahati and Itanagar-Arunachal Pradesh. After collecting the source materials, cross examination of the sources were carried on and then analyzed.

**Review of literature:**

Not much work has been done in the field of tribal history especially in North-East India but historians and anthropologists have provided tremendous insights into this region. In spite of the fact that various scholars and researchers
have thrown light on various aspects of the history of North-East, very few works on Arunachal Pradesh, especially on the Monpa tribe are found. Earlier scholars writing on various aspects of the Monpas of Arunachal Pradesh have largely depended upon library and archival sources with limited field studies. They being an outsider could not largely focus on field study. Therefore, here an attempt has been made to bridge this gap.

Neeru Nanda’s work *Tawang the land of Mon* (1982) throws some light on the various aspects of the Tawang Monpas. But Neeru Nanda being the Deputy Commissioner of Tawang district during 1980,s she throws light only on contemporary history of Tawang and does not throw any light on the origin and migration of the Monpas. Tashi Lama’s work-*The Monpas of Tawang* (1999) and also Tsewang Norbu’s work-*The Monpas of Tawang Arunachal Pradesh* (2008) provides an understanding of the life and the culture of the Tawang Monpas. However the discussion is not adequate. Tsewang Norbu’s has almost touched every aspect of the Monpas but he is totally silent about the Monpa Tibetan relations (before 1959). Though Bibhas Dhar’s work-*Arunachal Pradesh, The Monpas of Tawang in Transition* is a pioneering contribution to the socio-economic and cultural aspects of the Tawang Monpas, his focus has been entirely on the transition period. S. Dutta and B. Tripathy’s works-*Buddhism in Arunachal Pradesh, Buddhism in North-East India* are also important works, but they mainly focused upon religious issues. D. K, Duarah’s work - *The Monpas of Arunachal Pradesh*, is also an important work to get an insight into the Monpa society but Duarah being an anthropologists, his focus has been basically on the physical features especially on the size of the fingers, growth of hair etc., of the Monpa boys.
For a general view of the history of the Monpas one can rely upon the works of Tsewang Norbu- *The Monpas of Tawang Arunachal Pradesh* (Guwahati 2008), Tashi Lama- *The Monpas of Tawang a Profile* (Itanagar 1999), Niranjan Sarkar- *Buddhism Among the Monpas and Sherdukpons* (Shillong 1980), Jogendra Nath- *Cultural Heritage of Tribal Societies Vol. II: The Monpas* (New Delhi 2005), Ashok Biswal- *Mystic Monpas of Tawang Himalaya* and articles published in various proceedings of NEIHA such as A. K. Thakur’s- “Peasantisation and State Formation in Early Arunachal Pradesh”, *The Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, Bangalore Session, 1997; A. K. Thakur’s- “State Formation in Arunachal Pradesh”, *NEHU Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1998 (new series); A. K. Thakur’s- “Pre-colonial Trade and Polity Formations in Arunachal Pradesh”, *Proceedings of North East India History Association*, Imphal Session, 2000 and in other publications on Arunachal Pradesh and North-East India by S. Dutta, B. N. Jha, B. Tripathy and others. But here too the discussion is not ample. As such proper research is quite necessary in understanding the various socio-economic and cultural trends that emerged in the Monpa society till its integration with the Indian administration and after.