

**A STUDY ON SOCIETY, ECONOMY, POLITY AND  
CULTURE OF THE SHERDUKPENS OF  
ARUNACHAL PRADESH (Till 1947 A.D.)**

**THESIS**

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In

**HISTORY**

By

*Nani Tamang Jose*

**Supervisor**

*Prof. Byomakesh Tripathy*

**Professor**



**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
RAJIV GANDHI UNIVERSITY  
RONO HILLS-DOIMUKH (ITANAGAR)  
ARUNACHAL PRADESH**

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# DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

RAJIV GANDHI UNIVERSITY  
RONO HILLS: DOIMUKH (ITANAGAR) -791 112  
ARUNACHAL PRADESH  
INDIA

Prof. B. Tripathy

Phone No: 0360-2277271(O)

+919436256388(M)

Fax : 0360- 2277317/2277881


Email: [byomakeshtripathy@gmail.com](mailto:byomakeshtripathy@gmail.com)

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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the Thesis entitled “A Study on Society, Economy, Polity and Culture of The Sherdukpens of Arunachal Pradesh (Till 1947 A.D.)” submitted by Mr. Nani Tamang Jose in partial fulfilment of the requirements for Doctoral Degree in the Department of History, Rajiv Gandhi University, Rono Hills, Doimukh (Itanagar), is a piece of original work which is the outcome of his systematic research carried out during 2008-2011. His research is based on primary data collected by survey in more than fifteen Sherdukpen villages of Rupa circle in the district of West Kameng Arunachal Pradesh

All his findings from the survey are incorporated in this Thesis which has not been submitted elsewhere for any Degree. This may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
(Prof. Byomakesh Tripathy)  
Supervisor

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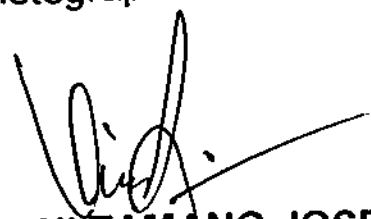
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**NANI TAMANG JOSE**

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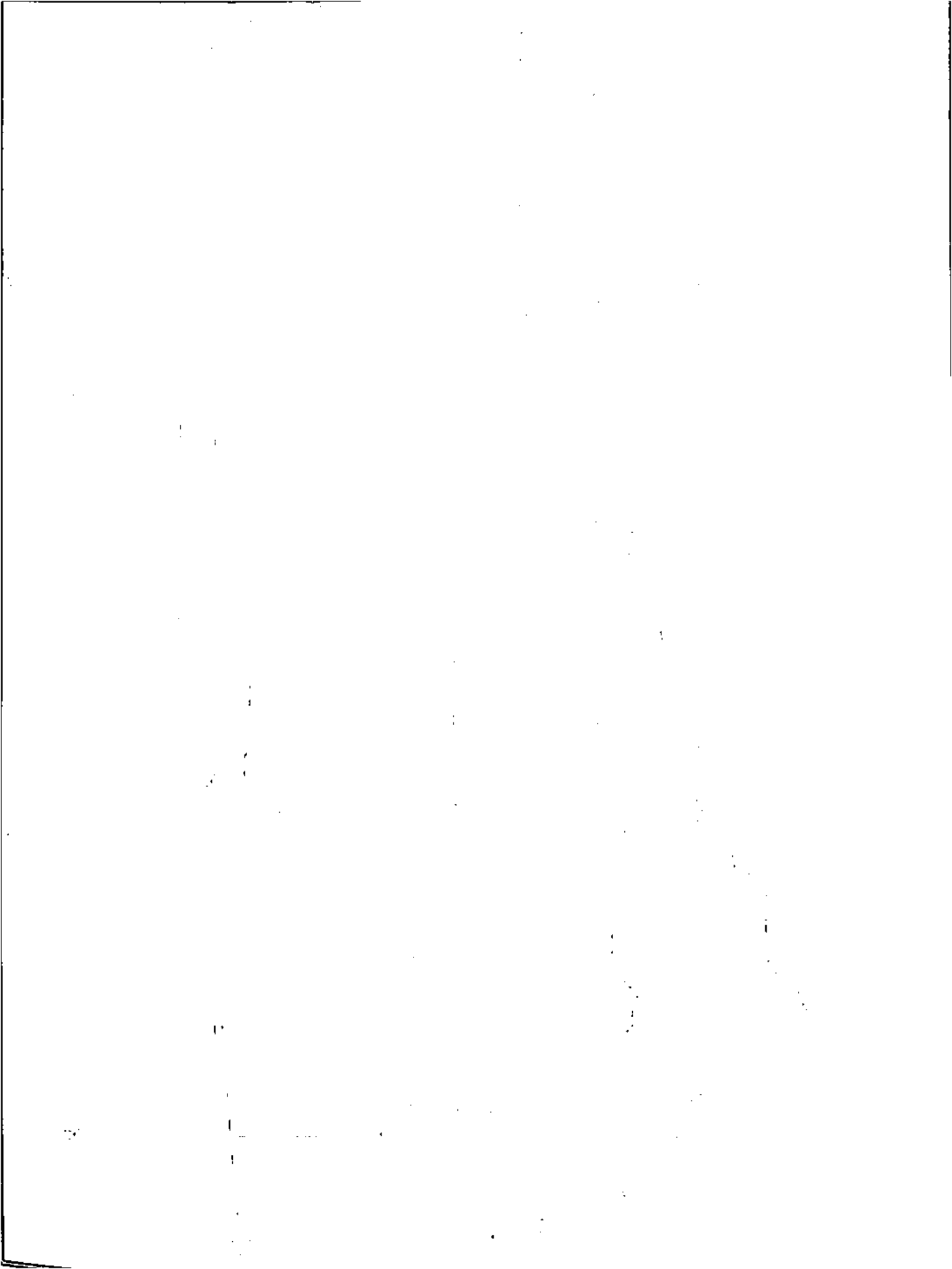
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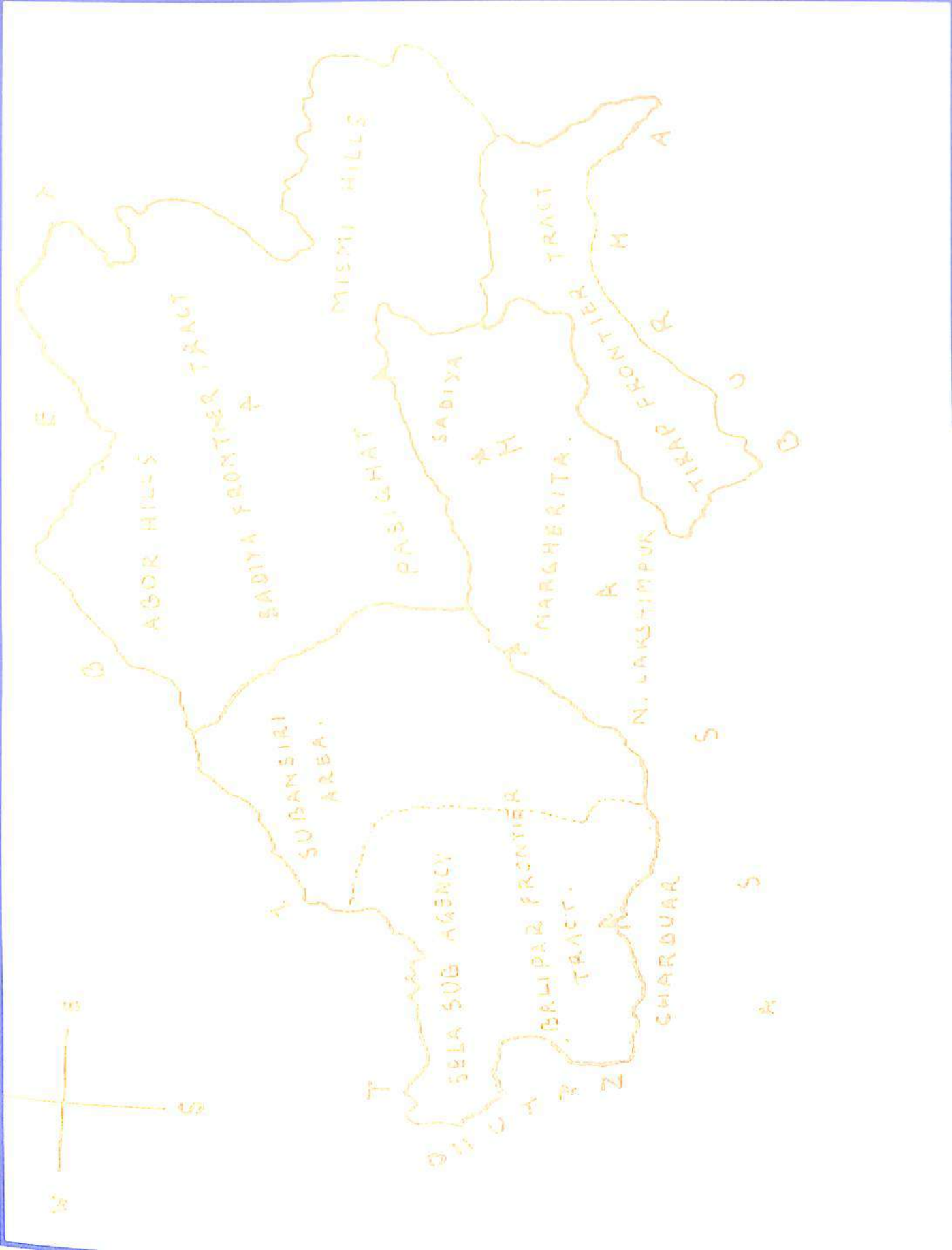
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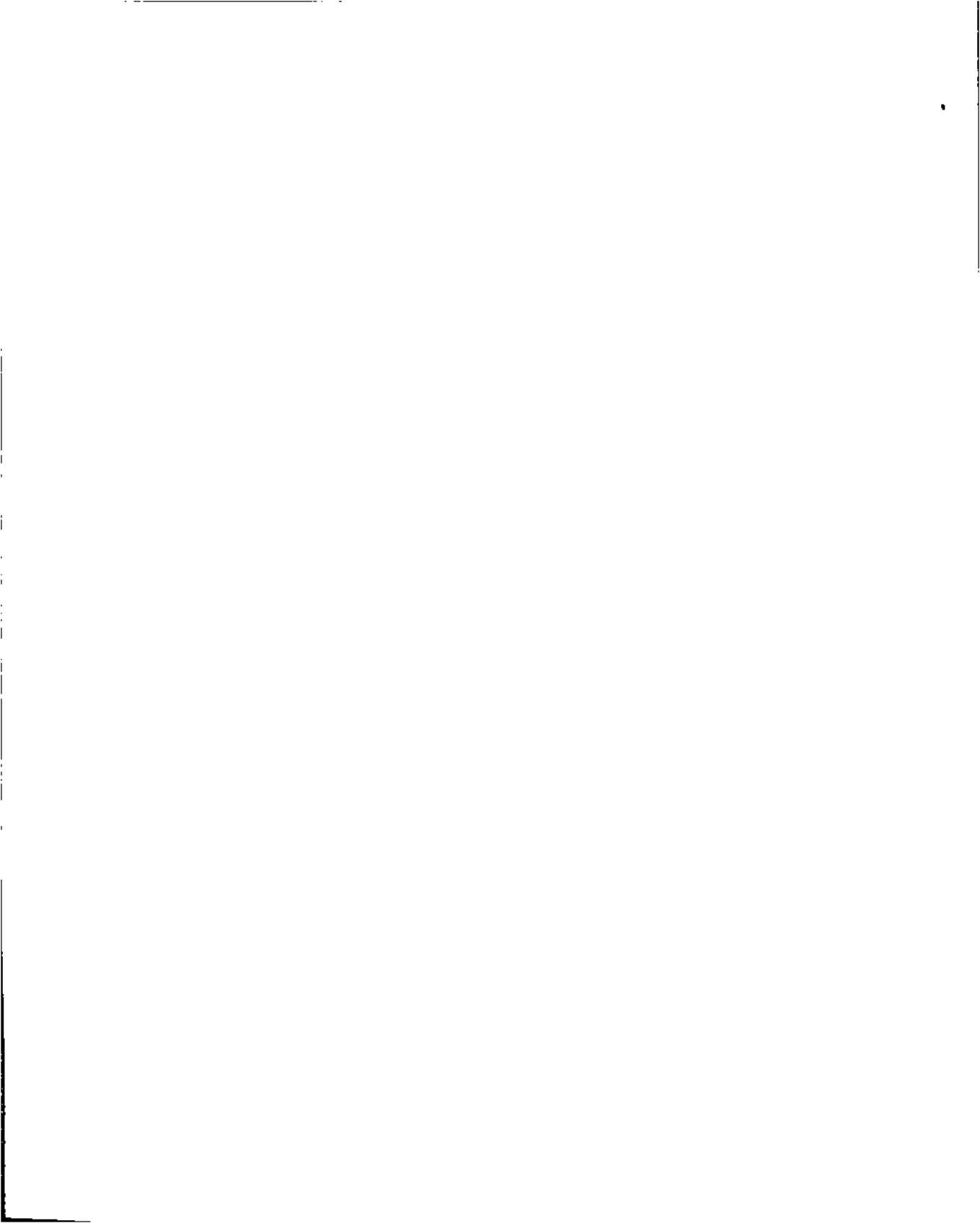
- REFERENCE
- INTERNATIONAL BDRY.
- DISTRICT BDRY.
- STATE BDRY.
- DISTRICT HQ.
- RIVER.











## INTRODUCTION

Earlier known as NEFA, the state of Arunachal Pradesh, situated on the Northeast extremity of India with an area of 83743 sq.km., spreads along the south face of the eastern Himalayas immediately below the water-divide between Tibet on the one hand and India on the other hand and the water divide between the Burma and India along the crest of the Patkai hills coming round to the south-east and the south of the easternmost tip of the Brahmaputra valley.<sup>1</sup> The state has a long international border with Bhutan to the west (160 kms), China to the North and North-East (1030 kms). The state is bounded on the North, North-East by Autonomous region of Tibet (China), on the South by Assam and Nagaland, on the southeast by Myanmar (Burma) and on the West by the Bhutan. The horse shoe shaped territory of Arunachal Pradesh is located between the latitudes 26<sup>0</sup> 28'N and 29<sup>0</sup> 30'N and the longitudes 91<sup>0</sup> 30'E and 97<sup>0</sup> 30'E. This beautiful land was earlier known as North East Frontier Tract from 1914, and later on NEFA (North East Frontier Agency) from 1954.<sup>2</sup> It was administered by the President of India through the Governor of Assam acting as its Agent. NEFA attained the status of Union Territory from the 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1972 under the provision of the North-East Area (Re-organisation Act of 1971) with the new name of Arunachal Pradesh under the charge of a Chief Commissioner with its headquarters at Shillong. The headquarter of this Union Territory was then shifted from Shillong to the newly constructed capital complex at Itanagar under Subansiri district in 1974. On 20<sup>th</sup> Day of February, 1987 Arunachal Pradesh attained the status of the state.<sup>3</sup> At present there are sixteen districts in the State namely, Anjaw, Changlang, East Kameng, East Siang, Kurung-Kume, Lohit, Lower Dibang Valley, Lower Subansiri, Papum Pare, Tawang, Tirap, Upper Dibang Valley, Upper Siang, West Kameng and West Siang.<sup>4</sup>

As per 2011 Census<sup>5</sup>, Arunachal Pradesh has the total population of 13, 82,611 (Male-7, 20, 232; Female-6, 62,379). The population density per sq. km of the state is only 17. The highest population density recorded is 51 in Papum Pare and the lowest being 1 in Dibang Valley. The percentage of literate in Arunachal Pradesh is 66.95



(73.69 for male and 59.57 for female). The highest literacy rate is Papum Pare district with 82.14 per cent and the lowest is Kurung Kome district with 50.67 per cent. Itanagar, the capital is situated in the Papumpare district. The name Itanagar was derived from historical fort called *Ita*-Fort located at the heart of the capital complex.

The state is distinguished for the indigenous culture, customs, traditions, traditional dances, festivals and arts and crafts, secular and religious monuments and so on. Being the home of twenty-six major tribes and many smaller tribes and sub-tribes, the state is an ethnographic paradise, where the people are following their diverse tradition, faiths and beliefs system harmoniously since early times. Among the tribes of the state, more than half of a dozen are followers of Buddhism. The tribes like the Sherdukpens, the Monpas, the Membas, the Khambas, the Nahs, the Meyors and the Zharkrings settled in western and central part of Arunachal follow the *Mahayana* form of Buddhism or better termed as Tibetan form of Buddhism.<sup>6</sup> The celebrated Tawang monastery of 17<sup>th</sup> century, at Tawang is the largest Buddhist monastery of the *Mahayana* Buddhism in Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>7</sup> The Khamptis, the Singphos and the Thikhak-Tangsa of the eastern part of the state follow the *Theravada* form of Buddhism, which they have brought from Myanmar while migrating their present settlement in late medieval period.<sup>8</sup> These Buddhist tribes have their socio-cultural heritage in the form of monuments, monasteries, *stupas* and other minor religious structures, dances, festivals and associated rituals, Buddhist arts and crafts like scroll painting, mask making, wood carving etc. which are important heritage of not only of Arunachal Pradesh but also of India as a whole.

The district of West Kameng<sup>9</sup> is the home of two significant Mahayana Buddhist tribe of the state such as the Monpas and the Sherdukpen. The district lying approximately between 91<sup>o</sup> 30' to 92<sup>o</sup> 40' East Longitude and 26<sup>o</sup>54' to 28<sup>o</sup>01' North Latitude is bounded by Tibet (China) and Tawang District on the north, by East Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh on the east, by Darrang district of Assam on the south and by Bhutan on the West. The district has derived its name from Kameng, the principal river of this region. Also known in its lower course as Bhareli, it rises in the remote westerly and then southerly turn to delineate the boundary between the

Brahmaputra in the plains of Assam. The West Kameng district has total 7,422 Sq.km in area and accounts for 8.86 per cent of the total area of the state.

Presently, the West Kameng District is divided into three sub-divisions viz. Bomdila, Rupa and Thrizino and Ten circles viz. Bomdila, Dirang, Thrizino, Bhalukping, Singchung, Jamiri, Nafra, Rupa Kalaktang and Balem. Rupa sub-division covers Rupa, Kalaktang and Balem circles.

**Table No. 1.** Highlights of Important Aspects of West Kameng district.10

Area	7422 Sq.km
Administrative Sub-Division	3
Administrative Circles	10
Administrative Block	4
Number of Block	10
Number of Town	4
Number of Villages( 2001 census)	221
Total Population (2001)	74595
Male	42638
Female	31957
Total 0-6 population(2001)	12181
Male	6221
Female	5960
Total Literate population	38488
Percentage of Literacy	61.67%
a) Male	71.02%
b) Female	48.56%
Density of Population	10 person per km <sup>2</sup>
Sex Ratio(female per 1000 males)	749
Decennial growth rate of population(1991-2001)	(+) 32.21%
Number of Assembly Constituencies	4

*Source: Statistical Hand Book of West Kameng District, Arunachal Pradesh 2001.*

Like the other tribe of Arunachal the Sherdukpens belong to Tibeto- Mongoloid race. Their population of Sherdukpen as per 2001 census was 4, 200.<sup>11</sup> They inhabit the south of the Bomdi La Range, in the valley of the Tengapani River of the West Kameng District of Arunachal Pradesh. Their close neighbour is Monpas of Kalaktang area. The Sherdukpens are Buddhist by religion having cultural affinities with the Monpas, the major Mahayana Buddhist tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, settled in

District Tawang and some parts of District West Kameng specifically in Dirang and Kalaktang area.

The Sherdukpen area<sup>12</sup> is long and narrow valley at the foot of the Bomdi La Range, traversed by many streams all of which are not perennial. Some of them spring to life and start flowing with strong swift currents with the onset of monsoon. The important rivers draining the area is Daplo Kho which flows in to the basin of Bhorelli, the largest rivers in Kameng

The oral tradition<sup>13</sup> of the Sherdukpen testifies to the fact that they originated from the union of a Tibetan king and Assamese princess. As per the tradition a Tibetan prince known as Japtang Bura or Gyaptung Bura who happened to be the son of the Assamese princess started his rule in the Sherdukpen area. It is told that at first he settle with his followers at BUT and Khoina village and later on shifted his headquarter to Rupa. Thus the history of the Sherdukpen starts. It is also believed that the Sherdukpen people migrated from Tibet to their present settlement by crossing the hills of Bhutan and as a result they have cultural affinities with Bhutan as well as Tibet.

The main concentration of the Sherdukpens is spread over the three important villages of *Rooprai Gaon* (Rupa), *Jigari Gaon* (Jigaon) and Shergaon in the south western part of the Kameng District. The local names of Rupa and Shergaon are *Thongthui* and *Senthu*, and the people living in these villages are known as *Thongjis* and *Senjis* respectively.<sup>14</sup> The altitude of the valley ranges between 1,524 and 1,981 meters above the sea-level.

Besides the three important villages, the Sherdukpens are dispersed over the small settlements which are known locally as *pams* or *lurek* (*lu*-hill, *rek*-cultivation). This dispersion was originally brought about by their jhum method of cultivation, and necessity of living in proximity to the forest clearings. Some of the important *pams* are: Thungre, Mukhuthung, Memechur, Jhumyam, Brukpublang, and Gacham.

## **HISTORY OF THE SHERDUKPENS**

The early history of Sherdukpen is shrouded in mystery due to paucity of literary as well as archaeological sources. It is partly due to Sherdukpens not having scripts of their own though their neighbouring Buddhist tribe Monpa has a script known *Bodic* script. The early archaeological remains of the area is testified by the findings of a few Neolithic tools and recently discovered a number of Megalithic monuments. Pre-historic remains in the form of Neolithic tools have been recovered from the Sherdukpen area. N. Sarkar has reported three Neolithic celts from Rupa and Shergaon area.<sup>15</sup> The first Celt made of shale is a heavy tool with rounded butt and sub rectangular shape. It measure 9.5 cm and breadth 6.1 cm. The tool is fashioned by grinding technical. The sides and one broad face have been ground almost flat while the other broad face is curvilinear. The sides are straight and taper slightly towards the butt. The slightly convexed cutting edge is produced by own equal by facial grinding. These tools were probably used as a hoe blade. The second tool is a ground tanged axe made of shale and also used as a hoe blade. It measure 6.1 cm in length and 4 cm in breadth. The tanged is broad and flat. The sides are rounded. One broad face is flat while the other curvilinear. The faces are ground unequally and hence the cutting edge is off the median. The third one is a ground Celt of soft rectangular shape made of shale. Its length is 7 cm and breadth 5.6 cm. The butt is broad and flat. The sides are straight, slightly tapering towards the butt. The two broad faces are ground almost flat. The convexed cutting edge is median produced by facial grinding. unlike the other two Neolithic celt it was probably used as an axe blade. During recent survey a few Neolithic tools have been reported by the research department of government of Arunachal Pradesh from the area. Most of these tools were used as hoe blade and axe blade and locally available rocks were used for making stone tools. Majority of these tools are prepared by following technique of grinding which is confine only for preparing and sharpening the cutting edge. In some tools a technique called packing as a primary shaping process of the tool can be identified. The people of Neolithic period would have followed the concept of shifting cultivation. The stone axes were probably used for forest clearing with a view to farming. The people were crude agriculturist practicing shifting cultivation by using burning as the chief means of clearing land and stone hoes for tending the young plants and weeding the grasses. The population must have

depended to a great extent upon the almost inexhaustible source of forest product. Most probably species of rice and millet which are native plants of area were grown. The people inhabited the highland and high slope for the production of cereals. The Sherdukpen call stone celts as *michaflu*.<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to note here that the Sherdukpens has a belief that the deities hurl these stone Celts as thunderbolt from the sky to strike the evil spirits and the thunderbolt bring prosperity to the household where it is kept. It is also believed if thunderbolt is kept in a house that house will never be stroke by lightning nor gutted by an outbreak of fire. However, we do not know clearly that when these Neolithic tools were prepared at that time Sherdukpens were living in the area.

Few megaliths have been discovered in Rupa –Shergaon area.<sup>17</sup> At Rupa a number of megalith have are discovered near a priest house. These upright megalithic stone are round in shape. The average height of these are 1.10 metres and circumference varies from 1.5 to 1.8 metres and .80 metres and breath .70 meters. Two megalithic sites have been recently discovered at Shergaon. The first site is located on the right bank of river Choskorong where three numbers of menhirs are discovered. The upright menhirs are of schistose rock. One of the menhirs is considerably large in size. The central large upright stone measures 1.4 metres in height, 0.4 meters in breadth and 0.4 meters in thickness. The second upright stone is of 0.75 metres in height and 0.20 metres in breadth while the thirds upright stone is having height of .50 meter and breadth of .20 meter. The other megalithic site is discovered on the left bank of river Daflo kho. The site is locally called as Lungzukthung/Manjangthung. The megaliths are located at right side of Shergaon-Rupa road and hardly at a distance 2 km from Shergaon. Like the Menhirs at Rupa these are made of schistose rock. The megalith measures as follows: 1) Large upright stone- Height .1.70 mtrs. Breadth.0.52 mtrs. Thickness 0.18 mtr, 2)H.1.35 mtr.B 0.50 mtr.Th 0.23 mtr, 3)H 0.95 mtr. B 0.49 mtr. Th 0.18mtr, 4)H 0.50 mtr. B 0.25 mtr Th 0.18 mtr, 5)H 0.63 mtr B 0.36 mtr Th 0.17 mtr, 6)H 0.73 mtr B 0.32 mtr Th 0.15 mtr, 7)H 0.37 mtr b0.16 mtr Th 0.11 mtr

These menhirs are called *shree* in Sherdukpen dialect. The people believed that they had no such practices to commemorate any important event to erect such upright

stone or it has no relation with the ancient burial system of the Sherdukpen. However, interestingly, the people pay regard to the upright stone during the time of *Khiksaba* festival in month of November and December every year which happens to be non-Buddhist festival. They also perform certain rites at the site of *shree* (menhirs) to appease the deities of *shree*. Here it may be mentioned that in different parts of north east India particularly in Khasi, Jaintia, Naga hills, Kachar hills, Manipur and, even in Mizo hills megalithic culture was in practice in the memory of the deceased upto recent times. So far about the builders and date of the Rupa and Shergaon megaliths we are in dark. It may happen that before the conversion of Buddhism the Sherdukpens had the megalithic practices as their neighboring communities like Bodo-Kacharis of Assam. Otherwise it may happen that few Bodo-Kacharis were settled in the area before the migration of Sherdukpens to Rupa and Shergaon. In fact in the Bodo-Kacharis area megalithic structures are found in plenty. However, we do not know the exact date of Neolithic remains as well as megalithic remains due to paucity of scientific dating.

A few Sanskrit literature and literature of Assam do mention about the land and people of Assam and its neighbouring hills. The early *Brahmanical* literature and early literature of Assam such as the *Kalikapuran* and the *Yoginitantra* refer to the *Kiratas* who are identified as hill tribes of southern and eastern Himalayas.<sup>18</sup> The early Greek and Chinese traveller to India has also given account of people of frontier Himalayan regions, but without mentioning about any communities of state including the Sherdukpens.<sup>19</sup> However, the *Buranjis* of medieval Assam do refer to the Sherdukpen as Charduar Bhutias<sup>20</sup> and we get number of accounts of the Sherdukpens in the British literature of nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>21</sup> The British literature are scattered and the archival documents highly refers to their traditional, social, economic, cultural, religious and political institution. However, the British documents throw some light on relations of Sherdukpens with the British and provide some valuable information about the trade activities of the Sherdukpens in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The Sherdukpen tribe is a minor Buddhist tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. The social, economic and cultural institutions of the people are of considerable significance for the

study of Mahayana Buddhism in the area. Their adaptation of Tibetan form of Buddhism and continuation of indigenous Bon religion side by side is not less interesting. They have a number of Buddhist monasteries, *stupas*, minor Buddhist religious structures, colourful dances, festivals with rituals, which reveal their cultural heritage. The people used to participate in the border trade with Bhutan and Tibet in the British period. They have their own traditional, political and judicial institution which governs their day to day life. The traditional socio-cultural, economic and political and judicial institution of Sherdukepn provides us interesting information about their cultural assimilation in some aspects with the neighbouring communities. The Sherdukpens present a little known Buddhist culture of Arunachal Pradesh of which a little is known to us. In the fitness of things the research work has been undertaken to understand various facets of Sherdukpen history and culture from early times to 1947.

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY ARE:**

1. To understand Socio-cultural organization of the Sherdukpens.
2. To investigate the traditional economic base of the people.
3. To document indigenous political and legal institution.
4. To understand the religion of the Sherdukpen with reference to Bon cult and Mahayana Buddhism.
5. To discuss various Buddhist religious practices of the people.
6. To throw light on Sherddukpen's relation with Assam (Ahom Kingdom) and the British.

#### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The study of Buddhist tribes and Tibetan Buddhism had its origin in late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sir A. Cunningham as early as 1854 wrote about the Buddhist tribes of Ladakh in his book *Ladakh: Physical, Statical and Historical*. Sarat Chandra Das' *Naratives of Travels in Tibet* (Calcutta 1885), E. Schlagintweit's *Buddhism in Tibet* (London,

1868), refers to some Buddhist tribes of the Tibet and their heritage. L.A. Waddell in his works *Lamaism in Sikkim* (Calcutta, 1893) and *The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism* (1899) refer to Buddhist tribes of Sikkim and Tibet and their cultural heritage. Waddell's work was the first comprehensive work on the subject. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a number of scholars have worked on Tibetan Buddhist cultural heritage. In this aspect Edwin Atkinson's *Religion in the Himalaya* (Reprinted Delhi,1974), Dalai Lama's *My Land and My People* (London,1962), A.K. Gordon's *The Iconography of Tibetan Lamaism*(Delhi,1978), Marco Pallis's *Peaks and Lamas* (London,1939), H.E. Richardson's *Tibet and its History* (London,1962), D.L. Snellgrove's, *Buddhist Himalaya* (Oxford,1957) and *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhist and their Tibetan successor*(Boston,1987), W. Zwalf's *Heritage of Tibet*(London,1981), Charles Bell's *The People of Tibet* (Reprinted, New Delhi,1991), *The Religion of Tibet* (Reprinted New Delhi.1992), D. McDonald's *Cultural Heritage of Tibet* ( New Delhi,1978), P. Pal's *Tibetan Painting-A study of Tibetan Thankas Eleventh to Nineteenth Centuries* (New Delhi,1998), G. Tucci's *Tibet-Land of Snows* (New Delhi,1967) etc. are some of the works which refer to Tibetan Buddhist tribe and their heritage.

Coming to Arunachal Pradesh, a few works mention about some aspect of Buddhist tribes of the state. V. Elwin's works such as *Myths of the North East Frontier of India* (1958), *The Art of the North-East Frontier of India* (1957), *A Philosophy for NEFA* (1954) and *Democracy in NEFA* (1964), A. Mackenzie's *History of the Relations of the Government with the tribe of the North-East Frontier of Bengal* (Cal.,1884), R. Reid's *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam from 1883-1941*(1942), C.V.F. Haimendorf's *Highlanders of Arunachal Pradesh* (New Delhi, 1978) H. K. Barpujari's *Problems of the Hill Tribes, North East Frontier, Vol. I, II & III* , (1980) throw some light on the history and culture of the Sherdukpens. Lakshmi Devi in her book "*Ahom-Tribal Relations*" (*A Political Study*) (1968) refers to the Sherdukpens relation with the Ahoms. The Research department of Arunachal Pradesh has published one small but informative monograph entitled "*The Sherdukpens*" way back in 1960. This work is purely ethnographic in nature. It has also not taken into consideration



various aspects of society, economy, polity, culture and cultural heritage of the Sherdukpens. Recently an edited book on "***Buddhism in North East India***" (2006) has been published by S. Dutta and B.Triparthy. However, in this work, materials on Sherdukpens are very scanty. Hence the proposed research work, it is hoped, would fulfill the gap in studying the society, economy, polity and culture of the Sherdukpens, a little known tribe of Arunachal Pradesh

## **SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY**

For the study both primary as well as secondary sources was taken into consideration with utmost specification. For collecting primary materials of the British period, the State Archives of Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar, State Archives of Assam at Guwahati, Archives of West Bengal at Kolkotta and National Archives at New Delhi was consulted. Libraries like National Library, Kolkotta, National Library, New Delhi, Library of Higher Institute of Tibetan Studies at Sarnath, National Museum Library, New Delhi, Library of NEHU, Shillong, Rajiv Gandhi University, Doimukh, State Research Library, Itanagar, State Central Library and West Kameng District Library was consulted to collect materials on various Buddhist tribes in India and Tibetan Buddhist heritage in general and on Sherdukpens in particular. The secondary sources such as published books, monographs, research articles and general articles of academic interest etc. were scrutinized.

The study is in the nature of historical descriptive analysis to ascertain the facts through interviews, questionnaires, extensive field works, and review of existing literature, both published and unpublished. Field survey was undertaken in the West Kameng District (in the village Rupa, Shergaon and Jigaon, and other villages) to collect relevant materials on society, economy, polity, dances, festivals and traditional arts and crafts through the unstructured questionnaire. Interviews were conducted with the Buddhist Lamas, intellectuals, village headmen, local traditional priest (*jiji*) and artists, engaged in traditional arts and crafts. Participatory and non-participatory observations method was resorted while collecting materials on dances, festivals, rites and rituals

and marriage ceremony etc. The socio-cultural heritage of the Sherdukpens has been documented with the help of a few colour photographs.

## **CHAPTERISATION**

For the convenience of the study, the research work is discussed in eight chapters.

### **I. Introduction**

The chapter introduces the subject, significance of the subject, objectives, statement of the problem, review of literature, source and research methodology adopted. It also throws light briefly on history, ecology and settlement pattern of the people.

### **II. Socio-Cultural Organisations**

The socio-cultural institution of the people is discussed with references to their settlement pattern, house pattern, family structure, study of clan, social division, forms of marriage, dress and ornaments, foods and drinks, recreational and leisure activities, etc.

### **III. Economic Base**

The Chapter throws light on the economic organization of the Sherdukpens with reference to their agriculture, trade, commerce and traditional arts and crafts.

### **IV. Political and Legal Institutions**

This chapter discusses their traditional village council, their organisations, functions, customary laws, etc

### **V. Religion**

The chapter takes into account religion of the Sherdukpen with reference to *Bon* cult as well as Mahayana Buddhism in historical perspectives.

### **VI. Buddhist Religious Practices**

The chapter deals with various Buddhist religious practices of the Sherdukpen with reference to devotion, monasticism, meditation, festivals, rituals, etc.

VII. **Relations of the Sherdukpens**

The Chapter discusses the relations of the Sherdukpen with Assam (Ahom kingdom), the British and at the same time refers to Sherdukpens relation with neighbouring communities.

VIII. **Conclusion**

The chapter summarises the above chapters with a conclusion.

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# SOCIO-CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS

## INTRODUCTION

The study of socio-cultural organization is an important component of ethnographical analysis. Besides anthropologists, social scientists and ethno historians of culture, there are sociologists, philosophers, and intellectual historians who have turned to social organization as a 'window' on the cultural dynamics by which people make and remake their worlds. The result has been a relatively broad and interdisciplinary conversation known as socio-cultural studies. Now, however, socio-cultural study has become a subject of interest in its own right, not merely a tool for understanding more embracing social phenomena. It will be more appropriate to present the conceptual analysis of the terms 'social organisation' in general prior to that of the Sherdukpen community. A broad conceptual analysis will be useful in understanding the socio-cultural organization and its various forms particularly with the reference to the Sherdukpen tribe. In fact, the social organizations deals with traditional institutions, which ascertain the status and role of different components of the society and thus channelise, their interpersonal relations. Among the writers about social organization thought so far mentioned, the pragmatist approach is perhaps most clearly enunciated by Eggan Fred about relation and stated thus:

“Relationship may be characterised both in terms of the individual or groups represented and by the type of relation involved. These social relations between individuals and groups form a network which we can call the social structure, the organization or configurationally aspects of society.”<sup>1</sup>

So far the social organization is concerned, we mean the operational system of the diverse elements into common constituent of any structure. R. Firth in the Element

of Social Organisation writes that, "Social organization implies some degree of unification, a putting together of diverse elements into common relation." <sup>2</sup> Social organization is, of course, a dynamic phase of social structure yet refers to a relatively stable form of social relationship of individuals and sub-groups with a society or group which is based on pattern of social rules, norms and shared meaning that provided regularity and certainty in social interaction. Elliot and Merrill said much the same, "Social organization is state of being, a condition in which the various institutions in a society are functioning in accordance with their recognized or implied purposes."<sup>3</sup> We also find some degree of close interlink between social and cultural development in several in inter-tribal societies in North East India. D.N. Majumdar informs us that; "Tribal social organization is different in so far as there is not much inter-tribal contact and communication in India except where geographical continuity has forced in upon some tribes."<sup>4</sup> In the context of the constituent units of the social organisation among the tribal societies, Majumdar further stated that:

"Social organization would consist of the interrelations between particular types of groups, viz., groups which make social life possible. The family, school, (if any), dormitory, clan and men's club are examples of such groups. Groups of people engaged in economic pursuits comprise type economic organization of a tribe, and groups like panchayats constitute its political organization. The interrelation between the three would present the total pattern of tribal organization."<sup>5</sup>

In the sense, all socio-cultural organization involves in the systematic ordering of social relations by acts of choice and desicio.<sup>6</sup> In this regard, R. Piddington has suggested ten elements namely, sex-dichotomy, age difference, kinship, locality, social status, political power, occupation, religion, totem, magic and voluntary agencies,<sup>7</sup> as the basic postulations of the tribal social organisation consists of the various units, which area ascertained by the form of the inter functional relations existing between

these components. It is observed that the nature, position and function of the constituent, as mentioned by the social anthropologist in their writings particularly with regard to different communities have been taken into consideration as to advance a cogent account of the Sherdukpen social organization, the Sherdukpen village and house, the family, the position of women, the marriage, the food and drink, the dress and ornaments, the festivals and sacrifices will be discussed in this chapter.

Social beings, men, express their nature by creating and recreating an organizing which guides and controls their behaviour in various ways. This organization, society, liberates and limits the activities of men, sets up standards for them to follow and maintain; society is a system of usages and procedures, of authority and mutual aid, of many grouping and divisions of controls of human behaviour and of liberties. This ever-changing complex system is called by us society.<sup>8</sup> Whichever the members of any group, live together in such a way they have, not this or that particular interest, but the basic condition of a common life, we call that group a community. The basic criterion of community, then, is that all of one's social relationships may be found within it. A community always occupies a territorial area.

The people of Arunachal Pradesh are most close to nature. Their living, economy, society, culture, music, arts, customs, traditions, religious etc. are all depending upon the nature. Their social systems are framed on the simple norms, to the extent the human sense can think in terms of their natural habit and habitat. The fact is that the tribal culture is established by the direct imitation of the nature. The custom and traditions are directly related to the natural habitats and environment. The norms related to these aspects are not very complex but are defined in terms of natural circumstance prevailing around. The social norms make them follow the realistic way of life. Their social customs and traditions are based on the consideration of realistic values. In dealing with such aspects, the norms will never go beyond which these can't be justified by the natural requirement of material and circumstantial factors. Some of



the important factors, which have determined the structural pattern of the village, the formation of regional and other bigger units and inter relations of the village with those units, are follows:

- (i) natural conditions like relief, configuration soil, water resources and others;
- (ii) the stage of agrarian economy,
- (iii) the nature of social conditions such as needs of defense, forms of property and other.

This distinction is vital from the point of view of the study of the entire social life of the community. The members of a community who dwell in village have generally stronger social urges, exhibit a stronger feeling of social cohesion, and possess greater ability for co-operation than those who are dispersed and live on their farms. Each types of habitat furnishes a different frame work for social life.<sup>9</sup>

Social organization would consist of the inter-relations between particularly types of groups, viz. those groups which make social life possible<sup>10</sup>; the family, clan, etc. are example of such groups.

The tribal societies in the Sherdukpen are organized on the basis of clan or village, and the social relations are determined by kinship and locality. Despite social and cultural differences, there are some factors common to all the tribes. As a matter of rule, each of the tribes is endogamous, and is divided into a number of clans, which are exogamous, that is to say, marriage is legitimate within the tribe, but not within clan. In fact, clan is very important element in the organization of tribes' society, and a breach of clan rule is a serious offence. It is also plays a very important role in regulating marriage.

Marriage

clan or sub-clan is strictly prohibited, and anybody violating this rule is never allowed to

go without punishment. Society is patrilineal, monogamy is the general rule but polygamy is recognized.

Before discussing the socio-cultural organisation of the Sherdukpen, in this chapter, an attempt has been made to study and trace their origin and migration as a prelude for better understanding of their society and

## **ORIGIN AND MIGRATION**

In all affairs of historical analysis, "it is the origin which deserves study before everything else...with curiosity scrutinize and make note of all beginnings" wrote Marc Bloch<sup>11</sup> in his celebrated work 'The Historian's Craft'. In this context the origin of the Sherdukpen tribe needs to be looked into. Like any other ethnic groups of the State, the origin of the Sherdukpen people is enshrouded with legends, myths and mythologies. The ethnological history of the Sherdukpen of the earliest record can be traced only in vogue outline due to paucity of written records and absence of archaeological evidence at our disposal.<sup>12</sup> As we browse upon earlier writings, none of these works gives the correct picture of the Sherdukpen and their history. Several theories have been put forward by scholars having different approach and ideas about the origin of the Sherdukpens. But there stills exist a difference of opinions with regards to origin of the tribes.<sup>13</sup>

The early history of Sherdukpen is shrouded in mystery due to paucity of literary as well as archaeological sources. It is partly due to Sherdukpens not having a script of their own though their neighbouring Buddhist tribe Monpa has a literature known as *Bodic* literature.<sup>14</sup> The early *Brahmanical* literature and early literature of Assam such as the *Kalikapuran* and the *Yoginitantra* refer to the *Kiratas* who are identified as hill tribes of southern and eastern Himalayas.<sup>15</sup> The early Greek and Chinese traveler to India has also given account of people of frontier Himalayan regions but without mentioning

about any communities of state including the Sherdukpens.<sup>16</sup> However, the *Buranjis* of medieval Assam do refer to the Sherdukpen as *Charduar Bhutias* and we get number of accounts on the Sherdukpens in the British literature of nineteenth and early twentieth century the British literature are scattered and rarely refer to origin and migration of the Sherdukpen. However, a few pre-historic stone tools, megalithic sites, etc. throw light on the early history of the Sherdukpens. But they do not throw light on their migration to their present settlement

Before analysing the myth and oral tradition, related to the origin and migration of the Sherdukpen it would be appropriate to understand these concepts. The term mythology can refer to either the study of myths, or to a body of myths.<sup>17</sup> In the study of [folklore](#), a myth is a sacred narrative explaining how the world and humankind came to be in their present form.<sup>18</sup> In a very broad sense, the word can refer to any traditional story. One theory claims that myths are distorted accounts of real historical events. According to this theory, storytellers repeatedly elaborated upon historical accounts until the figures in those accounts gained the status of gods.<sup>19</sup>

According to the myth-ritual theory, the existence of myth is tied to ritual.<sup>20</sup> In its most extreme form, this theory claims that myths arose to explain rituals. This claim was first put forwarded by the biblical scholar [William Robertson Smith](#). According to Smith, people begin performing rituals for some reason that is not related to myth; later, after they have forgotten the original reason for a ritual, they try to account for the ritual by inventing a myth and claiming that the ritual commemorates the events described in that myth.<sup>21</sup> The anthropologist James Frazer had a similar theory. Frazer believed that primitive man starts out with a belief in magical laws; later, when man begins to lose faith in magic, he invents myths about gods and claims that his formerly magical rituals are religious rituals intended to appease the gods.<sup>22</sup>

[Mircea Eliade](#) argued that one of the foremost functions of myth is to establish models for behavior and that myth may also provide a religious experience. By telling or reenacting myths, members of traditional societies detach themselves from the present and return to the mythical age, thereby bringing themselves closer to the divine.<sup>23</sup>

Tradition is handing down of statements, beliefs, legends, customs, etc. from generation to generation by words of mouth or practice. Oral traditions are historical sources of special nature. Their special nature derives from the fact that they are unwritten source couched in a form suitable for oral transmission, and that their preservation depends on the powers of memory of successive generation of human beings. Though validity and reliability of the oral tradition as a historical source have been question but “the oral tradition is not necessarily untrustworthy as a historical source, merits a certain amount of credence within certain limits.”<sup>24</sup>

Because of lack of written records of the Sherdukpens, myth and oral traditions are the main sources for understanding their origin and migration. Sherdukpen traditions about the origin and migration consist of myths and legends. According to their traditions the direction of their original migration is indicated from the north.<sup>25</sup> It is also said that they came from the north-west in view of the cultural affliction they probably had with the people of Bhutan.<sup>26</sup>

By appearance they belong to Tibeto-Mongoloid stock. In detailed diagnostic features they seem to be in between the Akas and Monpas. Infact they occupy the central position geographically as well as between these two tribes. Therefore, their admixture with two races of the said tribes can't be ruled out. Their faces are broad, cheek bones prominent and lips thick in both sexes. The ladies have long faces than round with prominent flattened cheeks. The skin complexion is fair with a slight redness in the cheeks especially, among the ladies. Both the sexes are well built and medium stature. In behavior they are very calm, courteous and gentle.<sup>27</sup>

The Sherdukpens folk-tales and tradition narrates<sup>28</sup> that, they originated from the union of a local Tibetan prince and Assamese princess, possibly of Kachari origin and had three sons by her. The first one remained at Lhasa, the second was given the kingdom of Bhutan and the third one was given the area now occupied by the Sherdukpens. The present day Sherdukpens are the descendents of the third son named Japtang Bura, who became the king of the area, of his followers. The

Sherdukpens say that, the Tibetan King sent his third son Japtang Bura, to this area with an intention of checking the deputation of the warlike Akas and Mijis, who were at constant war. He toured the entire area including the Buragaon and Tamiri and decided to keep the hill tribes in good humour, and promised to give them as a token of present, six cows every third year, salt, cloth to Aka king, Nimmo Chhenjee, provided he maintained law and order in his area. This was continued by his descendents till the time British Government stopped it. He also held out similar promises to the Miji King and the Monpa chiefs so as to ensure peace and harmony in the area. Even today the descendents of the third son of the Tibetan king are called '*Raja*' by the neighbouring tribes. The Dirang people called them '*Bapu*' and the Akas and Mijis called them '*Thongli-Thongcheng*' thereby, meaning a *Raja* or King.

Japtang Bura came to be held in high esteem by the neighbouring tribes and was regarded as apostle of peace. He afterwards shifted his capital from But to Rupa and while there, he once went out for hunting, in the course of which he chased a wild pig and overtook near Doimara. There he met Kacharis, from whom he came to know about his maternal grandfather, the Ahom king who was then ruling from Sibsagar. Japtang Bura went there to meet the king who was so happy to see him, that he ceded him all the land between the Dhansiri and the Gatsu (Belsiri) rivers and its revenue. The Sherdukpen tradition of going to Doimara every winter is said to have started from this date.

After his return from Doimara, Japtang Bura visited Kalaktang area, where he soon became popular and his influence began to be felt. There he met Lama Khambu Takha who had killed a man-eating snake and served the people of the area from its degradations. He invited the Lama to visit the Sherdukpen territory once every three years in order to conduct worship and receive gifts from the king.

When king Japtang Bura came to *Thongthui* (Rupa), he was accompanied by a large numbers of porters and servants who formed his retinue. The descendents of the

king himself are now called *Thongs*, while the descendents of the porters are called *Chaos*.<sup>29</sup> The villages of But, Rahung, Khudum and Khoina, according to the Sherdukpens, are inhabited entirely by the *Chaos*. Whether this is correct or not, the inhabitants of these villages do have marked affinities with the Sherdukpens in their ways of life, physical features, tradition and origin and marriage customs.

The story alludes to a fact that the Sherdukpens came to their parent area of settlement after the arrival of the Akas and Mijis in this region. As stated in the preceding quoted passages, the Sherdukpens are indeed in the habit of migrating down to the plains every winter, where they used to camp at Doimara.

There is another version of the tale. In this version the name of the Tibetan king is Ge-Porading Dorjee and his son who ruled Sherdukpen was known as Gyaptang Bura. Some scholars have accepted the tradition to explain the origin and early migration of the Sherdukpens to their present area of habitation in the absence of other evidences. However, this is not a tradition of Sherdukpen people. In fact it is a Buddhist tradition developed to explain the origin of the tribe with the purpose of attracting them to the Buddhist faith. It is possible that the story was developed and circulated by some Monpa or even Sherdukpen monks to impress upon the people and their king had Buddhist connection by relating them to the king of Lhasa. This was meant to secure the help in the spread of Buddhism among the Sherdukpens. After majority of people of the tribe had accepted Buddhism they also gradually came to believe in this tradition and retain it perhaps as a popular record of their connection with the royal families of Tibet and Assam.<sup>30</sup>

The other version of the tradition<sup>31</sup> indicates that one Japtung Bura visited the Kalaktang area of the southern Monpa. Here he came across a Buddhist monk, Khambu Takha who had earlier killed a man eating snake and saved the people there.

He invited this monk to this area every three years to conduct worship and received gift from the king. This part of the tradition suggests that Buddhism was introduced in Sherdukpen territory from Kalaktang during Gyaptang Buras reign.

Strangely enough the king of Tibet and his son Gyaptang Bura or Japtang Bura are mentioned as Buddhist. We know that Buddhism was introduced in Tibet in 7<sup>th</sup> century therefore, had Japtang Bura come to Sherdukpen area from Tibet any time after that date he must have brought Tibetan monks with him. Thus it is possible that the story of the king of Lhasa perhaps refer to a period earlier than the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet. That is why both father and son are not mentioned as Buddhist. This also goes to prove that the story is purely imaginative and has no historical basis that Buddhism came to Sherdukpen area from Kalaktang may be true but the origin of Gyaptang Bura from the Tibeto-Assamese royal family is purely imaginative.

It seems that Sherdukpens after migrating from Tibet went to Bhutan and after crossing the hills of Bhutan they came to BUT and Khoina area. Later on the Sherdukpen king settled at Rupa. Thus, as per tradition they have migrated to their present home from the north-west. It is very likely that they had close ethnic, linguistic and possibly cultural relation with the Bhutan in the past. Like the people of Bhutan the Sherdukpens are followers of *Nyingmapa* Buddhist tradition. According to captain Kennedy, the Sherdukpens a language similar to that of Bhutan. Kennedy<sup>32</sup> writes, "This extraordinary diversity of language in a country where the people live in harmony amongst themselves is an interesting philological puzzle. I believe that eastern Bhutan is a polygot country and it may be that each of the above mentioned language (Sherdukpen) is sprung from a prototype in Bhutan." Verrier Elwin also while writing about on Monpas and Sherdukpens believes that these two tribes had ancient connection with Bhutan and Tibet which is reflected in their religion, cloth, rituals, traditional arts and crafts, festival, etc.<sup>33</sup> In this connection C.F. Haimendorf states that, "Tribal History traces the origin of Sherdukpen to a Tibetan prince Gyaptang by name, who is believed to have emigrated from Beyalung, the birth of his birth, and to have established first at But, today's Monpa village, where the ruins of a fort are still to be

seen. Local history has that Gyaptang imposed his rule over a large area, including some territory in Assam, and received from the inhabitants a tax paid in the form of grains.”<sup>34</sup>

There can be no doubt that the Sherdukpens have old connections with Assam, for at Sapi Jergaon, near the border between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, there is still an area of 130 acre which remains under the control of Rupa; the Government of Assam levying no land –revenue on the area in question. Sherdukpen go there once a year and stay with local people.<sup>35</sup> Two new Sherdukpen settlements have sprung up in the same area. The Assamese used to refer the Sherdukpens as the *Sat raja*, i.e. the seven rajas. The five of these were from Rupa and two from Shergaon, each representing one of the major clan.

The *Senji* had originally lived together with the *Thongjis* at *Thongthui* (Rupa), but subsequently, about ten generations ago, they migrated to *Senthui* and settled there permanently and continued to keep close relationships with the *Thongjis*, which are still as strong and as cordial as ever. The cause of the migration is used to be a serious outbreak of cholera causing many deaths at *Thongthui*, but it is more likely that it was forced by shortage of good land at *Thongthui*.<sup>36</sup>

## NOMENCLATURE

The origin of the name “Sherdukpen” also known as “*Ngok*” itself is obscure.<sup>37</sup> It is not known how and when they came to be called by it. In the earlier record, the Sherdukpens have been mentioned as *Rooprai Gaon Bhutias* and *Shergaon Bhutias*,<sup>38</sup> and Mombas of Rupa and Shergaon.<sup>39</sup> The Sherdukpen also call themselves “*Mei*”.<sup>40</sup> But the rest of the world know them by the term-the Sherdukpens which instances after the names of two original villages: Shergaon and Tukpen (the original name of Rupa). The Sherdukpen is a Bhutanese word which means ‘people living in the East’.<sup>41</sup> They are also called *Sangi Tongi* i.e. ‘people of Rupa and Shergaon’



The Sherdukpens also have three synonyms-*Sanjee* or *Sainjee*, *Thungjee* and *Jigaonpee*. *Sainjee* means the people of *Sain* area (Shergaon area). *Thungjee* means people of *Thung* area (people of Thungrao villages) and *Jigaonpee* means the people of Jigaon area.<sup>42</sup> The Kacharis use to call them as *Rupagya* (people of Rupa) and *Shergya* (people of Sergaon).<sup>43</sup> Further, the principle village of Serdukpens also called *Sengjithongjis* are *Senthui* and *Thongthui* commonly known as Shergaon and Rupa respectively.<sup>44</sup>

## VILLAGE SETTLEMENT

The dwelling in which the hill-people of Arunachal Pradesh choose to live vary according to the nature of the environment and the available building material no less than according to the less units individual houses are meant to accumulate the range of houses- styles extends from the flimsy bamboo huts of Sulungs to the enormous houses of Wanchu Chiefs, the wooden framework of which is meant to last for generations even if the palm-thatched roofs has to be periodically replaced.

The harsh climate of the high Himalayan valleys necessitates building in stone, but the areas where houses are thus constructed are small, and wood and bamboo are the normal building materials among the great majority of tribal populations.

Unlike other tribes especially that of Nishi, where the house have unpartitioned walls, the individual inmates has next to no privacy. Reasonable measures of privacy are absence and no space where one can do any undisturbed reading or writing. In this respect Sherdukpens houses offer much better facilities for the educated, because long contact with literary world brought Arunachal Pradesh by Buddhist lamas has favoured an arrangement of space inside the house which allows some of inmates to read books, usually a religious nature, and to perform ritual without being disturbed by these engaged in their normal domestic duties.

The important villages of the Sherdukpens are situated in a flat valley along the banks of the *Duphla Kho* river. Hamlets, which are locally known as *pams*, are snuggled in the niches of towering hills or are picturesquely clustered on sunny slopes, not far away from water supply and cultivable land. They vary considerably in size. Rupa, the largest villages in the area, consisted about 60 house in early 1980s, while Brukpublong, which is perhaps the smallest, has barely four house. Each village has well-defined territory for hunting and cultivation.<sup>45</sup>

The habitations, made up of stone and wooden planks in a traditional pattern, illustrate the effect of environment on the life of the people. They are scattered at random without proper streets, though there may be passages between them. The houses do not always face the same direction, for they are constructed more in conformity with the physiographic of the ground than on a conscious plan or pattern. Sometimes, a village is split up into several parts with different names. Winding passages run between houses but no regular roads exist to suggest a definite pattern. Public gatherings are held usually in front of the house of the village headman who invariably occupies an elevated position in relation to others. Otherwise, any convenient open space between the houses is good enough for public meeting.

In important villages, there is a common place where the villagers meet and discuss their affairs.<sup>46</sup> In smaller ones, however, any convenient level ground between the houses is good enough for the purpose. Usually, such gatherings are held near or in front of the house of the village headman, the latter invariably sitting on a slightly higher place than the others. In the case of *pams*, water is usually obtained from small hill streams caught in a hole. Important villages are served by bigger streams. The Sherdukpens generally have small fenced kitchen gardens attached to their houses.

The location of the house is often selected by the Lama. This is presumably that the selection of site is done by studying the horoscope of a person and the safety and security of household members. Further, that the members may be rid of any evil spirits that might come along with the construction of house. After selecting the site the Lama performs a site and offers a prayer which is explained in detail in the chapter related to the religion of the Sherdukpens.

The materials used during the construction of house are mostly wooden plank, bamboo and stone (boulder which available in plentiful in the Sherdukpen area). Few use clay as a material to keep intact the stone which are pile dup forming wall or retention of a house. Mostly pine tree is used for construction of house. The bamboos are split and arranged in a pattern.<sup>47</sup>

The Rupa village, is a forward looking village. The Sherdukpens have been living in the village for the last many generations and are considered to be autochthons of the area. The Sherdukpens are individualist by nature and live at a distance from each other. This individualistic attitude has resulted in the formation of small village and also due to lack of sufficient flat ground or favourable hill slopes for constructing many houses. The village has some *jhum* land near about. But in most cases cultivable land exists at a distance of few miles. This is found only in small patches at each place.

The Sherdukpen settlement consists of few houses but each house is capable of holding all the members of a family as Sherdukpens did not have large members of family, beside slaves. The village springs up according to availability of space and kinship. Houses do not face each other, which are neither in a row nor in line. A village has its own territorial boundary often demarcated by a stream or a hill by any other natural barrier.

The main concentration of the Sherdukpen is spread over three important villages of Rupa , Jigaon and Shergaon occupying the south-western part of the Kameng district. The strip of land, inhabited by the Sherdukpens, is long and narrow valley at the foot of the Bomdi La Range, traversed by many streams all of which are not perennial. Some of them spring to life and start flowing with strong swift currents with the onset of monsoon. The important river draining the area is *Daphla Kho* which flows into the basin of the Bhoreli, the largest of the rivers in Kameng. The altitude of the valley ranges between 1,424 and 1,981 meters above sea level.

In the Sherdukpen society, the selection of site of the village and construction of house is determined by the surrounding environment like nearby river, available forest land, cultivable land with fertile soil, safe and security, and protection during the war time. Once the selection of site is done for construction is done, *lama* is invited to offer some rituals on the site. The *lama* collects some soil from all four corners and centre of the land offers thanksgiving prayers and bless the land for good construction of house and, safe and security. A ritual *Sachi bompō* is performed in which all food items (*raw*) is placed in the centre of the land. Basically it is *Laksmi pooja* for wealth and health.

All villages except Shergaon are under the control and jurisdiction of Rupa village council. During pre-independence a village consisted of 6-7 households which now have increased to 60-80 household. The Sherdukpen has villages also in Assam at Doimara and Jergaon where they used to migrate during winter days.<sup>48</sup>

**Table No. 2.** Sherdukpen villages during British and at present.

<b>British period</b>	<b>At Present</b>
Thijong	Rupa
Yuser	Shergaon
Thikkhong	Jigaon
Prowding	Chilipam
Rupa	Garbaw
Shergaon	Brokpublang
Jigaon	Thungri
	Jablang
	Dikshi
	Jumyam
	Mukhuthing

	Membachur
	Musaksing
	Khellong
	Limbaktang

*Source: Field Study*

## THE HOUSE

The Sherdukpen houses<sup>49</sup> (*pamkingyam*) are generally erected on a substantial stone foundation, five to seven feet high; the basement is used for sheltering goats and other animals. The lower half of the wall is constructed with timber and the upper half with bamboo matting. The roofs are built with light planks, bamboo matting and occasionally grass-thatch, weighed down by heavy stones. The floors are of thick wooden planks.

The houses are generally double-storied. The lower apartment is used by the household, while the upper one serves as a store-room and granary. They do not have separate granaries. The living apartment of a typical house has two rooms with a portico in front. The room next to the portico is used a kitchen, dining room and bed-room. The other room is used for storing important house-hold belongings, and is at times utilized as bedroom or for the performance of religious rites. The basement serves as a veritable stable for goats and other domestic animals.

Entrance to the house is usually by a rough wooden ladder. The living room has usually two iron hearths, one near the entrance and another at the other end. A stone platform behind the hearth is used for keeping the cooking utensils. A bamboo structure called *bakhi* (four by two feet) hangs usually four or five feet above the hearth and the warmth of fire from the hearth dries and preserves the food grains and meat kept on it. Sometimes, a long table is kept on one side of the room for keeping various odds and

ends. The family members sleep by the side of hearth, on bamboo mats which are spread on the wooden floor.

A number of big rectangular bamboo containers for storing a variety of grains, millets and pulses are kept in the portico which is reached by a staircase. There are no windows or chimneys in the Sherdukpen houses. The interior is often dark, smokey and ill-ventilated. This could have because of the weather.<sup>50</sup> The walls of some houses are fitted with racks over which household articles are kept. Sometimes, such articles are suspended from pegs inserted into the wall.

There is no separate cabin reserved for the expectant mother, where she could lie in private and deliver her child. The doors of the houses are made of bamboo and can be bolted, but locks are rarely used. Poles decorated with prayer flags of paper or cloth are found on tops of the houses.

In winter, chillies are spread on the roof to dry. In the courtyard, women pound grain with pestle and mortar to the accompaniment of pleasant songs. The process involves a good deal of hard toil; a stout pole is driven with considerable vigour into a hollowed-out log which contains the grain.

As among other tribes, the construction of a house is a solemn occasion in the life of a Sherdukpen, and involves consultations and ceremonies for the selection of the site, for bringing wood from the forests and laying the foundation. There are ceremonies at the completion of the first roof and again after the entire house has been built. The Lama is frequently consulted during the various stages of construction. Friends and neighbours help in the work and are compensated in kind. There is a house-warming feasts before the building is occupied, when maize-beer and even the potent spirit, distilled from maize or rice, is liberally served. Other structure or shelter which formed the part of the house are *Jho* (granaries) at first floor of the house which is used for storing food grains and where a *neteng* (ladder) is used to climb up. The floor is used by bamboo. A portico in the upper floor is used for hatching the chicken, *spu yam* (cow shed). Earlier there was no shed for cow or horse. The animals were left in agricultural

field but now a days a separate is built near the house and *Jhen yam* (shed for goat) built near the house.<sup>51</sup>

### **Household articles**

Carpentry has certain vogue among the Sherdukpens who possess some skill in smithy also. Though the Sherdukpen were not an excellent artist in making utensil for household articles for daily use but they are quite creative in making articles for own personnel use and household items. The easily available timber in their locality also gave them to an opportunity to make their own wooden utensils.

The Different articles used as household articles are<sup>52</sup>;

- (i) Food storage/eating- *hing skam* (wooden plate), *ma kaptung* (bamboo mug), *khlom chok* (jug) *bidir* (brass bucket)
- (ii) Cloth storage- *thing* (box/almirah) it is made of cane like a big size box. Height- 2.5', breadth 1 foot length 2 foot
- (iii) Drinks/local brew-*kolsi* (earthen pot)-*thikling- phok* (wine)
- (iv) The grind grains of maize and rice were stored and kept in box or container made of wood/timber called *ha gam*.
- (v) Weapons/ hunting, fishing- *nik* (arrow), *li* (bow), *jhee* (arrow sheath), *handu* (*dao*), *jong* (spear), *chuk* (fishing net), *nyujuk khan phu* (fishing spear), *hop* (fish trap basket made of bamboo)

### **FAMILY**

Family is a common used word and universally understood well in its general sense. Family refers to a general, permanent and pervasive institution characterized by socially accepted sexual access and reproduction, common residence, domestic

services and economic cooperation. It fulfills needs and performs functions, which are essential for the continuity, integration and change in the social structure of human society. The forms and functions of family have undergone an adaptive change with changes in technologies and economic super structure of society.<sup>53</sup> W.H.R. Rivers defines the term 'family' in these words, "The family as the basis of society, we mean by family a small social group consisting of parents and children".<sup>54</sup> Historically it is consistent to affirm that the family in one form or the other has subsisted at every level of the cultural evolution. Nevertheless, with the passage of time the family has gone through numerous changes particularly in its structural and organisational frame of credentials. But the basic factions of the family, which are centered on the principle of bio-psycho-social needs of man, have not been changed so far. As a matter of fact, family in its earliest origin was reproductive association comprising male and female; and successively transformed into a basic social unit of greatest significance for mankind. According to R .H. Lowie's view, the family is the association that corresponds to the institution of marriage, the socially approved form of sex relation."<sup>55</sup> While McIver and Page also commented that the family, "...of all the organizations large or small, which the society unfolds, none transcend the family in the intensity of its sociological significance."<sup>56</sup>

It is evident from pages of history that the social scientists and anthropologist differ in view point from one another about the historicity of origin of the family. As a result, they put forward various theories based on different premises, speculation and doctrines. One of the earliest modern anthropologists, Lewis Morgan attempted to formulate a complete scheme of the evolution of the human family. According to his scheme the human family has five different and gradual forms of family namely, the *Consanguine*, the *Punaluan*, the *Syndyasmian*, the *Patriarchal* and the *Monogomian* family.<sup>57</sup> In most cases, all the successive forms of the family have been connected with a corresponding and remarkable type of marriage emerged out of the evolutionary process. Rivers, further suggested that the term, 'family' indicate four different kind of group, (i) the small group of parents and children, (ii) the bilateral group, consisting of persons related through both father and mother,(iii) eth ultimate group of a unilateral kind, consisting of person related through the mother only.<sup>58</sup> It is necessary to



distinguish these four forms of groupings. Morgan also further dated the origin of the family only after men's role in 'begetting', rather than to his sister's mother's children had been recognized and accepted. Whatever may be the origin of the family it is proven fact that there is ample evidence to determine the existence of the family at all stages of the cultural evolution. In this context Maclver and Page have stated, "The family has no origin in the sense that there ever existed a stage of human life from which the family was absent or another stage in which it emerged."<sup>59</sup> That is why family is still what it was and at most powerful means of socialization and as agency of informal social control. It also makes the cultural transmission possible from one generation to another.

In most communities in India descent is traced in the father's line. All the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh are patriarchal and father is normally the heads of the family. The tribes are also patrilineal whereby descent is reckoned through the father being the head of the family. The smallest unit of the society is the family and in some tribes the system of joint family also exists. The nucleus of a family normally consists of father, mother, their sons and unmarried daughters. The agnatic relationship determines the right of inheritance to property, which devolves through the male members of the family.

The family is by far the most important primary group on the Sherdukpen society. Sherdukpens are patriarchal and father is normally the head of the family. Kinship, social and economic ties hold together the members of the homestead. In ordinary activities such as fishing collection of food, clearing of the jungle and cultivation, they act as a single unit. Properties, such as land, live-stock, food stuff, house and forest trees are held jointly by the family. But personal belongings such as ornaments, cloths, cash and household occupational equipments may belong to the individual separately. The attitude towards the father, father's brothers and the grandfather is one of respect, and usually the father is considered to be an authoritative head, who has an effective say in all matters that concern the family. The mother's brother is treated with a degree of intimacy and affection. A greater share of inheritance devolves on the eldest son. Monogamy is the prevailing form of marriage among the Sherdukpens. Descent is patrilineal and marriages patrilocal.

Joint families are common, though tendency for such families to break up into separate units has already manifested itself. Polyandry and polygamy are unknown amongst the Sherdukpens. Although an indulgence in illicit relation is frowned upon laxity in sexual morality is by no means uncommon. Frequency of divorce is not high, and widow remarriage is permitted.

In the domestic affairs of the family, the father usually wields a dominating influence, and his will generally reigns supreme. It is he who mainly provides for their influence and his will generally reigns supreme. It is he who mainly provides for their comforts, and arranges the necessities of life. This is not, however, to suggest that the other grown-up members of the family do not contribute their share towards its maintenance.

## **INHERITENCE OF PROPERTY<sup>60</sup>**

The immoveable property of a family consists of the house, the cultivable lands and the area reserved for fishing, collection of honey and fire gathering. The moveable property includes livestock, household belongings, cloths, ordainments, domestic, utensils, agricultural implements and so on. The inheritance of property follows the principles such as

- (i) Property is not divided equally amongst the sons on the death of their father. The eldest son gets a major share and the rest is divided equally among the other sons
- (ii) Personal garments are generally placed in the grave along with the dead body. Any surplus garments that he may leave behind, are divided equally among the sons
- (iii) If a man dies without leaving any son, his land goes to his nearest male relatives.
- (iv) The bride price, obtained during marriage of a daughter, always goes to the father but when the father is dead and the brother performs the marriage of the sister, the bride-price is shared all by the brothers equally.

- (v) The person who gets the major share in the estate left by the deceased person has to accept the obligation of performing the death rites and to bear the expenses of the funeral feast.
- (vi) Adopting of a son is permitted. The adopted child is treated like real son and entitled to inherit property of his foster father but not that of the real father.
- (vii) Women do not have any right or claim over immovable property.

## **KINSHIP**

Kinship system among Sherdukpens, to a large extent, is of classificatory type;<sup>61</sup> that is, a single term of address is used to denote more than one relationship. The terms of classificatory relationship among the Sherdukpens are follows:

**Table No. 3.** Kinship Terminology<sup>62</sup>

<b>Term of Reference</b>	<b>English term</b>	<b>Term of Address</b>
<i>Abu</i>	Elder Brother Father's brother's son	<i>Abu</i>
<i>Anno</i>	Elder sister Mother's sister's daughter	<i>Anno</i>
<i>Azang</i>	Mother's brother Father's sister's husband	<i>Azang</i>
<i>Ara</i>	Son Mother's brother's son Father's sister's son	<i>Ara</i>
<i>Azu</i>	Daughter Father's sister's daughter Husband's sister Brother's wife Wife's sister	<i>Azu</i>
<i>Anni</i>	Wife's mother Husband's mother	<i>Anini</i>
<i>Asu</i>	Father's father Mother's mother Father's father's father	<i>Asu</i>
<i>Abbi</i>	Father's mother Mother's mother Mother's mother's mother	<i>Abbi</i>
<i>Chhduma</i>	Son's son Daughter's son	<i>Chhduma</i>
<i>Moro</i>	Mother's younger sister Father's elder brother's wife	<i>Moro</i>

*Source: Field Study*

Many of these above classificatory terms are used to address the members of the same clan and generation.

The following terms of relationship, however, do not belong to the classificatory category as they are restricted to indicate one particular relationship.

**Table No.4.** Terminologies of relationship<sup>63</sup>

English term	Term of Address
Father	<i>Acchi</i> ( <i>Thongs</i> ) <i>Abbo</i> ( <i>Chhaos</i> )
Father's younger brother	<i>Achhe</i> (Rupa) <i>Aku</i> (Shergaon)
Father's elder brother	<i>Chhlo</i>
Mother	<i>Ami</i> (Rupa) <i>Amo</i> (Shergaon)
Mother's younger sister	<i>Ateeing</i> (rupa) <i>Atung</i> (Shergaon)
Father's sister	<i>Khnee</i>
Husband	<i>Aaya</i>
Wife	<i>Aayu</i>
Younger sister	<i>Mirang</i>

*Source: Field study*

The Sherdukpens are patrilineal in descent, and count their relationship through the male line. Their kinship terminology may be called non classificatory as they use separate terms for the lineal relatives. *Thongs* and *Chhaos* use different terminology for father, *Adui* among the *Thongs* and *Abbo* among the *Chhaos*. This determines the tracing of patrilineal caste of clan.

It appears that no regular traditional system of bachelor's dormitory existed in the old days but a loose form of dormitory system did exist. It is traditionally believed to have originated in the years immediately following the Sherdukpen migration to the

Tenga valley. The youth of the dormitories provided a system of village guards, who were readily available for defending the settlement. Boys and girls of the same age group form into a separate clubs and start sleeping together in batches in some convenient houses. This social institution was known as *Tablang* like the *Dungchon* of the Monpas.<sup>64</sup> Separate establishment for dormitories are absent. Any small family, having surplus accommodation, might be inclined to allow a batch of boys and girls to make use of it as a common sleeping apartment. It has been conjectured that a loose form of boy's dormitory developed among the Sherdukpens during the troubled days when they had constantly to be defense against the *Damais* (Mijis) and *Hrusso* (Akas).

## LANGUAGE

The people speak in a dialect known as *Sangjee Ngook*.<sup>65</sup> The dialect of those living in Rupa village is known as *Thungji Ngnok*. Both the dialects are similar and belong to the greater Tibeto-Burma linguistic family. They are closely related to the dialects of but Monpa, Lish Monpa and Miji communities who are their neighbours. The Sherdukpen language is part of the Kanauri branch of Tibeto-Burman family.<sup>66</sup> The people use Hindi, Assamese and Tsangla languages to communicate with the other communities. The use of *devanagiri* script is catching up these days. The Sherdukpen called themselves as *Mei* and their language is called *mei-nyo*.<sup>67</sup> This language is guarded by the Bomdila Range in the east from Buguns (Khawas) and Hrusso (Akas) in the north, the Thongpu-La from Central Monpas.

The Sherdukpen are the Buddhist by religion. They maintain the Tibetan script,<sup>68</sup> but it is only for religious purposes. Their language is unwritten. The Sherdukpen has thirty six sound units. The sound units comprise five vowels, twenty five consonants and nasalization which modify them. Tone plays a significant role in Sherdukpen Language. The meaning of some words may change according to the tone which they utter.

The Sherdukpen has different words which can be divided into different kinds to indicate their syntactical functions and relations. In the analogy of the English grammar, the Sherdukpen words have been arranged under the following heads-Nouns, Pronoun,

Adjective, Verb Adverb and another class that is particles are added to other words to indicate modifications of meaning.<sup>69</sup>

## **CLAN AND SOCIAL DIVISION**

Clan is the principal social unit of tribal organization, in which descent is reckoned usually in the paternal line.<sup>70</sup> A clan, sometime called a *Sib*, is a set of kin whose members believe themselves to be descended from a common ancestor, but the links back to that ancestor are not specified. The tribal society of Arunachal Pradesh is mainly organized on the basis of tribe, clan or villages, and the social relations are determined on the basis of kinship or locality. Every tribes are divided into various clans and every clan are exogamous in character.

All tribes are territorially organized in cohesive societies based in kinship and clan relations. Division of society into patrilineal exogamous clans is common to all the tribes of this region except among the Monpa. Each of the tribes is broadly endogamous which implies that marriage is usually legitimate within the tribe. The endogamous tribes are each divided into a number of clan which are exogamous, to wit, marriage is forbidden within the clan. The rule of exogamy is rigidly followed and a breach of the rule is considered to be a major offence. The clan is the basic unit of the society.

Although the societies are in general egalitarian, some of them are divided into classes of different social status. Despite the social divisions into classes or status groups among some of the tribes, there is no caste system though semblance of caste features are noticeable in some societies.<sup>71</sup> Inter-marriage across the class-lines is not usually permitted, but there is no commensal taboo. Normally, all eat together; take part equally in tribal councils, religious ceremonial and festivals, Crafts are not hereditary though craft-exclusiveness is found in a few profession.

In some of the tribal society of Arunachal, one can notice social distinction which was however more horizontal than vertical. This class division can be noticed among the Monpas, Sherdukpens, Khamptis, Singphos, Noctes, Wanchos and the Tangsa which played an important role in the agriculture production. However, it is found that in these tribes, ethnic relation and also that class formation nascent it might be, was

primarily an endogamous process. The Tawang Monpas<sup>72</sup> are divided into three classes-*Ki* (highest class), *Muimo* and *Kharmu* (lowest class). The Monpas also generally maintain distance from *Lishpa* and *Chugpus* and regard them as social inferior to them. The Mijis has also a class division called *Nyubu* (socially superior) and the *Nyulu* (socially inferior).<sup>73</sup> the Tagins are also said to have arranged in a hierarchical order from the top to down as *Nibu* (priest), *Nite* (the rich), *Open* (poor) and *Nyra* (slaves).<sup>74</sup> The Khamptis and Singphos society also had the chieftainship system and the chiefs were considered superior, other than the common people, and the slaves, etc.<sup>75</sup> The Noctes, Wangchos and Tangsas also followed the tradition of chieftainship. The Noctes are divided into *Lowang Jat* (chief and kingship) and *Sana Jat* (commoners)<sup>76</sup> The Wanchos and Tangsa also said to have some sort of social division in their society.<sup>77</sup>

The Sherdukpen society is divided into two well defined classes, *Thong* and *Chhao*, each of which is further sub-divided into number of socially equal exogamous clans.<sup>78</sup> There is hardly any mobility between the classes and they do not intermarry. Recently the class-rule has been somewhat relaxed and few marriages across the class-barrier have taken place, but such marriages are still viewed with certain disapproval.

According to the tradition, the descendant of Japtang Bura now forms into a class by themselves, known as *Thongs* while the descendants of his retinue are called *Chhaos* enjoying slightly inferior social status. It is claimed that the villages of But, Rahung, Khudum and Khoina were inhabited entirely by *Chhaos*. Whether there is any truth in the story or not, the villagers of But, Rahung Khudum and Khoina are said to have marked affinity with the Sherdukpens in many ways such as physical features, marriage customs and so on.<sup>79</sup>

The *Thongs* enjoy a high social status and wield a dominating influence upon the lower strata of society, the *Chhaos*.<sup>80</sup> Relations between these classes are, however, cordial and intimate; for there is no discriminating in dealings in daily life. Though the *Chhaos* are subservient to the *Thong*, there are no restrictions on inter-dining or inter-drinking amongst them. There does not seem to be any difference in the forms of their



dress or in their ways of life and physical features; nor is there any demarcation of areas for the classes within the village. There are, of course, the rich and the poor in each of the two classes; the standard of living of the *Chhaos* is, in general, lower than that of the *Thongs*.

Besides the two classes, there is another group of lower social status called *Yanlo*.<sup>81</sup> The *Yanlos* are believed to have emigrated from *Barson* village near Tashigong in Bhutan about seven generations back. Some believe that they once concentrated in one village of Jigaon Ado. The *Yanlos* were good carpenter, and were known for their skill in smithy. They were grouped into two exogamous clans: the *Kenkhar* and the *Barsan Nai Athhok*. In the beginning, the *Yanlos* had a distinct dialect of their own, but now they speak the Sherdukpen language. They have now lost their identity and have become completely assimilated with the Sherdukpen.<sup>82</sup> Each *Chhao* clan is attached to a *Thong* clan and is expected to perform certain menial as well as ceremonial duties for it. If a *Thong* requires the services of a *Chhao* belonging to a clan which is not attached to his, he is expected to take permission from the member of the *Thong* clan which exercises authority over it.

The *Chhaos* have certain customary privileges<sup>83</sup> as well as duties on the occasion of marriages and funerals. When a *Thong* girl gets married, her father is expected to give a scarf each to the *Chhao* families related to his clan, who in turn give the bride certain presents, such as utensils of various kinds. The bridegroom's father also presents sheep to the *Chhaos*, and feeds them throughout the ceremony.

At *Thong* funeral, the *Chhaos* attached to the clan of the deceased *Thong* have the duty of washing the corpse, wrapping it in a piece of new cloth and carrying it for cremation or burial, for it is a taboo for a *Thong* to touch a dead body. The *Chhaos* are given a token gift of five rupees and feast for the service.

Unlike the *Thongs*, the *Chhaos* enjoy a certain relaxation of the food taboos. They can eat *mithun* flesh which is forbidden to *thongs*. It is possible for a *Chhao* to be a *Jiji* (tribal Priest) or a *Lama*, but the rulers are restricted in his case. The *Chhaos* are expected to sit behind the *Thongs* in religious ceremonies.

*Thong* comprises nine classes and *Chhao*, consists of five clans. Most of the clans within a class can intermarry. There are certain hereditary links between *Thongs* and *Chhao* clans.

**Table. No.5.** List of Clans belonging to *Thong* and *Chhao*

<b><i>Thong</i></b>	<b><i>Chhao</i></b>
Khrimey	Singhaji
Mousobi	Dinglow
Wangja	Megeji
Thongdok	Mijiji
Karma	Monoji
Thungon	
Yangfan Thongchi	
Lama guru	

*Source: Field Study*

**Table. No.6.** Four Exogamous group clan

<b>Group</b>	<b>Thongs</b>	<b>Chhaos</b>
One	Khrimey, Mousabi and Wangja	Singhaji and Dinglow
Two	Thongdok, Karma and Yangfan	Megeji
Three	Thungon	Mijiji and Monoji
Four	Thongchi	

*Source: Field study*

The above group cannot marry each other. Thungon and Thongchi cannot marry each other as they are considered relative. Lama Guru and Khrimey of Shergaon are considered relatives and hence cannot marry each other. But *Lama Guru* and Khrimey of Rupa can marry each other.<sup>84</sup>

It is observed that villages distant from Rupa, Shergaon and Jigaon are mostly inhabited by the *Chhaos*. This could have been as they are considered as a poor in agricultural activities and are expert in hunting and food gathering. So they have migrated to distant villages. Some of the distant villages where high concentration of *Chhao* population are Thungrey, Gorbaw, Mukhuthing, Mingchun, Maraksing, Diksi, Birpur, Brokbublong and Limbaktang.

## **MARRIAGE**

The principal aim of marriage, from the Sherdukpen point of view is the procreation of children to maintain the family and its clan genealogy. In other words, every male individual wishes to have a legitimate married life and lawful offsprings, historical facts and scholarly conclusion drawn through the comparative and meticulous researches are sufficient enough to prove the existence of variant communities as well as other parts of the region. Rivers<sup>85</sup> defines the institution of marriage in these words:

“Marriage, as the means by which every individual born into a society is assigned a definite place in that society, by which his or her social relations to the rest of the society are determined. Each child, by virtue of being born as a child of a marriage, takes its place in the social structure.”

If we understand from this point of view, marriage may be an institution of the most definite and highly organised kind. As R.H. Lowie said, “Marriage and family are complementary concepts: marriage is an institution; family, the association that embodies the institution.”<sup>86</sup> Marriage can be of several types. In fact, almost all tribal communities of the state follow some particular sort of custom pertaining to family incest, taboo, which subsequently generates the exogamous or endogamous forms of marriage.

It is evident from the aforesaid discussion that there are numerous forms of marriage, the manner of finding mates are also many in different ethnic groups of the region. Contemporary social anthropologists have suggested the following forms of

marriage prevalent; negotiated marriage, arrange marriage, marriage by service, marriage by capture, marriage by purchase, marriage by exchange, marriage by natural consent and elopement, marriage by intrusion and cross-cousin marriage. The Sherdukpen living within the pristine order of the socio-cultural set up follow either of these rules for acquiring the mates.

Marriage is one of the universal social institutions. It is closely connected with the institution of family. In fact family and marriage are complementary to each other. Marriage is an institution of society which can have very different implications in different cultures. Its purposes, functions and forms, may differ from society to society, but it is present every where as an institution. The rule of clan exogamy is strictly adhered to in marriage relations. A clan consists of a number of allied families who trace their descent from men of common ancestry. The members of a clan regard themselves as close kins tied by blood relationship. It is, therefore, customary for them to marry outside their own clan. Marriage within the clan or consanguinity is abhorred as incestuous, a serious breach of the clan rules and a major offence against the society. Although polygyny is permissible, it is not common in all tribal societies of Arunachal where only a few rich can afford to have more than one wife by paying the heavy bride-price for each marriage. Levirate, sororate and cross-cousin marriages in various forms are also recognized in many parts of the tribal societies of Arunachal. But monogamy is the established norm of marriage among all the tribes.

Monogamy is the prevalent rule. Polygamy and polyandry are never practiced. Concubinage is frowned upon. 'A Sherdukpen cannot have two wives at the same time under any circumstances.' Pre-marital relations are common. But adultery and incest are treated as crimes and do not go unpunished.<sup>87</sup>

The Sherdukpens are clan-exogamous tribes. The most suitable bride for the Sherdukpen boy is the daughter of his father's sister or of the mother's brother. In fact, it is the duty of a Sherdukpen woman having a marriageable daughter to ask first her brother having a marriageable son whether he is ready to marry her daughter for his

son. This takes us back to that stage of the human society in which there was no marriage system, and the children of woman were looked after by her brother(s) only. Similarly, it is considered the duty of a Sherdukpen father having a protective son for marriage ask his sister having a marriageable daughter for the daughter's hand for his son. And his sister is ever ready to make such matrimonial relation if her daughter has not established some relation with someone else, which is a modern trend. The maternal uncle is also responsible, to a great extent, to arrange the marriage of his nephews and nieces. In other words, the proverbial relation between the maternal uncle and the nephews and nieces is very much there in Sherdukpen society.

The Sherdukpens, as stated earlier, are divided into two clearly defined upper and lower classes known as *Thong* and *Chhao* respectively, each of which consist of a number of socially equal exogamous clans. The two classes do not usually intermarry. Beside these, there is another class called *Yanlo* of lower social stratus as described earlier. It is important to not that the Sherdukpen system of marriage is regulated by the rules of class endogamy and clan exogamy. It is forbidden for a Thong girl to marry a *Chhao* or *Yanlo* boy. Such a marriage is possible only on payment of heavy fine to be paid to the village council by the bridegroom's family. The rule of class endogamy is still rigid and strictly adhered to by the Thongs as well as the *Chhao* among those who abide by the traditional custom. However, some marriages between these two classes have taken place following certain relaxation of the rule and growth of awareness and mostly influence of Buddhism is the society.

### **Marriage forms<sup>88</sup>**

- (i). Parallel and cross-cousin marriage- Both parallel and cross-cousin marriage are known to exist. Marriage with the son of mother's brother or, conversely, with the daughter of father's sister is preferred. Selection of the daughter of the mother's brother or sister as a bride is not popular, and is avoided as far as possible.
- (ii) Elopement Marriage- It usually takes place when the parents of either the boy or girl are against the proposed marriage. In most cases, they ultimately reconcile themselves to the alliance.

- (iii) Marriage by service- This method is not unknown and is usually resorted to, when the father if the girl has no son or male relation to help him in the fields. In such cases, the boy goes to the house of the girl and renders service for some months in agricultural operations during which his capabilities, character and working capacity are carefully watched.
- (iv) Marriage by exchange- This method is possible, but is uncommon among the Sherdukpens.
- (v) Marriage by capture- This is also sometimes resorted to, particularly when the bride is unwilling, but her parents and the boy's parents are quite agreeable.
- (vi) Levirate form of marriage- This marriage system is practiced in the event of the death of a husband. No elaborate ceremonies are gone through in such a case; nor are any bride-price paid. Both junior and senior levirate exist.
- (vii) Sororate Marriage- The marriage of a man with the wife's sister after the wife's death, is also not uncommon. Both junior and senior sororate prevail. Marriage with wife's sister, whose husband had died, can also take place.
- (viii) Widow-marriage- It is permissible, and is not looked down upon
- (ix) Monogamy is the prevalent rule. Polygamy and polyandry are never practiced. Concubinage is frowned upon and not tolerated. 'A Sherdukpen cannot have two wives at the same time under any circumstances.' Pre-marital relations are common. But adultery and incest are treated as crimes and do not go unpunished.

It may be noted that some forms of marriage like levirate, sororate, marriage by service; widow remarriage and remarriage after divorce are solemnized in a simplified manner without much feasts and festivities. These marriages are relatively less expensive. One peculiar feature of Sherdukpen life is that young boys and girls do not normally sleep in their own houses at night. On attaining puberty, they start sleeping separately with their friends in batches, and thus get opportunities for making love and choosing mates. They may exchange their sashes in order to show their willingness to

marry. Soon the matter also comes to the notice of the boy's father who takes into consideration his son's choice, judging by such qualities as physical appearance, grace, temperament and social status of the girl.<sup>89</sup>

### **Marriage procedure<sup>90</sup>**

Soon after notice of son's choice and confirmation the parents of the boys also consult the *Lama* about the selection of the bride, and about the day on which the bride should be brought to the boy's place. On the appointed day, the groom's friends, in a body go and bring the girl to the boy's house by a show force. The girl is made to stay there for three days after which she runs away to her father's house before dusk. The groom does not remain in his house during this period. The groom's father searches a suitable go –between (*achung jering*) for further negotiations. He is sent to the bride's house to persuade him to accept the proposal. He offers local drinks and one scarf each to the girl's father, mother and elder brother to indicate that the proposal has finalized. Thereafter, a day is fixed for performing the formal marriage ceremony after consultation with the Lama. On this day, the marriage party consisting of the groom's father, mother and other near relatives, the *Gaon buras* and influential members of the village go to the bride's house. Presents are exchanged between the two sides on this occasion. The boy's father offers cow, sheep, *endi* cloth and scarves to the bride's parents. He also presents a scarf each to all the people, gathered there, are entertained by the bride's people with local drinks and food. Meanwhile, the bride gets ready and adorns herself with new cloths and ornaments given by her parents. As she comes out to depart, she first bows down to her father who gives her a cow, iron hearth, and scarf; then to her mother who gives scarf and cooking utensils and finally to her brothers and uncles from whom she receives *endi* cloth, scarves and other things.<sup>91</sup>

After this, the girl starts for her new home escorted by her relatives and friend. On reaching there, the groom's father offers drinks and food to all the members assembled. Songs are sung to celebrate the occasion. The groom, significantly enough, is not present during all these ceremonies. He is not also seen during the ceremony performed on that day by the lama to bless the home and the new couple for prosperity and happiness.

At the conclusion of the marriage ceremony, the go-between and the *Lama* get drinks, scarves and cash. The groom is not allowed to sleep with his new wife for the first ten days or so after the marriage. Thereafter, he is persuaded by his friends or elders to sleep, at his own house, with his wife.<sup>92</sup>

### **Bride price**

The Sherdukpens do not pay a bride-price in the usual sense but men of both upper and lower class are under an obligation to give the head of any animal they kill in the chase to their mother's brother, and this gift known as *ru* is considered as a belated payment for their mother to her natal family.<sup>93</sup> The payment of *ru* to her kinsmen begins only after a woman's death, and if a man does not hunt he may give cattle or valuables in lieu of *ru*. After the mother's brother's death his sons or even grandson may be given *ru*, and this way the links between the two families are perpetuated.

### **Divorce**

Divorce amongst the Sherdukpen is not very difficult, and is normally effected with the consent of both husband and wife. In case, where divorce is claimed by the wife, she or her parents have to return the bride-price to the groom's people. The most important grounds for divorce are: disobedience, misconduct and adultery; bad temper and frequent quarrels, leading to domestic unhappiness; desertion by husband or wife; and barrenness, impotence or sterility.<sup>94</sup>

However, divorce is rare in Sherdukpen community but if any proposal comes up either from husband or wife then it is attempted to settle within the clan itself. If any of the clan is not accepting then the *Gaon Bura* is being informed. Who then convenes a village council to settle the matter. But in most cases it is settled within the clan itself. One characteristic of the divorce case in Sherdukpen community is that when a case comes up neither of the members of the clan meet face to face to settle the problem rather a middle man called *Achung Jiring* is appointed to convey the message of each party. He keeps the sanctity of his position and does not leak the information outside the clan nor to the *Gaon Bura* or village council.<sup>95</sup>



## **Pre-marital and Extra-marital relations<sup>96</sup>**

Pre-marital relations are common among the Sherdukpens. Extra-marital relations, however, are looked down upon. Adultery and incest are considered to be crimes and, when detected, do not go unpunished. If a girl becomes pregnant and delivers a child, she is forced to disclose the name of the father who is compelled to marry her, if he is a bachelor; otherwise he has to bear the expenses of the child born from such relationship.

## **POSITION OF WOMEN**

It is extremely difficult to formulate any definite rule for the position of the Sherdukpen woman departing from normal customary practices. While explaining the limited autonomy of woman in pre class society Engels<sup>97</sup> puts it, "The man took command in the house also...She became a mere instrument for the production of children." Later anthropological works has greatly enhanced our knowledge about changes in the position of woman. As we are informed, that even in gathering and hunting societies, and in early agriculture, women did major parts of the work of non-domestic sphere alone as women's province. S. Freud has given a useful summary of women's role in simple society, "It may be admitted that women have but little sense of justice and this is no doubt connected with the preponderance of envy of their mental life."<sup>98</sup> In the *Mahabharata* (19.21), Bhisma says, "Women should always be adored and treated with love."<sup>99</sup> It is observed in epics that views towards women vary from time to time, and to some degree she is a thing to be adored and revered. At certain point, she is also referred as a Goddess of peace and prosperity. So, there is a inconsistency of opinions in respect of the position of women and her nature of role in eth society. Ancient Brahmanical work, like *Manusmriti* prompts to acknowledge us that, "Woman must always be honoured and respected by father's welfare."<sup>100</sup> Thus, in ancient period the position of women and the ideas of the masses about her living have been unsteady so as to ascertain her status in the broad matrix of the socio-cultural activities. While

writing about the position of women R.H. Lowie declares, “woman as undisputed mistress of the family, if not of communal life as well”.<sup>101</sup> He further maintained that there is so much variability in the relation of woman to society that any general statement must be taken with caution. Numerical facts show that any cultural practices of a particular community and its culture structure like attitudes, traditions, customs, and beliefs etc. determine the human manner, and also shape and fashion it in distinct direction in harmony with the standard set up in the society. Hence, the males and females occupy respectively a particular status and behave in a certain typical way because the society they live in expects them to behave in such a manner presumed to be observed by both the sexes. In the context of foregoing historical delineation, the relative evolution of the position of the Sherdukpen woman exhibits some degree of variance picture.

As already noted, the father is the head of the family in Sherdukpen society. All the same, the mother does not in practice have a lesser status. She sets the general pattern of family life, and is invariably consulted in all matters of family importance. Women, however, play an insignificant role in administrative matters, though they can freely take part in practically all festivals, and are not secluded from any social gathering or public amusement. They are also free to move about, and can call on each other.

The marriage customs of the Sherdukpen people give a high status to women.<sup>102</sup> It is the boy’s father who requests the girl’s father for his daughter in marriage to his son. In place of the dowry system of the plains, the system of bride-price is prevalent, and it is the boy’s father again who has to pay a substantial price for the bride. However, society has imposed certain restrictions on women in matters of religion. They have practically no part in religious rites; it is taboo for them to officiate as priests.

During the course of sowing and harvesting, the women help their husbands in the fields. In domestic matters too, they have to work hard. Their primary duties are cooking, pounding and shifting of grain, fetching fuel from the jungle and the like. By nature they are conservative and dislike change in the family pattern and traditions.

They are, as a rule, gentle-hearted and amiable. Their gay disposition and modest demeanour are attractive. They are open and frank in their conduct, and readily join in conversations. Generally speaking, the sexes have equal rights in Sherdukpen society, and stand almost on equal footing in social intercourse.

However, in rituals related to construction of house, festival, etc. *Tashi Yong*, a ritualistic multi-layer alter made out of bamboo with decorative items is carried by women only which proves their significant. Women take active part in collection of Honey (*Chi Luba*). But a woman cannot touch the bow and arrow; nor attend the council even if she is victim. Despite all children are girl no property is inherited. Women, however, do not have any right or claim over immovable property. They are however encouraged to rear poultry and breed cattle, which they can sell on their own and retain the sale proceeds for personal use.<sup>103</sup> In the matter of participation of women did not enjoy the right to attend the proceedings of the village council.

## **INSTITUTION OF SLAVERY**

Apart from family labour and some sort of division of labour based on the social stratification, the institution of slavery<sup>104</sup> played an important role in the economic life of the people. The Akas, Mijis, Nyishis, Apatnais, Adis, Mishmis, Khamptis and Singphos depended on the slaves to a larger extent for their agricultural activities. The possession of a number of slaves of wealth and social status. The slaves were known as *Khulos* (by Akas), *Sulung Darlo*, *Banni Narang*, *Nyra* (male slave) and *Pagne* or *Pane* (female slaves) (by Nyishis), *Muras* (by Apatanis), *Nyra* (by Tagins), *Pakbo* and *Pakne* (in Siang frontier for male /female slaves), *Epoh*, *Po* and *Mangra* (by Idus, Digarus and Miju Mishmis respectively), etc.

In real sense of the term the institution of slavery did not develop among the Sherdukpen. A few Buguns were attached to the Thongs as some sort of serfs. Even Chaos and *Yanlos* of Jigaon area considered to be serfs of the Thongs. Thus some sort of serf system has evolved among the Sherdukpen. It is definitely not a full fledged slavery system.

## **AMUSEMENT AND PASTIME**

The amusement and pastimes have important role to play in the all round development of the people. It provided joy, satisfaction, merriment and also takes care of emotional problems etc.<sup>105</sup>

The popular indigenous games played by boys and girls in the Sherdukpen are remarkably simple, inexpensive and suited to local conditions. They are also not devoid of thrill and excitement. Enjoyable as they are a good deal of entertainment and recreation is derived from these games by the young and the old alike. A description of some of the games are cited below;<sup>106</sup>

- (i) *Wi-rola-khiadia* (Pick-a-back kick fighting)-This game consists of two boys kicking one another while riding on the backs of two other stalwarts. The boys who carry the kickers turn their backs to one another, thereby giving ample opportunity to the boys on their backs to exchange kicks. Kicking from this position is not as

easy as it may seem. This game appears to be quite a favourite with the players, and is naturally an interesting spectacle for the onlookers.

- (ii) *Mik Rekdi khan* (Archery) - Some form or other of competition in archery is practiced by children in Sherdukpen area. Shooting at a target with bow and arrow is so common a sight that it hardly needs description. Competition is held between villages to village and colony to colony.
- (iii) *Eak khadi khan* (Arms-wrestling)- Sherdukpen youth test their strength of arm by arms-wrestling on the normal day or festive occasion. Individual competition is held within the villages. Children pass their leisure times with this competition
- (iv) *Talingthe khan* (Shot -put)- A kind of sport almost identical with the modern Putting the Shot is practiced in Sherdukpen area. A large, round, and fairly heavy stones are used instead of the shot. In general the stones vary in weight from 10 to 16 pound. Sometime this may be quite heavier too. This is played to prove one's strength and manhood among the Sherdukpens.
- (v) *Tachaodi khan* (High Jump)- In Sherdukpen area, locally available materials such as forked bamboo poles are used as posts, and any rough and ready method may be used to suspend a rope or a pole across the two posts. Members compete among themselves and try to prove who can jump higher.
- (vi) *Thok khung dipa* (Tug -of -War)- This is a common game played in Sherdukpen area. The players divide into two teams which range themselves opposite each other and holding on to either end of a long rope generally made of cane, do their utmost to pull the opposing team over.
- (viii) *Ukba-Sauba* (Hide-and -Seek)- The players divide themselves into two parties of equal numbers, and when both boys and girls play the game, each party consists of both sexes. One party hides, while the other seeks, when the call *kwi-ba* is given. Sometime they make a wager of boiled or toasted maize pods; though other foods such as the tender shoots of a maize plant or sweets too, may be used for the wager; in which case the game is more in the nature of a treasure hunt.

- (ix) *Sta-rekba* (Marble game)- It is similar to the game of marbles played in other societies. Girls are not allowed to play it. At least two are needed though more may play. The pieces, most likely seeds, are placed in pairs, one above the other; each player contributing an equal number. One player hits the group of pieces by another piece using his thumb and index finger to manipulate the striker. The object being, to strike as many pairs as possible and add them to his credit.
- (ix) *Rolling the wheel*- It is game that very young Sherdukpen children enjoy. This is played by running up and down with a wooden wheel attached to a bamboo handle. A nail or spike inserted through a hole in the centre of the wheel serves as crude axle.
- (x) *Starekdi khan* (Seed game) - It is a game played normally by girl/women. A large size seed of a particularly tree is collected from jungle. The seed is dried and smoothen. After this the game is played like a carom of modern game where seeds are stroked by main striker to win a point. It is normally played in the field.

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The above games and amusements are played mostly during the festive occasion of *losar* and *choiker*. They are also played in competition organised in villages, and during the leisure time.

## **DANCE AND PANTOMIMES**

Singing and dancing are significant and integral features of any folk society, which coincide to certain *musical*. It has a social, recreational, religious and mental role for the members of the community. Dance is the stylized rhythmic movement of any or all parts of the body to express some emotions, ideas or to narrate a story. When a dance is accompanied by significant gesture and attempts the narration of series of events, it becomes a pantomime.

The dances, performed by the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, have been broadly divided into four groups.<sup>108</sup> The first group is the ritual dances which form part of ritual like war dances, agriculture, funeral, fertility, etc. The second group is the festive dances which form the recreational part of a particular festival. The third group is the recreational dances which do not form of an particular festival or ritual which inspire its participants to express their mirth through these dances. The fourth group is the pantomimes and dance-dramas which narrate a mythical story or illustrate a moral which are educative in purpose. The Buddhist tribes like Sherdukpen have a large repertory of these.<sup>109</sup>

The Sherukpens, who are Buddhist, have two types of dances-the *Kiengpa* and the *Brohpa*.<sup>110</sup> In these dances there is no regular training, but the novices learn the dance from the trained dancers. They have several *brohmo* i.e. pantomime. Only men take active parts in pantomime. Each pantomime is performed by a party of trained dancers. The trainers are called the *Lopon* who play the drum and the cymbals during the performances. The Sherdukpens have several pantomimes through which they depict legendary stories, sometimes with moral import.

### **Jiji Sukham or Yak Pantomime**

A life size dummy yak is made by covering a body –frame of bamboo with black cloth and setting a wooden head of yak on it. A wooden image of a goddess with lifted arms rides on its back. Holding up the frame are two dancers who enter inside the cloth-covered frame and do the yak's part of the dance so that it looks as tough as a yak is in performing the dance. Three men, representing *Apapek* and his two sons and wearing masks and beautiful costumes, dance along with the dummy yak. The two *Lopons* play a drum and cymbals.

### **Ajilamu Pantomime.**

This dance is popular with the people of Rupa. This pantomime is performed by five dancer- two wearing masked to represent demons with ferocious faces and flowing hair dance with one man dressed as a king, and two others representing queens. The

story behind this dance bears a slight resemblance to that of the capture of *Sita* by *Ravana* in *Ramayana* mythology.

A king of Lhasa called *Chajernurjan* had two queens, *Lamu* the senior and *Lamu* the junior. One day they went to take bath in a river. They were both very beautiful. The same day it so happened that the two demons, *Nyapa* and *Nyaro*, were going along the river bank fishing, and when they saw beautiful queens, they carried them off. When the king found the queens had disappeared, he became alarmed and went in search of them. He heard that they were imprisoned in *Nyapa's* house. Reaching the place outside the house, he sung to them in a language that the demons would not understand. The queens replied them and narrated through song how they were captured.

When *Nyapa* and *Nyaro* were frightened know that they were the wives of a king and begged the king to forgive them which he obliged. The doors were opened; the king and demons made friends and they all danced together with the queens.

### **Jik Cham or Deer Pantomime**

This dance is a pantomime of the tale of *Apapek*, an old shepherd and his two sons with a dog who passed their leisure hours hunting in the jungle. It depicts how deer are tempted on to trap by the hunters. One day the two sons and the dog entrapped a deer and took it to their home and sought permission of the father to kill it and feast on its meat. But the villagers, who came to see the deer, implored them to take mercy on the creatures and not to kill it but to set it free. Being released the deer was very happy and danced to express its happiness. Since then, it has become customary to set free such animals as deer, sheep and goat and is followed by the people uptill now.

This pantomime is performed by five to seven dancers. Three of them wearing appropriate masks and costumes representing *Apapek* and his two *Milingchu* (sons); one dressed like a *Btha* (dog) wearing a mask of a dog and another wears a mask of *Zuk* (deer) with spreading antlers. The two *lopans* play the drum and the cymbals to the accompaniment of the dance.



## **Jachung Cham or Bird Pantomime**

There was a pair of birds called *Jachung*. They were a menace to the human population as they used to catch and eat them. A monk named *Khampa Dungzur* thought that in this way human race would be annihilated. So he decided to save them by killing these man-eating birds. With the help of two other monks, he was able to trap these two birds and kill.

In this dance at least seven or eight persons are required to take part in dance. One *Lama Khampa Dungzur*, two monks, one dog and pair of eagles. Six different wooden masks and colourful costumes are required for the participants. Two persons play the cymbals and drum. The dance shows how the eagles are enticed on to a trap and killed.

## **Kiengpa Dance**

On the last of the *Choiker* festival,<sup>119</sup> the boys and girls, clad in new cloths carry the scriptures on their back in ritual procession. They start from the monastery, pass through the field circling the villagers once clockwise and return to the temple. Two young men, bare-bodied, but for their underpants, put on wooden monkey masks and wooden replicas of the phallus. They go on dancing in front of the carriers of the scriptures. They are called *Kiengpa*. The persons, acting as the *Kiengpa*, may be bachelors or married men. They dance with erotic movements which they direct sometimes towards the carriers of the scriptures and the spectators particularly girls. They do it with impunity as according to custom. The evil spirits who afflict the villagers with calamities like disease and death are believed to get frightened seeing the *Kiengpa* and their performance. These spirits run away from the villages out of fear.<sup>111</sup>

## **Brohpu Dances**

This is a group of dances performed for merriment on festive occasions like the *Choiker* festival, marriage ceremony, house warming ceremony, etc.<sup>112</sup> It is generally performed at night. No musical instrument is played to the accompaniment of these

dances. There is no special costume but the dancers wear the usual dress. Woman takes part in this dance with men. The dancers are generally the boys and girls. They may dance separately or jointly mixed up, when the song is sung in chorus.

In Jigaon village, after the prayer flag is planted the monk performs some rites then after the villages start *Brohpu* dances after dusk and continued it throughout the night in the passage of a house. The participants of the dances were usually boys and girls. The boys sometimes withdrew from the dance, but the girls were always on their feet. Originally they had only one dance movement. But nowadays they have more modified and some adopted from the Tibetans.

### **DRESS:**

The dress of the Sherdukpens is well-suited to the rigours of the climate.<sup>113</sup> They wrap themselves in several in several layers of clothes for protection against the weather. On formal occasions they put on colourful garment and adorn themselves with ornaments.

### **Men's Dress**

Men wrap a piece of cloth, either mill-made or *endi* silk, diagonally about the upper part of their bodies. It is locally known as *sape*, and is about 2.5 yards in length and 1.5 yards in width, and forms the main constituent of their dress. Two ends of the border are pinned by *jojotak* made of silver on the shoulders. This garment is sleeveless and reaches down a little above the knees. No vest or singled is worn, nor reaching below the hips. A full-sleeved jacket called *ringbo* or *putok*, reaching below the hips, is worn over the *sape*. It has around neck, and is open in front. To keep themselves warm in winter, some people wear a short over the jacket, and over it another longer one as well as loin cloth or trousers.

Men do not allow their hair to grow very long. They get it cut at intervals and, unlike the Akas and the Mijis, do not tie knot. For headgear, they use an attractive black felt skull-cap, like a pudding-basin, which is made from yak's hair. The cap is locally known as *chitpa gutung*, and has small tassels jutting down over the face of the wearer

and often a white cockade at the side and a colourful band round the brim. The normal type made out of woolen is called *gurdam gutung*. Influential members of the village sometime wear splendid hats of fur and yellow brocade obtained from Kalinpong. A sash of thick coloured handloom cloth with decorated borders six to eight feet long and 11 to 12 inches wide, is wrapped round the waist. A *chongto* (sword or *dao*) in a sheath is tucked crosswise in this waistband. On formal occasions, they carry highly prized artistic *chongto* in silver sheaths.

An attractive woven bag called *daon*, of distinctive patterns is also worn on one side. A hand-woven cloth, decked with pretty patterns, is tied round the shoulders to form a fold at the back, which is used as a pouch or pocket for keeping eatables and other articles of use. This cloak, known as *bogre*, is a speciality of the Sherdukpen area, and is made from the fibre of local plants known as *hongchong* and *hongche*.<sup>114</sup>

### **Women's Dress:**

Women dress themselves in loose, collarless and sleeveless shirts made of *eri* cloth which cover the body from shoulders to knees. This is known as *singko*. Over it, they sometimes wear small full-sleeved coats, made of mill cloth. In some cases, these are embroidered with coloured cotton threads. Like men, women tie a coloured *eri* sash, known locally as *mukhak aran*, round their waists. The sash is fastened over the *singko*. They protect the lower leg with gaiters. *Jidik aran*, a kind of sweater is also worn over *singko* and *mukhak aran*. They also wear a cloth round their calves to keep off the dim-dams. This consists usually of mill-made white cloth, about 20 inches long and 12 inches wide, its two edges sewn together. Its upper end is tied below the knee with thread or bead strings and the lower end hangs loose up the ankle.

Young girls cut their hair round the head. When, however, they get a little older, they let it to grow long and fall over their face so as to act as a sort of veil. This is thought to be very attractive. After marriage or after the birth of a child, girls tie up their hair at the back of the head in a loose bun, just above the nape of the neck. Women usually do not cover the head. On ceremonial occasions, however, some of them use

small attractive caps imported from the Tawang area. Sherdukpens generally go bare-foot, but sometimes use Monpa shoes. Some Sherdukpens, especially those who have come in contact with the outside world, have given up a part of their original dress, and are now wearing coats, collared shirts, woolen *pyjamas* and canvas shoes.

## DECORATION

The Sherdukpens do not tattoo their bodies.<sup>115</sup> Women and children, however, sometime use a vase line called *bachichlong*, which is a black sticky substance prepared out of pine- resin mixed with charcoal dust, for painting their lips and making geometrical designs on their cheeks. It is believed that application of this extract adds to one's beauty and charm, and protects the skin from getting dried up. The designs are painted by applying the mixture on the cheeks with the help of thin bamboo sticks or are stamped with wooden moulds.

## ORNAMENTS<sup>116</sup>

As elsewhere, ornaments are an indication of prosperity and wealth in the Sherdukpen society. These are especially worn on festive occasions and also while visiting neighbours. The rich who possess valuable ornaments usually keep part of the possession in hidden holes dug in the jungle known only to the owners and sons who are to inherit them.

Men wear *khik* (bead necklaces) round their necks and silver or brass rings on their fingers. Women wear bead necklaces of different varieties and colours, bangles and rings, made locally by melting rupee coins. They also wear silver locket and brooches purchased from the plains. When a man dies, the family members, among other things, stop wearing ornaments, especially beads, for about a year.

In earlier days valuable ornament and material were hidden and kept far away from the house in a *maching chung* (cave where valuable things are kept). Sherdukpen who were well to do had its own Cave to keep the valuable personal belongings and ornaments like *guthing gunu* (earring), *thring* (bangles), *nying thring* (silver bangle), *laso*

*thring* (thick design bangle) *khik* (bead necklace), *eksdop* (finger ring), *juruk* (traditional pin made of silver), etc.

## **FOOD**

The Sherdukpen diet is simple.<sup>117</sup> It consists chiefly of cereals, fish, vegetables, and beer brewed from maize and millets. They are fond of chilies and take a variety of beans which are sometimes cooked like pulses. They are also used to milk and butter but very few consume rice which is not grown in the area. The cereals are usually pounded into small particles and ground to form powder which is then cooked in boiling water till it turns into a thick paste. This is taken either with chilies and salt, or with fish, or cooked vegetables such as pumpkins, radishes, cabbages, and potatoes. Sometimes maize and millets are fried in a pan. People also use wild honey.

The food habits of the people are very simple. They are not fastidious about food, and relish whatever is cooked in the house. Buddhist influence has, however, created certain food taboos. They do not, for instance, take beef, pork, fowl or goat meat. They take fish and meat of only non-domestic animals, such as deer, and certain birds. They rear cows, fowls and goats, but only for trade purposes. Orthodox people do not even take eggs although instances of relaxation in such matters are becoming common, especially among the school going students.

The Lamas are permitted to take fish and meat of wild animals, only if the killing is done by other persons. Tea is taken rarely and has not yet come to take a strong hold on the people.

Local beer brewed either from maize or millets is an important item of the Sherdukpen food. It rarely leads to intoxication. They sometimes distil liquor called *ara*, which is taken only occasionally. The people depend a good deal on jungle produce to tide over the lean periods when crops are bad. Varieties of roots, tubers, yams, fruits, berries, mushrooms and leaves are gathered and consumed as food, when necessary.

## **HANDICRAFTS**

### **Weaving:**

The Sherdukpen women are skilful weavers.<sup>118</sup> There is no fixed place for weaving, nor are fixed structures required, for their loom is simple, light and portable, the articles woven are mainly attractive coloured bags with geometrical designs and rectangular pieces of cloth called *bogre* which are used for carrying things.

The yarn is obtained from the plains or is manufactured locally from the bark of plants known as *hongchong* and *hongche*. The local yarn prepared from *hongche* is strong and is used for making fishing nets and bow-strings. The bark of *hongchong* is poisonous, and as such, women cover their hands with cloth when removing the bark is then soaked in boiling water, and washed several times till it decomposes and becomes pulpy. The fibre is then extracted and, after drying, is spun with the help of a bamboo spindle and fly-wheel.

The *bogre*, which is characteristic of the Sherdukpen area, has invariably a Swastika' figure in the centre around which are woven variegated patterns such as the eyes of yaks or pigeons face of a sheep, and Tibetan flags. Sometimes, scenes of arrow shooting or pictures of flowers, leaves or trees are also woven. The borders of the cloth are usually multi coloured.

The *daon* (bags) are of different designs, and are accordingly known by different names; for instance, *sit-man daon* has a design of seven vertical lines, and *daondhum dham* has horizontal patterns. Its central motif is always a right-pointing swastika, around which are a number of subordinate patterns which vary considerably. The colours are red, blue, black and sometimes green and yellow on a white background. Several of these designs were either interpreted as flowers or as shrubs which supply the black juice used for painting beauty-marks on the faces of young girls. The lines projecting from the main design are said to be the thorns of the plant. A Chinese fence design is generally used as the upper border of Sherdukpen bags.

## **Loom**

Sherdukpen women are skilful weavers. Their loom is simple, light and portable. The articles woven are mainly attractive coloured bags with geometrical designs and rectangular pieces of cloth called *bogre*, which are used for carrying things. The yarn is

obtained from the plains or is manufactured locally from the bark of plants known as *hongchong* and *hongche*. The local yarn prepared from *hongche* is strong and is used for making fishing nets and bowstrings. The bark of *hongchong* is poisonous, and as such, women cover their hands with cloth when removing the bark, which is then soaked in boiling water, and washed several times until it decomposes and becomes pulpy. Among Sherdukpens some designs revolve around folk tales. One such tale is about "a girl who falls in love with a snake, who is a handsome youth in disguise. In his snake form, he coils himself in her lap as she weaves; she copies the markings on her lover's body and is soon making the most beautiful cloth that was ever seen." <sup>119</sup> Among other popular designs are stylised peacocks carrying a baby bird on the back, elephants with riders, and flowers that are combined with geometric forms. The textiles depict popular myths and stories of the region and are translated into complex weaving patterns with narrative stories explaining the textiles. Parts of looms are *kampo*, *baoro phumsant*, *guli*, *gotok*, *phla*, *bluing*, *thi*, *baoro*, *kethol* and *honglum*.

## HUNTING AND FISHING

Hunting and fishing though an economic based activity has socio-cultural connotation in the life of Sherdukpens. <sup>120</sup> They resort to hunting and fishing in their leisure to supplement their food. Both individual and community hunting and fishing are practiced. The organization of group hunting is informal. The game hunted by the Sherdukpens includes deer, bear, tiger and leopard. All the hunters get their shares. The leader of the party and successful marksmen, of course, get larger shares.

Fish is abundant in the streams and most of the Sherdukpens devote themselves to the sport some time or the other. Fish forms an important item of the Sherdukpen food and contributes a good amount of protein to their diet.

Hunting and fishing provides a social conglomeration of all section of society which unites them into one cohesive society by various rituals and ceremonies providing them to understand each other through interaction and festivity. This forms the important element of social life of the Sherdukpens.

The preceding pages provides an idea of socio-cultural organization of the people where influence of Mahayana Buddhism can be marked. At the same time the clan system, their social divisions, concept of serf, position of women, form of marriages, dances, etc. reveal their various facets of socio-cultural life. The concept of dormitory was an important aspect in their social life before the adoption of Buddhism. In fact the socio-cultural organization of the people must have been affected by the culture of the plain people of Assam as well as by the culture of few non-Buddhist neighbouring communities.

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# ECONOMIC BASE

## INTRODUCTION

In every human society the physical means of subsistence and means for the production of other wants must be suited to the ends of one's own subsistence. There must have been also some degree of 'satisfaction'<sup>1</sup>, which means economic activities were to some extent regulated by prevailing ecology and environment. Discussing about the aim of traditional economy, Lionel Robbins<sup>2</sup> calls it as, "Human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternate use." About the nature of traditional economic organization R. Firth states,<sup>3</sup> that "Economic organisation is a type of social action. It involves the combination of various kinds of human services with one another and with non-human goods in such a way that they serve given ends." While George Dalton opines that, "All societies have structured arrangement to provide the material means if individual and community life. It is these structured rules that we call an economic system."<sup>4</sup> Some other ethnologists like H.K. Schneider<sup>5</sup> has rightly observed, "Traditional economic is insensitive to the constraints normative, cultural and ecological, that condition the play of the market." The above writings reflect the importance of traditional economy in the study of various ethnic communities. Broadly speaking, the 'Neolithic revolution'<sup>6</sup> has changed the economic activities, which permitted the general expansion and domination of tribal societies over hunting and gathering societies of the Paleolithic stage.<sup>7</sup> The gradual expansion of 'Neolithic economics' in course of time involving the whole world, a process which began around 9000 years B.C., included the first form of plant and animal domestication. Then came the progressive disappearance of Paleolithic hunters and gatherers who were slowly driven back into marginal ecological zones, which were possibly unsuitable for Neolithic farming and domestication techniques.<sup>8</sup> Under such Neolithic economics and tribal society, we have the discovery of slash –and –burn agriculturist in the 'New World' to a great degree, who already reached the tribal level even before the appearance of Neolithic agriculture but being ignorant about the techniques of food-production who

had till recently depended for his subsistence largely on the wild animals and plants, had rapidly transformed their culture and societies into practicing extensive agriculture. Since the commencement of village life with some degree of control over subsistence, with wooden vessels and utensil, finger-weaving with filaments of barks, basket making and the bows and arrows, the archaic society was made more vibrant and progressing. Naturally, this type of progress might have been substantially the same in kind in Sherdukpen tribe and society. In the progressing process, there could be deviation from uniformity in some particular aspects produced by special causes. Hence, there was some kind of unity and uniformity in the origin of cultures and societies of all mankind. In this context L. Morgan<sup>9</sup> has correctly said;

“ The most advanced portion of human race was continually advancing, approached in different degrees of nearness to the same status; for wherever a continental connection existed, all the tribes must have shared in some measures in each other’s progress.”

In all probability, with trial and tribulation of elementary base of subsistence economy, the Sherdukpen might have closely experienced these phenomena before they finally became expert in agricultural life-setting. The territorial identity of the Sherdukpen of Arunachal was a product of process of transformation of the tribal formations in human history of ‘Pan-Indian mainstream’. Communitarian identity with a certain geographical location prevailed where the tribes lived in relative isolation with varied socio-economic and political progress.

Economy of the tribe is a projection of tribal society, response to the eco-system in which it is placed, its function of production and distributions are governed by the bonds of kinship within or between families, clans and kindred. Production is based on the exploitation of the recourses locally and easily available with a crude technology largely for consumption. Family is the unit of production, with little specification and division of labour beyond that based on sex and age. Distribution of goods is regulated by the considerations of reciprocity. The ideal state of primitive economy is thus described as self-sufficient though at subsistence level, non-acquisitive, no-machine and non-monetary. Economy of the tribe is seen as in a state of flux, moving from one



pole to the other, as the tribal society, is segmentary and non-hierarchical, integrated with the caste society which is marked by heterogeneity, stratification, role specialization and inter ethnic participation in production. Moreover as the tribal economic situation is diverse, there are multi-linear processes of integration into regional/national economic systems.<sup>10</sup>

Economy of the tribes in many parts of the country is characterized by survival and persistence of elements of ethnicity. Settlements are organized around line age and clan which can be identified, even today, despite their distortion caused by the immigration of outsiders. A tribal society is less unequal. Tribal economy is characterized by dependence on forest as an ecological niche, a resource, a source of living and food supply. The tribal areas are coterminous with the hilly and forest regions. Primitive technologies such as food gathering and shifting cultivation survive largely among the tribes.

In the primitive economy of the people of Arunachal Pradesh, the human labour was the principal source of power. The implements were mostly simple tools like *dao*, iron hoes, pointed bamboos, swords, bow, arrow etc. Given the abundance of land and simplicity of instruments production labour-power was the principal factor in the production process and efficiency of labour process was a function of the volumes and concentration man-power and the scale of co-operation at work. In Arunachal society, social labour was divided into six branches of production e.g. hunting, fishing, collection forest products, animal husbandry, cultivation of crops and handicrafts.<sup>11</sup>

The economic life of the people of Arunachal Pradesh, like any other society, has been continuously evolving and thus undergone many changes; however, the economic life of the people in this area advanced on different lines when compared with the rest of the country owing to unique living conditions here resulting from very formidable geography and a long history of isolation from the mainstream. It may not be wrong to suggest that before the dawn of independence in 1947, the evolution and progress of

the economic life of the people was very-very slow and appeared to be static. The traditional economic life of people revolved around nature and its compulsions. As V. Elwin, has rightly pointed out “for centuries, the real ruler of the tribal bodies has been environment; it has shaped their bodies, directed their art, forced babble on the tongues; it has been their Governor, their policy maker.<sup>12</sup> Added to this was along period of isolation of the people of this area from the rest of the world, due to which the economic life of the people remained confined to their respective tribes or clans. No doubt, there was some interaction between the various tribes like the Sherdukpens as well as between the people of the state and the neighbouring plains of Assam as well as Tibet, Burma (Myanmar), yet the magnitude of this was too small to have any major impact on the traditional economic life of the people.

Thus, the economic life of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh was different from that of the plains people. And in no respect was this difference more marked than in the method of agriculture which was the most important economic pursuit in the hills. The economic activities practiced by the people in the past may conveniently be grouped into three categories agricultural, manufacturing and trading,<sup>13</sup> the tribe’s men supplemented their poor economy by hunting, fishing, rubber-tapping and elephant-catching in the land at the foot hills north of the Brahmaputra. But during British rule this land was affected by the expansions of tea plantations and creation of reserved forest. The cultivation of Tea, was first undertaken by the Government in 1835 at Sadiya.<sup>14</sup>

It was also natural that hunting was an important complementary occupation of such cultivators. Fishing in the streams was another production activity. The tribal people also reared poultry, piggery and the semi domesticated *mithun*. These were not only an important source of food, but also the stock of assets as the life span of these animals exceeded a single *jhum* production period. The hills people used to collect building materials, firewood, berries, nuts etc. of plants and trees.

Economic growth and development presuppose the process of accumulation that is production of surplus over consumption needs. In the tribal economy of north-east frontier in the nineteenth century, there were three source of surplus earning. Though *jhumming* was practiced on common village land, some privately owned plots of agricultural land which were cleared and developed by owners concerned were there. Since the *jhumming* depended on the quantum of labour employed for the purpose, other things remained unchanged. One source of employing labour was slave labour. From all accounts it appears that the total tribal population was more or less static for many decades although there is no historical evidence of suffering from their shortage of food in any period. Inter-tribal feuds, which were very frequent, kept the population in check. Therefore, it was the common tendency among the tribes to capture as many person both male and female from the enemy village as possible. These captives were reduced to the status of slaves and employed for all kinds of arduous and productive activities; even then tribal economy was not a slave economy because the system did not virtually depend on the employ of the slave.<sup>15</sup> However, the so called slaves in this area may be better termed as serfs.

When the colonial period started, British Government also followed the policy of developing closer trade relations with the tribes. As a result, the volume of trade with Tibet gradually declined while that with Assam increased. To promote increased flow of trade between the hills and plains, the Government organized a number of trade fair at different places annually from the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## **AGRICULTURE**

In the traditional tribal economy, agriculture occupied the central position supplemented by forestry. Two distinctly different agricultural practices, viz. *jhum* or shifting and settled cultivation, including both terrace and wet rice, had historically evolved among the tribal communities of Arunachal in response to the nature of topographic and climatic factors. Communal efforts that came into being during the hunting and gathering phase also continued in many cases in the labour intensive *jhum*

life.<sup>16</sup> Traditionally developed terrace rice cultivation was found among the Monpas of Tawang and among the Sherdukpens of West Kameng district.<sup>17</sup>

Apart from the topographical and climate factors, abundance of land in this sparsely populated vast tract also helped in perpetuation the *jhumming* on a massive scale. In fact, tribal life in Arunachal rotated, for many centuries; round the *jhumming* activities without any significant change in their internal socio-economic structures. Sherdukpens had a definite habitation which was again divided into a number of *pam* (hamlets) or villages mostly organized along clan lines. The villagers, in many cases, used to move from one place to another within the village boundary along with the shift in *jhum* plots. Thus *jhum* life did not allow them to settle down in the proper sense of the term.

The economy of Sherdukpens is a subsistence one providing them only the bare necessities of life. Agriculture (*rek*) is their main occupation. It is not any easy one; in fact, it is very toilsome and precarious. The labour put forth in agricultural operations is great as the soil is hard and rocky. The cultivators have always to be on guard against their numerous enemies: occasional heavy frost, paucity of water supply, raids by wild animals such as bears and monkeys, and hungry cattle. The fields are rocky and small. In addition, the absence of proper paths to the fields and in some cases their remoteness from the homesteads, are some of the other important factors with which the hardy inhabitants of this region have to contend with. Agriculture is a task requiring great expense and immense labour. However, in spite of all these handicaps, it has come to stay as the main occupation of the entire population.<sup>18</sup>

The Sherdukpens used to have both shifting and permanent cultivation but they do not seem to be particularly expert at either, for they frequently suffer from a deficiency of food for which they to make up to trade. Their permanent fields, of which there are many in the valley of the *Dupla Ko*, are in many cases covered with stones, which the people refused to remove on the ground that if they do so the fertility of the

soil will be impaired. They use a very primitive plough which may be drawn by buffaloes, cows or bullocks; this has an exceptionally broad yoke and requires two men to operate it. It is interesting to mention a few communities in Arunachal such as Monpas, Khamptis use plough in their agricultural fields.<sup>19</sup> Scholar believe that Tawang Monastery introduced plough cultivation in Tawang, Dirang and Kalaktang Monpa area and most probably Sherdukpen learnt the art of plough from their Monpa neighbours.<sup>20</sup> However, it seems that Sherdukpen would have been influenced to a great extent by the ploughs of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam.<sup>21</sup> They usually have to plough the ground twice before sowing their seed. In these permanent fields they rotate their crops, following wheat and millet. They manure their fields by tying up their cattle in them when they are lying fallow, but they do not use oak leaves as the northern people of Dirang practise. In addition to the main crops they grow pulses, chilies, mustard, ordinary and sweet potatoes and various vegetables.

In the hills clearing they grow maize for the first year, wheat and barley or millet in the second and mustard in the third. The cycle of cultivation is approximately eight to ten years. They begin their cultivation, after returning from Doimara, in the fields which are more distant from the village and later sow the same crops in the fields nearby.<sup>22</sup>

The tour diary of Political officer, Balipara frontier tract of 1944-45<sup>23</sup> throws some light on the agriculture at Rupa and Shergaon village. We are told in the report that the Sherdukpen especially those of Rupa were very poor cultivators. They depended a good deal on plain rice which they used to get in normal times from the Kacharis living around Misamari by exchanging chilies and reddish. They also used to buy some paddy and rice with the *posa* money they were given annually. Another important source of the supply of their food was from Khowas of *Senchong* and *Wangho* who used to exchange their grains for salt, *endi* cloth and cattle.<sup>24</sup> While referring to the Shergaon people it is to be mentioned that the cultivation of crops at Shergaon used to start earlier than at Rupa owing to its height. Unlike the people of Rupa they had no *pams* and their *jhums* were negligible. The people were busy getting their fields ready for *brasma* and *grunchun*. They were dependent mainly on their permanent filed which can be broadly

classified into two (i) *phentang rek* and (ii) *reksam*.<sup>25</sup> In the former they grew only maize every year and no other crops. But in the later they used to have a double crop and have it by rotation. Wheat and barley used to be followed by *brasma* and *grunchun*. Sometime for change in some fields they grew millet by sowing on April and harvesting at the end of October or beginning of November. During the winter these fields were kept fallow and in the following April *brasma* and *grunchun* were sown on them to be followed by wheat and barley. Their main crops are maize, millet, barley, wheat supplemented by *brasma*, *grinchin*, chilies and mustard. They also grew a certain amount of ordinary and sweet potatoes and vegetable like bean, garlic and *lisak*. In their *jhum* they grow maize for the first year followed by wheat and barley or *brasma* or *grinchin* or millet and lastly as a third crop mustard is grown in good *jhum*. The *jhuming* cycle was an approximately eight to ten years.

### **Types of Cultivation and Varieties of Crops**

The Sherdukpens practice both shifting and permanent cultivation but are not particularly skilful at either. They frequently suffer from a deficiency of food which they have to make up by trade and other means. The *jhuming* conforms to the same pattern as is followed in other tribal areas. A portion of the jungle is cut down, and the felled trees are allowed to dry. When completely dried, they are set on fire, and maize and millets are sown after the rains. The fields in which permanent cultivation is practiced are in many cases strewn with stones which are often left as they are. The main agricultural implement is a very primitive type of plough which is drawn by bullocks and has an exceptionally broad yoke and requires two men to operate it. The lands are usually ploughed twice before sowing.

The first phase of their agriculture actually starts immediately after the Doimara winter camp.<sup>26</sup> The distant fields where maize, *gacham* and other varieties of millets are grown are taken up first. Then they turn their attention to the nearer plots. By the time

the plots close to the village have been cultivated, the crops sown in the distant fields are ready for reaping.

In Rupa, there were in all 13 '*Pam*' scattered over a wide area of about 10 square miles. Size of these *pams* varies from 2 to 10 houses in each. In this *Pam* there are field houses which are occupied practically throughout the year, except during the winter when they go down to Doimara and also take their cattle with them for lack of grazing in the hills during the winter months. Attempts are being to introduce *kykiu* grass in this area to overcome this difficulty. In the *pams* there are both permanent fields and *jhums*, where they grow wheat, barley, maize and millet. Crops in the *pams* are generally harvested much later than those grown in their permanent fields near their village and on the banks of the river, which they call '*Zanbi*'. Their soil is infertile, and they hardly have enough high food to see them through the year. But the Sherdukpens are poor cultivators and are inclined to depend on the Bugun of Wangho and Senchong for supply of food-stuffs such as maize, potatoes, taro, etc in exchange for salt, *endi* cloth and cattle.<sup>27</sup>

In the permanent fields, the Sherdukpens practice rotation of crops: wheat and barley are followed by maize and millet. Their fields are fertilized by tying up cattle in them when they are lying fallow. Ploughing is done by men only. The fields are not irrigated and depend almost entirely on rain, artificial irrigation being seldom practiced. They do not dam streams for this purpose; nor do they ordinarily cut channels from the neighboring rivulets for irrigating their fields.

The Sherdukpens also maintain kitchen gardens with bamboo fences around them. Droppings of the cattle, fowls and goats and also the garbage from the house are used as manure for these gardens. Maize, pulses and vegetables such as potato and sweet potato, are shown in them.

## **Agricultural Cycle:**

The agricultural schedule round the year is intimately connected with an governed by nature's signals and sounds.<sup>28</sup> It also depends upon certain astronomical observations. According to the Sherdukpen calendar, there are twelve months in a year. *Lang-Do*, roughly corresponding to July- August, is the first month which sees the beginning of agricultural activities with the people sowing millets like *nakhoo*, *jamu*, and *khichin*. Maize and Lap-Song, the agricultural festival, falls in this month. The second month is *Tak-Do* (August- September). The fields are likely to be attacked by bears, monkeys, rats and wild pigs. The main activity during this month is to guard the maize crops from their ravages. The people do not have any effective check against these wild animals at night though in the day time they prevent them from raiding their fields by shouting or throwing stones at them. Their fields are usually without enclosures or fences, but the jungle around them is cleared so that the wild animals and birds may not find easy lurking places. The women too assist in the task of guarding the fields in addition to their household work and weaving, a great deal of which is done in this month. In *Yosee-Do* (September- October), the third month, barley (*Phu*) and wheat (*bukku*) are sown while maize is harvested and stacked in temporary granaries in the fields for drying. *Brike-Do* (October- November), the next month, is occupied with the clearing of jungle for the *jhums* and preparation of *jhum* plots. The first part of the clearing operations- clearing the bushes and under growth is the responsibility of women while the felling of trees, leaving short stumps standing, is done by men. The trees are left to dry and afterwards fire is set to them. Assistance of other members of the village is taken in the felling operations. It is also in the fourth month that women spin yarn from the fibre of the *hongchong* which is used in weaving bags called *bogre*. They also engage themselves in such operations as pounding of grain. Millets like *gacham*, *jumu* and *nakhu* are also harvested during this month. Wang is the festival which falls in this month. The fifth local month is *Bree- Do* which falls in November- December. During this month, harvesting operations are continued and seeds of barley are sown. The people also build or repair houses and celebrate the *Khiksaba* festival. The next three months, *Luk-Do*, *Pree-Do* and *Jai-Do*, corresponding to January, February and March, are spent in Doimara- their winter camp- from where the



Sherdukpens carry on trade with the plains. During these months, they find enough leisure to go out for hunting or visiting friends in the plains. They return from Doimara by March or April. In *Khik-Do* (April- May), those fields which are adjacent to the villages are ploughed for sowing maize, chillies, soya beans, pumpkins and mustard. In *Phak-Do* (May- June), maize and millets are sown in the fields and *pams* which are distant from the village. *Jee-Do* (June- July) is also devoted to the cultivation and the sowing of maize and millet in the nearby fields.

Thus works the yearly cycle of Sherdukpen agriculture. It is observed that they do not engage in paddy cultivation as their area is not suitable for this purpose. Standing crops of millets in the fields with their wide expanse of vivid green present a beautiful view during September- October. After harvest, when the sheaves get completely dried up, they are thrashed and pounded to remove the stalks and are then winnowed in a sifting tray. The grain is then stored in rectangular containers made of bamboo.

### **Agricultural Implements:**

The agricultural implements are devised to cope with the environmental necessities of the region.<sup>29</sup> Though primitive, they are still effective and closely resemble those in cultures of similar level. They are comparatively cheap, easy to handle and cost little in maintenance and repair.

The chief agricultural implements employed are:

- a) The *ganga*. It is a plough made entirely of wood and has an exceptionally broad yoke. It is drawn by a pair of oxen and is used for ploughing soft soil.
- b) The *handu* or *dao*. It is used for felling trees and clearing the undergrowth.

- c) The *breksing* or *rake*. It is made of bamboo about 2 ½ feet in length and is split into three or four prongs at the outer end. The implement is used for scratching the top of the fields after they have been properly burned.
- d) The *chhampok* or *weeder*. It is a wooden implement with pointed end and is used for weeding, scraping and drilling holes in the fields. Maize seeds are inserted into these holes which are then filled with earth.
- e) The *tong*. It is a wooden implement with bifurcated handle and a central loop. It is used for loosening the top soil.
- f) The *yung*. It is a conical basket made of bamboo which is carried on the back for carrying field produce, fuel and vegetables.
- g) The *chhakhi* or dibbler. It consists of a stout wooden handle with an iron blade and is used for turning the hard soil and digging the fields.
- h) The *brachok*. It is scythe used for harvesting the crops and weeding the fields.
- i) The *chom chhanke*. Equivalent to mortar and pestle, it is an indispensable implement for pounding grain.
- j) The *flu*. It is an axe used for felling trees and branches.
- k) The *khao*. It is winnow used for separating grain which is allowed to fall from some height to enable the straw to be carried away by the wind.

## **SOURCE OF LABOUR**

The greater part of the labour employed by a Sherdukpen farmer during these agricultural operations is furnished by his family. There is, however, no very strict or rigid division of family labour, in as much as personal aptitudes and preferences and aversions have to be taken into consideration. Men normally reserve for themselves a majority of the less onerous and fatiguing jobs, leaving for the women the bulk of the tedious tasks. For instance, except during the sowing and harvesting seasons, the men

are inclined to while away their time in comparative ease; but not so the women. They enjoy no slack season, the whole of the year being spent in hard toil. The Sherdukpens also have a tradition of giving help to each other when needed. Friends and acquaintances combine to help in any undertaking which requires extra hands and give their services *gratis* to the person who needs them; the person thus helped repays in his turn, when those who have helped him need his services.<sup>30</sup>

The Khowas of Senchong and Wangho were utilized as labour force in the land of the Shedukpens. The tour diary of political officer mentions, "The Khowas of Senchoing are good cultivators but their friendly relation with the Bhutias of Rupa are a constant drain on their resources. The villagers of Rupa are a lackaisaidical lot and would expect the Khowas of Senchon and Wango whom they look upon as their serfs to do their cultivation."<sup>31</sup>

The Chaos used to do all the menial and agricultural works of the Thongs.<sup>32</sup> Even the *Yanlos* who were considered inferior in the society were also engaged as serfs (*yangchow*) to the work in the agriculture field.<sup>33</sup>

## HUNTING

The Sherdukpens supplement their food supply by hunting, the popularity of which is suggested in a number of folk-tales, and by fishing. Sherdukpens resort to hunting (*sulatokpa*) in their leisure to supplement their food. Both individual and community hunting (*sapo rokbu jong hungbo longba*) are practiced. Bows and arrows are the weapons mainly used. The arrows sometimes have poisoned tips and are carried in quivers of bamboo tubes. Bows with trigger arrangements are also used.

The organization of group hunting<sup>34</sup> is informal. All the dogs belonging to the participants in a hunt are entrusted to the charge of one man who usually goads them forward to comb out the jungle. The barking dogs are yelling hunters make sufficient noise to frighten away the game towards some selected spot where the pick of the

marksmen wait in ambush all round. The hunters lie in wait and as the animals unwarily enter the trap, they spear them easily. They also hunt animals from platforms built on trees. The game hunted by the Sherdukpens includes deer, bear, tiger and leopard. All the hunters get their shares. The leader of the party and successful marksmen, of course, get larger shares.

## **FISHING**

When late J.P. Mills visited Rupa in 1945 he was shown 'the most ingenious local fishing (*chukraba/hopsiba/nyuchaba/nyujukpa/kholepa*) tackle.<sup>35</sup> Mills writes, "No hook is used. A line of knotted white horse-hairs, said to be said to be invisible in water, is attached to a bamboo rod about 15 feet long. There is a weight at the end of the horse-hair line and few inches above the weight there is a noose, which is tied a piece of an iris root said to smell like roe. The weight is slung gently out and worked down-stream in fairly fast runs. A fish coming to the bait gets the noose behind its gills, and is played till exhausted. There being no reel, the angler usually takes a friend with him who helps to keep the fish under control by throwing in stones ahead of it if it tries to run. I am assured that large numbers of fish up to three or four pounds are caught in this way, and that it is quiet impossible to catch any on the hook."<sup>36</sup>

Fish is abundant in the streams and most of the Sherdukpens devote themselves to the sport some time or the other. The most common method of catching fish on a large scale is by damming the water with logs and stones, and diverting it on to a dry land on a higher level. The water surges forward and then subsides, leaving the fish on dry ground where they are readily caught by hand. Essentially, a communal method of fishing, this requires a great deal of labour.<sup>37</sup> The results are, however, a commensurate with the efforts and the huge catch is dried and smoked and kept for future use. Traps are also used to catch fish. These are conical in shape and are closed at one end. The traps are placed in the streams with their mouths facing

## **DOMESTICATION OF ANIMALS AND LIVESTOCK<sup>38</sup>**

The most prized livestock are the ponies, cows and bullocks. The Sherdukpens also rear goats and fowls, and keep dogs and cats as pets but not usually pigs and sheep. They keep fowls in pens made of closely woven bamboo. In some houses the hens are put in a separate basket placed high against a wall of the house for laying eggs. The Sherdukpens do not eat eggs and fowls but keep them only for trade. They do not look after their animals well and often let them wander in the forest

## **TRADE**

It is generally said that the tribes of Arunachal lived in isolation from the rest of the world and also that there was very little interaction amongst the various tribes, yet, from very early days, various tribes had established trade relations amongst themselves and with the outside world. The trade which the tribal did was rather a compulsion for them since they had to depend on the outside world for the supply of some of the basic requirements of life such as salt, metal, etc. In a few cases, the demand for these items was met by forceful collections from the plains of Assam in the form of *posa*, but generally speaking, trade was carried out within the society as well as outside world. V. Elwin<sup>39</sup> has rightly pointed out that "Some of the tribes...are very keen traders (*chongbon*), the Sherdukpens and Akas have for generation traded with the foothills, and the plains. There is much inter-tribal commerce in northern Siang. The Monpas, Khambas and the Membas trade with Tibet, the Tangsas with Burma. The Mishmis bring down musk, the coptis teeta, skins, textiles and baskets to barter in the plains." Trade had a significant place in the economy of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, owing mainly to varied physiographical features and diverse socio-economic traits of the tribes living in different parts. Over the time and space, there evolved a network of transaction among these different tribes inhabiting the present Arunachal Pradesh, which were essential for survival of the politico-economy of the different tribes.

### **Trade during Ahom**

The trade which the Ahom rulers of Assam valley encouraged to the mutual benefit of the Arunachalees and their own subjects was conducted on the basis of

barter and exchange. The Adis, Miris, Mishmis and Singphos use to bring paper, munjit, ginger, wax, ivory, cottons, etc. which they exchanged for glass, beads, cloths, salt and money.<sup>40</sup> In addition to these hill people used to attend trade fair held in bordering areas (e.g. Kariapar and Doimara Fairs)

Relation of the Ahom kings with the tribal peoples of Assam may broadly be classified under two heads viz, relation with the plains tribes and relations with the hill tribes according to the policies that they adopted with regard to these two kinds of tribes.<sup>41</sup> The policy towards the hills tribes was one of conciliation backed by the display of force when occasion demanded it and when it could be employed effectively. Most of the tribes as it seen were deficient in certain necessities of life and laborers. In order to conciliate them and prevent them from committing raids in the plains which were mainly resorted to fill up their deficiencies, the Ahom rulers introduced the '*posa*' system and granted some of the tribe lands and fishing waters along with the *paiks* in the plains. Some of the tribes again depended solely for their livelihood upon their trading activities with the plains, and the Ahom rulers offered them trading facilities with the plains, on the condition of good behaviour and payment of annual tributes. In spite of the concession made to the tribes in various ways, most of them often violated their agreements, indulged in raiding villages within the Ahom kingdom, withheld the payment on annual tribute, and compelled the Ahom rulers to send punitive expeditions against them which often resulted in the destruction of granaries and dwelling houses of the hill people. But the Ahom rulers pardoned the tribes whenever they later made their submission, agreed to pay annual tributes and to abide by the conditions imposed on them.

The Ahom rulers did never envisage the plan of the complete subjugation and annexation of their territories to the Ahom kingdom and to take part in their internal administration. The expeditions that were undertaken against the tribes brought home to the Ahom rulers the futility of such an attempt which would make the tribes recede further into the backwoods leaving the conquerors masters of unpeopled hills and forests. The hills and the plains also stood as a barrier in the way of annexing the hill areas to the Ahom kingdom. The Ahom rulers, therefore, considered it enough to

receive the submission of the hill people and the payment of annual tributes by them in return of the concessions made to them, and allowed them to enjoy their tribal autonomy and the privileges granted to them so long as the tribes did not violate their agreements.<sup>42</sup>

### **Trade through Duars**

The North-East India with its varied topographical features have helped the development of different political and social units in the region. The social relations and economic interdependence between the hills and the plains of North-East India have been their since the time immemorial. In the absence of extensive historical literature it is difficult to know the relations between these two groups of people of the region. It is the *buranjis* of the Ahom of the latter period that occasional mentions have been made of the relations between the Ahom administrations on the one hand and the Brahmaputra valley, on the other. The infrequent references indicate that socio-economic relations of symbiotic nature did take place along the relatively large rivers to the plains and thus established a relation and go back after a sojourn. There are numerous passes along the Himalayan foothills adjoining the Indo-Gangetic and the Brahmaputra plains. Traditionally such passes are known as “*duars*” (doors) in eastern India from Nepal eastward. It is through these *duars* that the people of Bhutan and the present Arunachal Pradesh have been interacting with the plains people since time immemorial.<sup>43</sup>

Although the Ahoms came into contact with the hill tribes of the northern hill range in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, after the annexation of the Chutiya kingdom, the *buranjis* are silent about their relations for about next one hundred years. From the reign of Pratap Singha (1603-41 A.D.) and after the occupation of the territory upto the Bardani, we found a continuous relation between them. To maintain a cordial relations with the inhabitants of these hill ranges, the Ahom rulers adopted the system prevailed and gave it a definite shape which is afterwards termed as ‘*posa*’.<sup>44</sup> About the allotment of the routes and the land surrounding the allotted *duars* and also Ahom subjects to each hill tribes, it is clear from the record of the *buranjis*, that each tribe had

different *duars* to contact with the plains, differently prescribed area to procure articles of their necessity for which they had to render annual *pal-seva*. The tract with *duars* in Darrang district (present Sonitpur District) and Lakhimpur District upto Dikrong was divided into three division namely-*Charduar*, *Noduar* and *Chaiduar*.<sup>45</sup> *Duar* is a mountain pass, through which people of North East Frontier (Arunachal) used to have trade of Assam. This is important passages which gave access to the hill tribes to visit the plains area for their economic needs and maintaining relations. Infact it was through this *duar* that the syncritisation and exchange of ideas that took place and became an important place in the history of tribal people of Arunachal particularly of western part like present West Kameng district.

The tract *Charduar*<sup>46</sup> was between Rowta river and the Jia Bharali The *duars* here were along the passes created by the Rowta, Panchnai and Belsiri were invariably used by the Sherdukpens. Even today many of them come down through these routed to the markets of Majbat and Dekhijuli. Some of them used the eastern most *duar* of the tract i.e Bhalukpong *duar* on the Jia Bharali and reached *Charduar*, Balipara and Rangapara markets. Robinson refers to market place named Doimara visited by Sherdukpens. The existence of the *duars* shows that there had been socio-economic interdependence between the hill dwellers and plains men. The study reveal that those territories below the *duars* which were frequented by the Bhutias, Sherdukpens and the Monpas developed hat or market centres. For they carried with them merchandise not only from West Kameng district but also from Tibet.<sup>47</sup>

### **Trade during British Period**

The Ahom rule was followed by the British rule. The treaty of *Yandabo*(1826) marked the beginning of the British annexation of Assam. This brought the British into contact with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh which ushered in a new era in the history of the region. Since Ahom regime in the Brahmaputra valley, the Arunachalese had maintained extensive commercial relations with Assam. The new government under the British encouraged the already existing trade-relations between the people of Assam and Arunachal. The colonial rulers continued to encourage hill-plains trade but the East



India Company with its essential mercantile character looked to the problem from altogether different angle. The development of trade with Tibet, China and Burma had long remained an important consideration of the British authorities in north-east India.<sup>48</sup> The early years of British rule in Assam valley served as preparatory period when markets were established and trade fairs organized in the foot-hill areas. In 1874 Assam became a Chief-Commissioner's province. By that period annual trade-fairs were held in Sadiya, Udalguri and Doimara.<sup>49</sup>

In the nineteenth century under the active encouragement of British authorities began an era of explorations in the hill areas of Arunachal Pradesh with the object of extending geographic knowledge and studying the trade-routes and trading contacts of Arunachalese with Tibetans, Chinese and Burmese. Bedford, Neufile, Wilcox and Burton were deputed on the frontier for extending geographic knowledge about the countries beyond north-east frontier of India. Their enquiries not only dispelled the mist which had previously rested on the whole of the extreme north east frontier of India but also revealed the bright commercial prospect of the east India company in the region.<sup>50</sup>

## **TRADE STRUCTURE**

The trade structure<sup>51</sup> in the region during the colonial period consisted of (i) Trade Fair, (ii) Local Trade, and (iii) Cross-country Trade

### **Trade fair:**

Although the frontier trade proved to be beneficial to the hills people, the British motives in organizing the trade fairs were politically significant. The Scarcity of some of the articles of daily consumption had kept the Arunachalese dependent on the plains and salt figured prominently in the list of such articles. The demand for the essential commodities sometime called upon the hill men to raid on the plains. The British

administrators realised that well-organised trade fairs would be highly appreciated by the hill people as an advantageous opportunity for disposal of their hill produce and procurement of their necessities. The fairs which would attract a large gathering of hill people could enable the British officers to exert political control which they could not do in ordinary trade carried on at no fixed time or place. The fairs would also promote close contact among the people on the hills and plains and ultimately result in infusing civilizing influence over the tribes. With the exception of producing the minimum necessities of life the hill people mostly engaged their time and energy in raids and inter-clanish warfare. Trade would provide them an outlet for activities and protect the British subjects from occasional tribal inroads.<sup>52</sup>

The origin of the trade fair dated back to the Ahom rule when in addition to trans-frontier tribes and the people of Assam, the Tibetans and the Chinese attended the fairs. At that time trade fairs were organized at Doimara and Udalguri which were attended by number of Sherdukpens and Monpas.<sup>53</sup> The British Government in their anxiety to exercise political control over the Bhutanese and the Arunachalese and to promote their commercial interest by encouraging internal and international trade and to popularise the European goods officially organised annual trade fairs at a number of places in the submontane areas. In addition to the people on both sides of the local frontier, the *Marwaris*, Europeans and the Chinese and Tibetans attended the fairs that were organized in the winter season. Although the official fairs were for three days, the actual trade usually continued from January to March.<sup>54</sup> The cost of organizing the fairs was met from provincial and district funds, although the presents or duty received in kind from the hill people that were sold in auction in the fairs fell much short of the cost, the policy of the Government was to encourage the fairs as they provided the opportunity to the British to exert political influence over the tribes who attended the fairs and in no time became used to it, besides introducing the European merchandise that would attract the simple and unassuming consumers. The *posa* or allowance was distributed among the chiefs at fairs which enabled them to buy things in cash. In addition to barter or exchange the rich presents including bottles of rum, were offered to the chiefs on behalf

of the British Government. *Darbars* were held during the fairs, where political or administrative policies were explained, the succession of chiefs announced and the disputes disposed of. The huge *pandals* were constructed, arrangements made for the stay of the visitors and police and military pickets posted to maintain law and order. To add to the glamour's, sometimes processions of the chiefs on elephants' back accompanied by the beating of drums and other musical instruments and in colourful tribal costume were held and the songs and dances and games and sports including horses' race were organized by the local officers.<sup>55</sup> The Selection of sites was based on the idea that each tribal group could visit one or the other, and could be both inside (e.g. Sadiya) and outside (e.g. Udalguri and Doimara) the Inner Line. The fair at Udalguri in Kariaparaduar and Doimara in Charduar date back to the Ahom rule and were continued throughout the colonial period.<sup>56</sup> The Udalguri fair was the earliest and largest in the whole frontier, and the Extra-Bhutan Bhutanese(Monpas and Sherdukpens) and the Bhutanese of Bhutan proper as well as the Tibetans and the Assamese visited the fair. The next in importance was the Sadiya fair, introduced by the British in 1867, attended by Abors, Miris, Mishmis, Khamtis, Singphos etc.<sup>57</sup> The Bhutanese chief of Kherkaris in Kullingduar started a fair in 1874, which continued later in Khagrapara for many years.<sup>58</sup> The fair at Datma in Goalpara, started by the British in 1873 to attract the Bhutanese in the bordering areas was abandoned after two years as the experiment failed due to the inaccessibility of the place and sparseness of population in vicinity.<sup>59</sup> The Subankhatta fair started in 1883, and Dewangiri about the same time, however, proved successful.<sup>60</sup>

## **IMPORTANT TRADE FAIRS**

### **Udalguri**

For the purpose of encouraging the interchange of trade with the Bhutias(including Monpas and Sherdukpens) and other hill people living beyond the boundary, annual trading fair s are held in certain villages near the base of the hills. The most important of these is held at Udalgiri in north-west of the district near the Bhutan

frontier, in February and March.<sup>61</sup> It is attended by Bhutanis, Monpas, Sherdukpens and Tibetans, as well as by the people of the plains from all the surrounding districts. During the three or four weeks for which the fair lasts, delegates from the hill tribes come to the civil station, to receive the amount allowed to them as their share of the revenue of the *duars*, their pension and also present given to them by the government. The deputy commissioner has provided with the following statement of the quantity and value of the produce bought for sale by the Bhutias, which may be classed as imports<sup>62</sup> were the following- 150 Ponies, value Rs. 15,000 (an average of Rs. 60 each); 111 sheeps, value of Rs. 333; 23 Dogs, Rs. 115; 1989 amount of salt of Rs. 9945, or Rs. 5 per mound; 80 *tolas* of Gold of Rs. 1600; 5058 Blankets of Rs. 15,174; 101 Yak tails of Rs. 101; 42 *tolas* musk of Rs. 420; 158 mounds wax of Rs. 6320; 100 mounds lac of Rs. 1000; walnuts 10,000, Rs. 31.4.0; 10,813 bundles dye of Rs. 56.5.0; 6060 needles of Rs. 47.5.6; 15,844 turnips of Rs. 247.9.0; 26  $\frac{3}{4}$  seers Onions, Rs. 5.0.3; 3  $\frac{1}{2}$  seers garlic of 10  $\frac{1}{2}$  annas, 128  $\frac{1}{2}$  mounds Chilies of Rs. 321.12.0; Spices 118  $\frac{1}{4}$  mounds, Rs. 591.8.0; 506 Bhutia bags of Rs. 126.8.0: total value of imports, Rs. 50,425.14.3 or £ 5042,115,9  $\frac{1}{2}$  d.

In exchange for the above articles, the Bhutias took away with them the following<sup>63</sup>- Exports:- 2436 mounds Paddy, value at Rs. 1 per mound, Rs. 2436; 2236 mounds Rice at Rs. 2 per mound, Rs. 4472; 889 pieces of *eri* silk cloth at Rs. 7 each, Rs. 6223; 1063 pieces of Cotton cloth, Rs. 2, Rs. 2126; 919 pieces of *Dunko lepa* cloth at Rs. 4.8.0, Rs. 4135.8.0; 1289 pieces of *Kharu* cloths at Rs 3, Rs 3867; 305 Brass pots weighing 30  $\frac{1}{8}$  mounds, at Rs 60 per mounds, Rs. 1807.8.0; 3 mounds of *Kahore* pots at Rs. 80 a mound, Rs. 240; 246 pieces of bar iron at 12 *annas* each, Rs. 43.2.0; 418 bundles of pan leaves, Rs 84.4.0; 13 mounds molasses (*Gur*) Rs 39; 8 Peacocks, Rs. 8; 13 Parrots, Rs 6.8.0; 20 bundles of Cotton thread, 5 *annas*; 149 seers dried Fish and flesh at 2 *annas* per ser, Rs. 18.10.0; 1 mounds 15 seers tobacco, Rs. 16.4.0; 20 seers rape seed, Rs .1.4.0: total value of the imports, Rs. 25,712.1.3 or £ 2571,45.2d; or almost exactly one-half the value of the import, the balance being taken away in money.

## **Doimara**

Another fair is held at Doimara within Bhutan territory, above 2 miles beyond the British boundary.<sup>64</sup> It is frequented by a class of Bhutias commonly known as the *Sat rajas* of Charduar (Sherdukpens), and is also numerously attended by *rayats* from British territory. A brisk trade is carried on, the Bhutias bringing down salts, chilies, spices, manjit, blankets, wax, rubber etc; and taking away in exchange paddy, rice, *eri* silk, and cotton cloths, etc. The sat Rajas receive an annual allowance of £ 250 from the British Government, as their share of the allowance of the revenues of the *duar* made to the Bhutias chiefs. During the time, the fair lasts, the chiefs come in person to Tezpur to receive their pensions and presents. The Deputy Commissioner has formed with the following statement of the quantity and value of produce bought and sold at the Doimara fair in 1875.<sup>65</sup>

**Imports-** 225 mounds of salt at Rs. 5 per mound, Rs. 1125; 75 mounds chilies at Rs. 5 per mound, Rs. 375; 40 mounds spice (*Jabrang*) at Rs. 3 per mound, Rs. 120; 375 mounds of manjit at Rs. 5 per mound, Rs 1875; 95 blankets at Rs. 4, Rs. 380; 295 Bhutia bags at Rs. 1 each, Rs. 295; 37 ½ mounds wax at Rs. 15 per mound, Rs. 562.8.0; 85 mounds rubber at Rs. 32 per mound, Rs. 2720; total value of Import- Rs. 7452.8.0 or £ 745,55.

**Exports-** 3757 ½ mounds paddy at Rs. 1 per mound, Rs. 3757.8.0; 387 ½ mounds rice, at Rs. 1.4.0 per mound, Rs. 484.6.0; 85 pieces of *eri* silk cloth at Rs. 12 per piece, Rs 1020; 150 pieces cotton cloth at Rs. 2.8.0, Rs 375: total value of export, Rs. 5636.14.0 or £ 563,135,9d.

### **Kherkeria**

A similar gathering of the Bhutias takes place at Kherkeria at the foot of the Bhutan hills, near the Lakshmi *nadi*, but just beyond the British territory. It is however, largely attended by people from Darrang and the neighbouring Districts. Even the Sherdukpen used to participate in this market. W.W. Hunter has mentioned about imports and exports at this fair in 1875.<sup>66</sup>

**Imports-** 20 ponies, value Rs. 1000; 20 sheep, Rs. 60; 2 dogs Rs. 11; 1551 mounds salt, Rs. 7755; 40 *tolas* gold, Rs. 800; 1520 blankets, Rs. 3930; 64 yak tails, Rs. 42.12.0; 6 *tolas* musk; Rs. 31 (2); ½ mound wax, Rs. 15; 26 mounds lac, Rs. 209.10.0; 100 Bhutia *daos*, Rs. 500; 750 bundles dye, Rs. 23.10.0; 240 packets needles, Rs. 11.4.0; 59,077 turnips, Rs. 309.12.0; 12 seers spices, Rs. 7.2.0; 160 pieces gum, Rs. 2.8.0; 1244 mounds spice (*Jabrang*), Rs. 2488; 40 Bhutia bags, Rs. 10; 20 mounds chillies, Rs. 20: total value of imports, Rs. 17,226.11.0 or £ 1722,135,4 ½d.

**Export-** 5609 *dholls* paddy at 4 *annas* per *dhol*, Rs. 7640; 223 piece, *eri* silk cloth at Rs. 8 per piece, Rs. 2664; 254 pieces cotton cloth at Rs. 2.8.0 per piece, Rs. 635; 227 pieces *dunko lepa* cloth, Rs. 860; 203 pieces khara clothes at Rs. 3, Rs. 609; 29 bars of Iron at 10 *annas* each, Rs. 18.2.0; 300 small brass pots at 2 *annas* each, Rs. 37.8.0; 805 bundle of Pan leaves at ½ *annas* per bundle, Rs. 25.2.6; 775 *pons* betel nuts, Rs. 197-4-0; 8 mounds molasses (*gur*), Rs. 24; 194 mounds dried fish, Rs. 3; 2 mounds tobacco, Rs. 20; 15 seers oil, Rs. 6.8.0: total value of exports Rs. 16,078.12.6 or £ 1607.175.6d

## FAIR STRUCTURE

At Udalguri, Sadiya and Doimara military and police guards were kept during the fair days.<sup>67</sup> A military guard of fifty men from Assam Light Infantry or native Infantry used to guard Udalguri fair besides the police guard of one sub Inspector, Head constable and Contstable.<sup>12</sup> A mouzadar used to keep the account of imports and ex[ports]. At Doimara the tradition was to maintain the guard consisting of one Head Constable and eight constables to collect the statistics of imports and exports.<sup>13</sup> Similar police arrangements were also maintained as Sadiya. Accounts of exports and imports were kept from local merchants at Sadiya. The usual accommodation for the hill people consisted of long sheds constructed by Government sufficient for shelter of some hundreds people at a time. To each family on arrival was allotted a small space in the sheds which the members again partitioned and formed residence while in plains. The following are the exports and imports items of the hill people at the Three fairs.

**Table. No.7.** Export and Import Item form the three Trade Fairs.<sup>68</sup>

Udalguri		Doimara		Sadiya	
Exports	Imports	Exports	Imports	Exports	Imports
Pony	Paddy	Salt	Paddy	Rubber	<i>Eri</i> cloth
Sheep	Rice	Chilly	Rice	Wax	Bead
Dog	<i>Eri</i> Cloth	Spice	Cotton	<i>Mishmitita</i>	Iron-utensils
Yak's tail	Cotton cloth	Dye	Cloth	<i>Mishmi</i> cloth	Silver earring
Salt	Brass pot		Brass		
Blanket	Pan leaf	Wax	Steel	Spear	Silver Ankle
Musk	Betel nut	Rubber	Dried Fish	Dan	Muslin
Chilly	Molasses			Knives	Iron
Spice	Dried-Fish	Fowl	Mat	Basket	Broad cloth
Orange	Dried-Fish	Madder		Bag	Coraj
Dye	Tobacco	Sheep		Mat	Opium
Lac	Rape seed	Pony		Elephant tusk	Buffalo
Needle	Bell-metal pot		Bag		
				Boat	Cattle
Bag	Bar rion		Ivory	Bell metal	
Gold	Peacock		Amber	Plates	
Walnut	Parrot		Honey	Steel	
Onion	Cotton thread			Rice	Tobacco
Garlic	<i>Eri</i> thread			Rhinoceros horn	Oil
				Rug	English hread
					Handkerchief
					American Drill
					Tea
					Sugar
					Cambric
					Molasses
					Cup

Source: Report on the Administration of the province of Assam, 1875-76, 1904-05

The export items of the hill people at the fairs consisted mostly of forest resources and their handlooms and handicrafts. Sherdukpens brought down domesticated animals in considerable number. In the absence of surplus production, Agricultural produces played little role in export trade of the hill people. The Sherdukpen exported rock salt which they brought from Tibet. As far as the tribes were concerned,

salt was in great demand among the tribes who came down to Sadiya fair. The Sherdukpens depended on plains for their supply of paddy and rice. The hill people also imported manufactured goods from fairs. There has been marked decrease of Sherdukpens visiting the Udalguri fair. They might have concentrated at Doimara<sup>69</sup>

## LOCAL TRADE

In addition to the annual fairs, trade between the hills and plains continued as in pre-colonial period throughout the calendar year.<sup>70</sup> As a matter of fact, as the brisk trade in the fairs began to decline since the closing years of the last century the local trade flourished and became more popular due to the greater facility offered by the *marwaris*. The authorities could not encourage trade in any and every place as it was its responsibility to provide security to the traders and the local people. It was essential that the trading activities should be limited to marts and markets where the officers could exercise full control. Sometimes the administration took upon itself to establish stores to supply essential commodities to hill people and set up marts for the collection of hill produces. The normal trade was thus more organized and controlled during the colonial period. The markets could develop only in frontier and in some advance posts. In some places within the hills the *marwaris* started shops on permit basis. Sadiya for example, had developed almost into market-town where permanent constructions were set up and police and military posts located. Some European and Marwari companies made fortune by engaging themselves in elephant and rubber trade. The more prominent among the weekly markets where considerable trade occurred were at Subankhatta, Kherkaria, Kalaigaon, Amratol, Lalukdoloni, Nizamghat, saikhowaghat, Bamjur, Bhismanagar, Silanimur, Orung, Lohabara etc. some of the tribes visited Dibrugarh, Golaghat, Tezpur and Mongoldoi towns for trading purposes.<sup>71</sup>

The Sherdukpen had trade relation with the Monpas in the north, Mijis and Akas in the east and the Khowas and Buguns in the south. The Sherdukpens depend on Buguns to supply of food-stuffs such as maize, potatoes, taro, etc in exchange for salt, *endi* cloth and cattle as they are bound by an ancient oath to supply their surplus stock of food. Because food production is so precarious, the Sherdukpens also depend in



large measure for their support upon an extensive trade. In this the mithan is an important item. "Cows" (females of common cattle) were traded to the Aka on the east for *mithan* bulls, and for these the Sherdukpen find a ready and profitable market among the Monpa and Bhutanese to the west and north. Both of these peoples value the *mithan* as a breeding animal from which to obtain sturdy hybrids for ploughing.<sup>72</sup>

There used to be regular trade exchange in *mithun* and cattle among the far western Daflas (Nyishis), the Ghuso (Akas), the Bugun, the *Senjithongji*, the southern Monbas and the Bhutanese.<sup>73</sup> This trade involved a long process, *mithan* and cattle changing nearly six hands. The Daflas, the Ghuso and the Bugun who only rear *mithan*, want cattle for meat, while on the other hand Bhutanese who maintained the best stock of cattle need bull *mithan* for crossing purposes and also the Monba and the *Senjithongji* are required to keep a fair number of cattle for agricultural purposes and trade. This trade went well for a long time as there was always a good margin of profit, as animal changed hands, the price of a *mithan* increasing arithmetical progression from 3 to 4 head of cattle in the Daflas hills to 16 to 20 head of cattle by the time it reached Bhutan. But later the overbearing *Ghuso* and the *Lamai* made such a nuisance of themselves by robbing the *Senjithongji* and the Bugun of all their legitimate profits, in the form of extortion of tribute, by frequent visit to their hills. That it became impossible for them to carry on the trade. A few *mithan* have been brought to *Thongthui* and exchanged for cattle.<sup>74</sup>

## **CROSS-COUNTRY TRADE**

In spite of the best endeavour to retrieve and continue trade with China, Tibet and, Burma on the Assam frontier nothing much could be achieved in this respect. The annexation of Burma had earned for the British the markets there, and, as a result, nothing particular was done to motivate the Burmese traders to visit the Assam markets and to introduce trade between Assam and the Chinese province of Yunan through Upper Burma. A trade route, even a rail link, to Western China from Sadiya through

Mishmi Hills for sometime occupied the attention of the British, but the hostile relations with China since the beginning of the present century negated the proposal.<sup>75</sup> The Burmese trade became localized to the Singphos and the Nagas on the bordering areas, and Mishmis maintained limited trade connection with the Chinese in the later years. As a result the cross-country trade of Assam was possible only with Tibet through Tawang and the Tibetan merchants continued to visit the fairs at Udalguri and Doimara throughout the colonial rule.<sup>76</sup>

In the earlier period, a regular trade was carried between the present West Kameng and Tawang districts with Tibet as well as with the plains of Assam along the trans-Himalayan route. Goods were brought annually by the traders of Assam and the Tibet to some established marts. The goods from Assam were rice, coarse silk, iron, lac, skins, buffalo horns, pearls and corals (first imported from Bengal). The imports from Tibet were woolen, gold dust, salt, musk, horse, *Chow-ries* and Chinese silks. In 1809, the trade amounted in value to two lakh of rupees, despite the fact that Assam was then in a state of turmoil. Due to the continued disturbances and disorder in Assam in the early nineteenth century had eventually affected the trade, but even in the year before the Burmese invasion of Assam (1816-24), the merchants from Lhasas were said to have brought down gold amounting in value to Rs. 70,000. Due to the Burmese occupation of Assam the annual trade was stopped for time.

There used to be trade block at Rupa and Shergaon (Sherdukpen area) where they collect tolls from traders using their route while coming down to Doimara.<sup>77</sup> The Sherdukpens also want to justify this toll saying that they have to take a good deal of trouble in clearing the paths from Rupa and Shergaon to Doimara very year and people using it must pay some thing which goes to the Temple Fund. It is a very long standing practice for the *Dzongpons* to collect tolls and as the proceeds go to the Monastery it will require very careful handling to put a stop to it

A remarkable feature of Sherdukpen life is the annual migration to a place called Doimara.<sup>78</sup> At the beginning of the cold weather, the entire tribe (with the exception of

few caretakers and very old people) used to move south to a settlement a few miles from the plains. They leave their comfortable houses and the lovely scenery of their valley and go to live in a heavily forested, malarious camp of small huts for several months. They return in March or April, when the weather becomes warmer.

The original aim of this seems to have been to extract taxes from the plains-people; today it is a sort of picnic, a change, a holiday at hill-station in reverse, which everyone enjoys enormously. The Sherdukpens have many friends among the Kacharis, whom they used to tax, and they have business relations with them and other inhabitants of the plains at Missamari, Rangapara and elsewhere. A very few friendly relations still existed. The Sherdukpens go with suitable offerings to Bihu and other festivals: the plains-people send gifts of cloth for prayer-flags and *pan-supari* for the *Khiksaba* festival. The Sherdukpens are received with honour and hospitality in the houses of their Kachari friends.<sup>79</sup>

## **TRADE ROUTES/ COMMUNICATION**

There were trade routes from the plains of Assam (from Doimara) to Tawang and Tibet through the Sherdukpen area. The paths from Rupa and Shergaon follow the routes Tongre Wo and Bompou La, Pankim La and Blonksong and meet at Doimara. The Nargum Chu and Shergaon paths meet to the north *Domkho* whence the path goes north to Dirang *dzong* and Tawang. The Rupa path goes north to Dirang *Dzong* via Bomdila and Rahung. All these paths are used by traders coming down from Tibet and Tawang.<sup>80</sup> There was another pass, which comes from Kalaktang and Shergaon and these places run through Dirang *Dzong*, Nyukmadung and the Se La to Tawang *Dzong*. It is fit for pack transport.<sup>81</sup>

The Udalguri fair was held in Kariapara *duar* in Mangaldoi sub-division of Darrang district, about ten miles from the foot of the hills and about twenty-five miles

from Mangaldoi.<sup>82</sup> The Monpas known also as Tawang Bhutias and Tibetans in a considerable number frequented Udalguri using Amratol-Udalguri trade route.<sup>83</sup> The Doimara fair was held at a place three miles beyond Assam frontier and about twenty five miles in a straight line north-east of Udalguri.<sup>84</sup> (Report on the Administration of the province of Assam for 1876-77). The Sherdukpens of Rupa and Shergaon frequented Doimara through Rupa-Doimara and Shergaon-Doimara routes.<sup>85</sup> Ponies, sheeps and mules were engaged by Monpas, Sherdukpens and Tibetans for carrying their loads to and from the places of fairs. The Sadiya fair catered to the needs of the Adis, Mishmis, Singphos, Khamtis and Duaniahs. There was no fixed route for these tribes as there were a number of passages from the hill territories to the plains of Assam. The Adis, Mishmis, Singphos, Khamtis and Duaniahs descended to plains traversing dense forest and rugged hills crossing the river by boats.

Similarly, from plains a large number of Marwari trading community and Assamese attended the fairs. European planters from Tezpur and Mangaldoi and traders from Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur frequented Sadiya fair.<sup>86</sup> A large number of Kacharis attended Udalguri fair. Udalguri and Doimara were connected by roads with other places of Assam. Fourteen and half miles road from Orang to Udalguri carried much traffic during fair days. Sadiya was connected by Assam Trunk Road which linked Bhrmaputra at Saikhowaghat and reappeared on the north bank where for 3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> miles it continued to Sadiya.<sup>87</sup> The Brahmaputra could be crossed by ferry at Saikhowaghat. The construction of Dioru Sadiya railway between 1885-1903 which linked Saikhowa further added convenience to traders of plains. A daily service of passenger steamers and a fine fleet of cargo boats owned and managed by the India General Steam Navigation Company plied on the Brahmaputra between Goa-lundo and Dibrugarh. Above that town, traffic was carried on by country boats, but vessels of four tons burden could go as far as Sadiya.<sup>88</sup>

Captain G.S. Lightfoot writing to J.P. Mills during June 1938 from camp Towang states that "There is one practicable route, and that is via Doimara, Rupa, Phutun to Dirang. This road may be divided into 2 parts, one of three days march, from

Doimara(the furthest place to which wheeled traffic will be able to go in the event of the road being improved) to Rupa, and the second part, a road of three marches to *Dirangdzong*.”<sup>89</sup>

## **GROWTH OF TRADE**

During the period at Doimara, the Sherdukpens carried on good trade. The important articles of import of Assam at this fair were rubber, slat and dye. In 1876, 85 maunds of rubber was imported which amounted to Rs. 2720.<sup>90</sup> The import of the dye was 375 maunds and slat 225 maunds which amounted to Rs. 1,875 and Rs. 1, 125 respectively<sup>91</sup>. In 1878 the amount of salt imported was 357 maunds and 22 seers which gave Bhutias a cash of Rs. 2,082.<sup>92</sup> The value of rubber imported in the same year amounted to Rs. 3102<sup>93</sup> according to the Deputy Commissioner of Darrang, Lieutenant Colonel J. Sherer, there was no reason to suspect the correctness of the trade statistics as the registration of trade statistics, rendering it almost impossible for traders to evade him. In 1883 the import of Assam from Doimara amounted to Rs. 72, 923 and export Rs. 33, 644.<sup>94</sup> The trade decreased in 1884 and in 1885 the trade showed a further falling off. This was mainly because the hill people not having come to terms with the rubber *mahaldars* about the price. As a consequence, no men were sent into hills to tap rubber. The important articles of exports of Assam at Doimara fair were rice, paddy and *eri* cloth. In 1876, 3737 maunds of paddy were exported from Assam which amounted to Rs. 3,737.<sup>95</sup> (Rice was exported worth of Rs. 4,84,400 and sale of *eri* cloth amounted to Rs.1020 in value.<sup>96</sup> In 1877, the sale of paddy amounted to 6,998 mounds, Rice 654 maunds and *eri* cloth 139 numbers which in value stood as Rs. 6,998, Rs.2155 and Rs. 1, 668 respectively.<sup>97</sup> In 1878, 2499 maunds and 20 seers of paddy(worth of Rs. 2,500), 861 maunds and 40 seers of rice(worth of Rs. 19,418) and 124 numbers of *eri* cloth worth of Rs. 1117.91 was exported from Assam.<sup>98</sup> In 1883 the total export figure rose up to Rs. 33, 644.<sup>99</sup> But later period witnessed a decline of both export and import.

## **EXCHANGE (BARTER) AND DISTRIBUTION OF PRODUCE**

Barter is a method of exchange by which [goods](#) or [services](#) are directly exchanged for other goods or services without using a [medium of exchange](#), such as [money](#).<sup>100</sup> It is usually [bilateral](#), but may be multilateral, and usually exists parallel to monetary systems in most developed countries, though to a very limited extent. Barter usually replaces money as the method of exchange in times of monetary crisis, such as when the [currency](#) may be either unstable (e.g., [hyperinflation](#) or [deflationary spiral](#)) or simply unavailable for conducting commerce. Contrary to popular conception, there is no evidence of a society or economy that relied primarily on barter.<sup>101</sup> Instead, non-monetary societies operated largely along the principles of gift economics. When barter did in fact occur, it was usually between either complete strangers or would-be enemies.<sup>102</sup>

While one-to-one bartering is practiced between individuals and businesses on an informal basis, organized barter exchanges have developed to conduct third party bartering. A barter exchange operates as a broker and bank in which each participating member has an account that is debited when purchases are made, and credited when sales are made. Compared to one-to-one bartering, concerns over unequal exchanges are reduced in a barter exchange. Sherdukpens are reported to have trade exchange with the neighbouring communities for meeting up their requirements. They used to supply musk, blanket, cowtails, ponies, rock salt and different kind of embroidered cloth and silk. However, the main articles of hill tribes constituted of forest products, for example, Aka rubber, Nyishi manjeet, madder, wax, musk, etc. The Sherdukpens had also exchanged cow with the mithan of Ghuso, Nyishis, Bugun, Monpa and Bhutanese. They probably might have exchanged a good number of rice with the neighbouring tribes as they were poor cultivators and lacked sufficient amount of rice.<sup>103</sup>

## **FOREST RESOURCES**

The Sherdukpen area is rich in forest resources. Common species found in the forest are pine, oak, deodar, walnut, rhodendron, cane and bamboo. The villagers have

absolute right over their forests and the government does not impose any restriction on use of forest. The main forest produces are timber, firewood, bamboo and cane.<sup>104</sup>

## **VEGETATION**

The vegetation types<sup>105</sup> include lowland evergreen forest, bamboo forest, broadleaved evergreen forest, coniferous forest, sub alpine forests, fir forests and roadside scrub. The vegetation is of tropical wet evergreen in the lower areas near Kalaktang and Ankaling (about 1,000m elevation), subtropical and temperate (with both broadleaved and coniferous) occurring above an altitude of 1,800m around Shergaon and Rupa. Various species like Oak especially *Quercus incana* and *Quercus serrata*, *Magnolia* sp., *Rhododendron* sp. and pine (*Pinus roxburghii*, *Pinus wallichiana* and *Pinus kesiya*) dominate the vegetation of the region. Fir forests are prevalent at elevations more than 2600 meters extending up to the timber line along with sporadic individuals of spruce.<sup>106</sup>

## **FOREST TYPES**

East Himalayan Sub Tropical Wet Hill Forests extend from Dahung, Jigaon, Shergaon, Tenzingaon, Kalaktang upto the foothills region, while the Lower level Blue Pine Forests are found from Rupa to Shergaon.

## **USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

The forest area is under the traditional ownership and de facto control of the village councils, and they have rights over most of the grazing lands.<sup>107</sup> High altitude meadows (4,200–5,000 m) and rhododendron areas (4,000–4,500 m) are grazed by livestock during summer. Forests are also used for collecting fuel wood, timber, bamboo for house-building and oak *Quercus* sp. leaf litter for manure. Timber is usually used for bonafide uses but occasionally commercially traded within the villages, with fir *Abies densa* being the most important species. In the higher regions Rhododendron shrubs

and trees especially red oak are valued as firewood. Leaves and small branches are taken from *Juniperus* spp., a tree of extreme importance in Buddhist rituals and culture. Collection of medicinal plants especially *Swertia* sp., *Rubia cordifolia* and *Picrorrhiza kurrooa* is another economic activity. Fruits of star anise *Ilicium griffithi*, sold as spice, are also permitted for extraction. Bark of *Litsea sebifera*, *Oroxylum indicum*, canes and *Cinnamomum iners* are also extracted from the forests by the locals. There is a rapid decline in the abundance of minor forest produce including medicinal plants because of unregulated collection. Extraction of *Taxus baccata* leaves was banned as a result in 1992. The Forest Department is assessing the availability of various such non-timber forest produce and issuing permits for their extraction to ensure sustainable harvesting of natural resources.

## **Timber**

Timber harvesting was done on a permit system prior to the Supreme Court ban on green felling in 1996.<sup>108</sup> Thereafter, tree harvesting is done as per an approved working plan. The working scheme for timber extraction in USF areas expired in 2010. Therefore, the draft working scheme is submitted to the Government of India for approval.

## **Non -Timber Forest Produce<sup>109</sup>**

Harvesting of non timber forest produce like canes is done as per an approved working scheme. Chirouta, Laneru, Star Anise (Litchi) and bamboos are harvested from the forests after scientific assessment of their stock and prescription of sustainable quantities to be extracted very year.

## **SIMPLE INDUSTRIAL ACTIVITIES**

### **Cane and Bamboo Industry**

Household utensils and baskets and mats are the main items prepared with cane and bamboo. Mugs, jars and containers of the preparation and storage of beer are of various shapes, and are also made from these materials.



### **Carpentry:**

The Sherdukpens are keen carpenters<sup>110</sup> and use wood for making doors, boxes, tables, chairs, benches and saddles. Cups and bowls for taking food and drinking are also carved. With more and more Sherdukpen boys learning carpentry work in the Cottage Industries Training cum production centre at Bomdila, they are reviving as well as improving their own indigenous methods of carpentry by learning the use of saws and other carpentry tools for making various articles of manufacture.

### **Smithy**

The people of Jigaon are known for their skill in smithy and produce *daos*,<sup>111</sup> knives, hatchets and sickles out of iron imported from the plains. There is also a well known silversmith who makes attractive necklaces, pins, bracelets, cups and sheaths for *daos*.

The forge is worked with charcoal fire, the charcoal being prepared by the smith especially, and is furnished with bellows manipulated by pulling strings. The anvil may be either of iron or stone. Pig iron and scrap are used widely.

### **Grain- grinding:**

The Sherdukpens grind their grain on the grinding stones, which are found in every house. They also have indigenous water mills or *sachkhar* for this purpose which is found in all important villages.<sup>112</sup> The water mills are situated by the sides of rivulets or streams, usually near a fall where the flow of water is very strong. A typical water mill is a two storied structure. A typical water mill is a two storied structure. The lower chamber contains the water wheel with horizontally inclined blades which are driven by the water power, and the upper one contains two mill-stones each about 2 ½ feet in diameter. A long iron bar which passes through the central hole of the lower mill – stone connects it with the centre of the water wheel. Water is conducted into the lower

chamber through wooden pipes and is made to fall on the wooden blades from some height. The force thus generated succeeds in turning the wheel. Grain is fed into the mill through a funnel- shaped basket which passes in between the mill- stones through a hole and is ground to flour. Slight rise or lowering of a lever increases or decrease the gap between the grinding stones thus providing an arrangement for regulating the fineness of the flour.

### **Liquor- distilling:**

This is a side occupation of the Sherdukpen women. The indigenous drink, called *phak*, besides being served on all social and festive occasions, is an important item of diet.<sup>113</sup> It is taken by everyone in the family irrespective of age and sex. The rich and influential people drink in small wooden bowls chased with silver on the outside. The Beer is brewed in every /house from powdered maize or other cereals. The cereal is boiled, spread out and allowed to cool after which yeast derived from certain herbs is mixed with it to set in fermentation. On the following day the paste is placed in a large earthen pot and a small quantity of water is added. The mouth of the vessel is securely fastened for a few days until the required degree of fermentation takes place. The contents of the pot are then squeezed through a sieve. The resultant brew is the local beer. The brew is stored in rectangular bamboo or wooden receptacles and is offered to every guest who visits the house, as a sign of hospitality. The use of beer, it is held, makes the people joyful and high spirited.<sup>114</sup>

### **Honey Collecting:**

The Sherdukpens collect honey called *chhi* from hives found in the jungle and do not themselves keep bees. The method of extraction is crude. First a fire is lit and its thick smoke directed towards the hive so as to drive away the bees. Then a rope ladder along with a basket is hung from the top of the rock in such a fashion that the basket is

poised right below the hive. A man goes up to the top, covering his entire body with bite-proof clothes, and detaches the combs with certain implements made of bamboo.<sup>115</sup>

The contents of the hive fall into the basket kept below. Raw honey thus collected is taken home where it is churned in a churning machine so as to separate the wax. The honey thus obtained is then filtered through a piece of cloth to get the pure product. The honey is taken with food; with fried maize it is considered a delicacy. It is also used as a medicine for curing cough and cold.

## **PRODUCTION OF ART AND CRAFT**

### **Weaving-metal work-wood carving-**

Sherdukpens women are fond of weaving, which they do on the usual loin-loom. They make attractive bags in coloured designs, sashes to be tied round the waist of both men and women, and the large pieces of cloth called *bogre* which are used as slings for carrying things. For this they use yarn obtained from the bazaars or home-made thread obtained from bark of nettle. The women have to cover their hands with cloths in order to remove the leaves from the stalk of this plant before they are able to extract the fibre.<sup>116</sup>

### **Mask making**

How and when the masks have come into use among the people, namely, the Monpas and Sherdukpens of the West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh is not known. It is, however, reported that with the spread of Buddhism among them, the masks have entered their culture to personify invisible spirits or supernatural beings, and to express the malevolent and benevolent benefit of the supernatural power on human beings. Moreover, the masks enable the followers to understand the theme of the religion more effectively. The masks are used mainly in the dances which are connected with religious performances. When masks are used in the dances, the dances are called as mask dance.<sup>117</sup> These were prepared by many great Buddhist

teachers like *Lopon Rimpoche*, *Pemalingpa* and *Shabdung Rimpoche*. The mask dance is very old dance among the Buddhist monks. The mask is more than an object, it is a living character, be it human animal or bird. It has to project its salient features to depict the actual meaning and purpose of the dances.

### **Bado-chom or shaw-cham, lhamo chhngkor-cham, yak-cham**

*Ajilamu-Cham* are the main masked dances practiced in the villages and *Gompas*.<sup>118</sup> A group of boy comes forward to learn the dance from the retiring members of a dance party. They rehearse the dance from time to time in a lonely place either in the village *Gompa* or at the outskirts of the village. When the dance is performed on the occasion of festivals or religious affairs, the dancer have to observe certain taboos for week or a day before the dance being staged and in some cases, the prescribed costumes and the specified masks are worn by the dancers. The masks and the costumes are to be arranged by the participants. Often, the interested dancers acquire the masks personally.

The supernatural power is vested on the masks through a ritual called *Ramya*. The ritual is performed by a lama in front of the object sitting at a suitable place he recites a few prayers taking some sweets, flour and lamp. It takes only an hour to finish the rituals. After vesting the power of the supernatural beings on the masks, these become sacred objects. So the people except the dancers hesitate to handle the masks fearing that there may be bleeding in the nose or misfortune may come to the person concerned. It is believed that the dancer have a sort of feeling of the character of the mask, while he puts the same on. Each mask dance carries a legendary story. The story associated with the yak dance is as follows:

**Table No.8.** Eight Numbers of mask required to present the yak pantomime

Local Name	English equivalent
<i>Lhamo</i>	Face of Devi.

<i>Apa-a</i>	Face of old father
<i>Mlengchung Achey</i>	Face of elder brother
<i>Mlengchung Shyekpa</i>	Face of younger brother
<i>Brukpa-ba</i>	Face of yak keeper-cum-owner
<i>Niva-ba</i>	Face of yak keeper
<i>Noba</i>	Face of Buddha
<i>Shyah-ba</i>	Face of a bird

*Source: Field Study*

In addition, there are number of masks among the Buddhist population of the district depicting different creatures and associated with different pantomime dances.

**Table No.9.** A list of the masks

<b>Local Name</b>	<b>English equivalent</b>
<i>Jiwa</i>	Face of rat
<i>Lang</i>	Face of cow
<i>Tak</i>	Face of tiger
<i>Yas</i>	Face of hare
<i>Druk</i>	Face of dragon
<i>Droi</i>	Face of snake
<i>Tah</i>	Face of horse
<i>Luk</i>	Face of sheep
<i>Tchee (Kriu)</i>	Face of monkey
<i>Jah</i>	Face of bird
<i>Khih</i>	Face of dog
<i>Fah</i>	Face of pig
<i>Throm-ba</i>	Face of 'Yum Raj'
<i>Gyamp-ba</i>	Face of girl
<i>Shawa-ba</i>	Face of deer
<i>Shya-ba</i>	Face of 'Garunda pakhi'
<i>Druda-ba</i>	Face of evil spirit
<i>Chhngkor</i>	Face
<i>Chsuksing</i>	Face of crocodile
<i>Chhoigi</i>	Face of god
<i>Lhah Karpu</i>	Face of lover of god
<i>Khymdak Peki</i>	Face of God who is not entangled with sin
<i>Dik phung</i>	Face of sinner

Sources: Field Study

The masks are made out of the wood, and the varieties are known as *shyoheng* and *Chhampo-sheng* locally. The trees are grown abundantly in the forest of Dirang and

Kalaktang areas at West Kameng District. The tree trunk is cut into pieces at the interval of two feet and seasoned for three to four months. The seasoned wood is then framed with the help of *dao*, saw, chisel and file by craftsmen's. Any interested person may be good craftsmen. Only a little bit of interest is necessary to learn the art from the master craftsmen in the village. In lieu of that the trainee may offer his service to the master craftsman. Nowadays, the govt. craft Centres located in the district provide the facilities including a stipend to Rs.100 per month and hostel provision to the local persons to undergo training on the mask making for one year duration. Moreover, after completion of the training the centres extend help and guidance for obtaining financial help from the bank and other institutions to open production centre to the successful trainers and encourage the trainees by purchasing the craft objects for sale at the Emporiums attached with the Craft Centres.

It seems that only two or three carpenters are found to practice the art in the villages and that is also the secondary source of their economy. A craftsman cannot expect to sell the mask regularly in the village. A mask is purchased by local customer only when the existing is worn out or discolored, and new dance party is formed in the village. Because a mask is deemed to be a sacred object which is kept carefully at the village *Gompas* or the dancer keep it at the sacred place in the house. Some of the mask may even last for more than 100 years. But a number of masks are sold out to the non-Arunachalese customers through the Govt. Emporiums. The customers purchase the masks for the decorative purpose. The mask of *Dorjee Dole* (Face of *Raknayas*) mask of *Sunge* (Face of Buddha), mask of *Apara* (Face of old man) etc. are popular masks sold out in the local Emporiums. The mask makers sell the product at the Craft Centre at the rate ranging from Rs. 30/- to Rs. 55/- basing on nature of the mask. They stress to get more money for the labour charges as a mask takes minimum two days' labour to be completed. At the same time of manufacturing of the mask no taboos are to be observed by the makers. A mask is not handled by womenfolk though there is no taboo to do so. Mask making by the women is not prevalent. There is also no particular clan among the tribes meant for the purpose.

The masks are painted for which several colours are depicted to bring out the actual picture of the inanimate or animate object. The colour helps to present the imaginary nature of the object.<sup>118</sup>

## **SCROLL PAINTING**

A religious painting or scroll of Buddha image of the goddess related with the Buddha Dharma is known as *Thangka*.<sup>119</sup> Legend has it that once Buddha was led by the God *Brahma*, how the religion would be spread in his absence. As soon as Buddha concentrated his mind on the matter a ray along with the goddesses –*Changna*, *Khayanzung* and- *Zopa Yeshi Karmu* came out from his forehead. The goddess- *Zopa, Yeshi Karmu* was requested by the other two to create statues of some of the deities to help in spreading the Buddha religion. Accordingly, he made the statues. Later on, a devotee of Buddha depicted the statue with a view to make these in different parts of the world. These pictures are the *Thangka*.

### **Purpose of the *thangka*:**

A *Thangka* is primarily an object of worship. At the centre of a deity resides when the mantra 'Om aa hun' is written on the back side of *Thangka*, and the *puj ramya* is performed by a *Lama* (priest) for it. A *Thangka* has got no value for the people for the purpose of worshipping unless the very words are depicted. *Thangka* is being established at household altar performing the *puja amya*. The images of the *Thanka* help the worshipper to concentrate the mind on the particular deity. There is a belief that if a *Thanka* is offered at the *Gompa* (Temple) in the name of the deceased person, the departed soul will rest in peace until it takes rebirth. The *Thanka* is offered for the purpose after consultation with the holy book with the help of a lama.

The purpose of worshipping of some *Thankas* is given below:<sup>120</sup>

### ***Chakra sum*:**

It consists of two disciples of Buddha, namely- *Seriba* and *Manglba* along with Buddha.



***Dolma ngonmu:***

It is a female deity. People worship her to be successful in the goal.

***Dolma karma:***

It is worshipped for long life.

***Lopon pema jungne:***

The goddess took birth in India on a lotus to get rid of the sinner from the earth. At first she destroyed the bad elements in Tibet, then spread the religion there and came back to India. So, it is believed that the Buddha Dharma was first spread in Tibet through Gautam Buddha, founder of the Buddhist religion took birth in India.

*Rhe* goddess is worshipped to save from sin.

***Chhana dorjee:***

It is made deity. It is worshipped to be free from diseases, attack of evil spirits etc. the deity seems to be remained always in angry mood.

**Zambeyang:**

It is a male deity. People worship him so that they may be kind hearted one towards any living beings.

**Rik-sum-ganpo:**

When the deities-*Chhana Dorjee*, *zambeyang* and *Chandezig* are depicted together in a *Thangka*, it is called *Rik-Sun-Ganpo*. It is worshipped to obtain the bless of all the three deities. (*Rik-Class*, *Sum-three* and *Ganpo-Deities*).

**Cipi kholo:**

It is a *Thangka* not meant for worshipping but for teaching the followers of Buddha Dharma. The images of *Thangka* present how the human beings are punished at the unseen world for doing sin at the earth.

**Process of *thangka* making:**

The *Thangka* is made by painting on a piece of cloth. A rectangular or square piece of white cloth after stitching its borders is tied to be remained like a paper in a wooden frame by means of thread. The frame is made by fitting four strips of wood. The ends of the strips are fixed to be a rectangular square shaped frame called '*Gyagshing*'. Different sizes of frame are needed for different sizes of scroll painting. A thin coat of glue prepared from animal skin locally called '*Pin*', small quantity of enamel paint and water is applied on the surface of the cloth, and allowed it to dry up. When the layer of glue is completely dried, it is placed on a piece of wooden plate and rubbed the treated cloth with a piece of ordinary smooth stone after spraying water to make it smooth. The frame with the fitted cloth is again vertically placed on a tripod stand or suspended by means of rope. The outline of the figure is first sketched or copied on the treated cloth with a pencil. While painting is being started with colours with the help of brush, a wooden strip of three feet long is held horizontally on the frame for support. A number of colour is needed for painting a *Thangka*. The prescribed colour of the deity in the *Thangka* is traditionally followed by the painters lest it may lose its identity. On

completion of the painting, it is detached from the frame, and fixed on brocade locally called '*Goichea*' by stitching. The brocade serves the purpose of border of the painted cloth. Two or three pieces of brocades of different colours are necessary for decorative purpose. Normally, yellow, reddish, blue and multicolour brocades are prepared for the said purpose. A thin layer of paste prepared from the flour and water is applied on the back of the brocade and fixed a loin cloth on it for its durability. Two numbers of wooden rolls are attached at the upper and the lower edges of the painting. Also, two pieces of golden coloured nodes '*Thangto*' are fixed at the edges of the lower roll of the *Thangka*. Sometimes, two pieces of red or yellow colour ribbons are connected vertically with the top and the bottom rolls to be more attractive. The ribbons are locally called '*Gong Shem*'.

### **Taboo**

So far it is known that there is no taboo connection with the *Thangka*. But it becomes a sacred object as soon as the *Ramnya* puja is performed.

### **Materials and its availability:**

The materials used in the scroll painting are cloth, wooden roll, thread, brocades flour and paints. It is believed that the painters were informed by the God through dream about the coloured soils for the *Thangka*.

According the painters prepared the various colours from the coloured soil at Tibet in the olden days. But the utility of coloured soil is no more exist. Even today the coloured soils are found here and there at Tibet. Later on, the painters learnt the art to extract the dye from the herbs and shrubs. *Surgon* is a plant of small size, it gives the yellow stain. Likewise, '*Chat*' is a creeper which gives the red colour. But the painter painters in due course forget the process of extraction of colour from the vegetation. Now a days, the paints of various colours for painting *Thangka* are collected by the local traders from Kalimpong at Sikkim, and supplied at the rate of Rs. 40 p.c. to Rs. 90 p.c. per *kha* is a measurement of square piece of cloth say 80 cm X 90 cm. approx. it

depends on the breadth of the cloth. The animal glue or *pin* may be prepared by boiling some pieces of the raw skin of animal or it may be purchased from the market.

The working tools are the brushes of various sizes for painting, wooden frame wherein the cloth is tight, needle for stitching the cloth, wooden pencil for drawing. Compus may be used when needed. Bowl wherein the paints are to be mixed.

### **Training:**

The painting or scroll of *Thangka* is task reserved for men and boys. It is not that the women and girls cannot do the same. The womenfolk not yet accent it as a professional business. These are a few professional scroll painters among the Monpas, Sherdukpens and Tibetans. But a definite class or clan for the purpose is not found among the tribes, any interested person may learn the art either from the master craftsmen or from the Govt. Craft Center of the District, where the training facilities are extended for the local persons. The local persons may learn the art at the free of cost for three years. A stipend of Rs. 100.00 is also granted to the trainees. On completion of their training period, these artists working at the centre may sell the products at the Emporium, attached to the Crafts Centre. The centre supplies the raw materials and tools to the painters for production of craft objects at the centre itself.

When a person learns the art under the guidance of a master craftsman privately, he may be required to offer kinds or cash according to the demand of the master or he may be learnt at the free of cost. Anyhow, it solely depends on the master.<sup>121</sup>

The chapter has taken into consideration the various traditional activities of the Shedukpen people which centered around hunting, fishing , trapping, rearing of animal, both *jhum* and terrace cultivation, local trade, participation with border trade, besides use of natural resources, forest products and production of various forms of arts and crafts, etc. Though the *posa* comes under economic benefit of the Sherdukpen it was only given to the chiefs thus the common people did not have any economic benefit

from *posa*. The product of traditional art and craft was not only utilized by the people in their day to day activities but also sometime bartered or sold to the neighbouring communities.

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# POLITICAL AND LEGAL INSTITUTIONS

## INTRODUCTION

There were no representative institutions except the village councils in Arunachal Pradesh till 1969.<sup>1</sup> The people of the tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh, though, slow in the development of political institutions, were not entirely unfamiliar with self governing institutions at the village level.<sup>2</sup> Each tribal community has its village council that is functioning as effective village government even after introduction of modern participatory political institutions including statutory panchayat systems. These village councils have existed since early times. The inherent urge of the people to take stock of their problems and deal with them has remained unchanged in Arunachal Pradesh, whereas in other parts of India the age-old village councils of their own type, have undergone changes reflecting their own nature and needs. One cannot say as to when and which point of time in history, these tribal councils had emerged. McIver in this aspect said that origins of these councils are always obscure.”<sup>3</sup>

The term “Political Organization” refers to those aspects of social organization specifically concerned with the management of the affairs of public policy of a society.<sup>4</sup> In other words, political organization is the system of social relationship that provides for the coordination and regulation of behaviour insofar as that behaviour is related to the maintenance of public order. Some form of political organization exists in all societies. The political institutions of a society cannot be properly understood in isolation from its ecological and techno-economic components; or it cannot be meaningfully analyzed apart from its socio-ideological context but rather in connection with the other components of culture.

Lewis H. Morgan and Sir Henry Maine were pioneers who attempted comparative study of political institutions on the basis of facts established through systematic investigation of ways of life outside their own culture.<sup>5</sup> Maine writes: “Their findings were in essential agreement”. Both held that kinship was the bond that held earliest men together and that only the more aggregates formed states, properly

speaking, which were based on territory.<sup>6</sup> Maine further mentions: "From the moment when a tribal community settled down finally upon a definite space of land, the land begins to be the basis of society in place of kinship...". For all groups, men are larger than the family, the land on which they live tends to become the bond of union between them, at the expense of kinship, evermore and more vaguely conceived. Some attempts have been made by scholars to provide some broad frame work of different types of tribal village councils existed in Arunachal Pradesh. According to Raghuvir Sinha,<sup>7</sup> "the political organization of the tribal community is the traditional way in which the society recognizes the exercise of the authority. This authority may be vested in a single individual acting as the headman of the village, or it may be entrusted to a few chosen representatives of the village forming a council of the elders as among the Adi group and acting on behalf of the whole village community whose confidence they may command, or in the third group, the village community may keep the authority to itself, while the first seems to be autocratic set up and the latter two are more popular among those societies where democratic ideas have a social value". These centuries old popular forms of village councils have evolved as administrative mechanism of a local variety for fulfilling purely local needs. As institutions of social evolution, the tribal councils have great potentialities. Established in history and traditions, supported by social and religious sanctions, these institutions are an expression of a genuine democracy, representing the cooperation and communal temperament of the people. The significance of these village councils lies in Arunachal social life where responsibility is often corporate rather than an individual taking decision. The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh knew no state and government other than their village and village council. Their state had its own natural boundary. Their government was their village council which was conducive to their happiness and welfare. Their sovereign ruler was nature; and environment was their policy maker. Territorial demarcation of the village by conspicuous marks such as the course of river, mountain, big stone, tree, etc., proved a territorial compactness and the political cohesiveness to each of them. Of course, the bondage of kinship remained fountain head of tribal nationalism. To quote Charles Metcalfe "The little republic having nearly everything they want within themselves and almost independent of foreign relations; they one forming a separate little state in itself

is in a high degree conducive to their happiness and to the enjoyment of a great portion freedom and independence.”<sup>8</sup> Elwin is of the opinion that tribal councils were a democratic court of the people.<sup>9</sup> These movements of democracy at grassroots will remain a symbol of political rationality for generation to come. Why these tribal government has been running purely on democratic lines is answered in the following statement of B. Malinowski: “The primitive State is not tyrannical to its own subject because, first and foremost, we know that a primitive tribe is always a body of people related by bonds of kinship and relationship, clanship and age grade, where politically everybody is related really or factiously to everybody also.”<sup>10</sup>

## VILLAGE COUNCILS AND THEIR TYPES

There are as many types of village councils as the number of tribes. The character of village council reflects the socio-polity and psychology of the community. Before discussing about the traditional institutions of Sherdukpens, a survey of the types of self governing institutions among the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh is presented below for a better understanding of village councils.

**The Adi:** The *Adi's* village council known as *Kebang*, has essentially a democratic structure.<sup>11</sup> *Kebang* is the most powerful and effective system among all tribal councils of Arunachal. The British explorer Wilcox<sup>12</sup>, who visited the Adi county in 1825 described the “Hall of audience for debate”, where *Kebang* used to meet. He emphasized the fact that every one had equal vote; but it is noted that “though not acknowledged by them, it is evident that some few, either through their superior wealth, hereditary, esteemed or real ability, exerts very strong influence as the rest can readily be swayed over to any measures.”

These *Kebang* organized like pyramids, are of three kinds. At village level, *Bane Kebang*, and *Atok Kebang* are there. *Bane Kebang* is a regular village council body where all men take part at regular intervals. *Atok Kebang* is an adhoc body that sits as and when the need arises. When *Atok Kebang* meets to resolve a particular dispute between two parties or men, the non party and neutral members are generally not allowed to sit. For inter- village disputes, there is an inter village council called *Bango*

*Kebang*. Today it is much larger unit acting, almost like an “Adi Parliament”. The *Bogum Kebang*, the Inter-*Bango*, is the highest and supreme *Kebang* and it has jurisdiction over almost whole *Adi* areas. These highest *Kebang* enacts the laws of society, formulates policies for *Adi* community, and discusses matters relating to war, peace, culture, religion, language, and development.

**The Aka:** The village council of the *Akas* is called *Melley* but *Akas* now have preference for the Assamese word *Riaz*, signifying the people.<sup>13</sup> The *Akas*, like the *Adis* have the system of inter-village council meeting to discuss area of inter- village conflict and co-operation to promote harmony and to co- ordinate activities of neighbouring villages. The “*Nuggu*” (Great man) called *Gaon Burah* (Village head), plays an important role in the disposal of inter-village disputes.

**The Apatani:** Apatanis with their close- knit cooperative social system have their village in close proximity to one another; The Apatanis have developed a much more highly organized system of government, which C. Von Furer Haimendorf described in 1944.<sup>14</sup> The representative of the clans who in their plurality constitute a kind of village Government is known as the *Buliangs*.<sup>15</sup>

The members of *Buliangs* are men of character and ability, who are appointed either from among the members of a family, which owing to its wealth and status, furnish one or tow *Buliangs* or on their personal influence in the community. Though the position of a *Buliangs* is normally hereditary; the persons who had been known for their integrity, ability, wealth, and social reputations are drawn from the members of clans. Though the *Buliangs* are the arbiters of tribal law and the upholders of justice, they are primarily the spokesman of their clan or clan group. In each clan, there are three types of *Buliang*, viz., the *Akha Buliang*, the *Yapa Buliang* and the *Ajang Buliang*. *Akha Buliang* has permanent members. *Yapa Buliang* consists of the middle aged persons, who are the most effective and responsible for all village affairs. *Ajang Buliang* consists of youth turks who assists, *Yapa Buliang* in discharging their duties properly as messengers and in many other ways. The Apatani *Buliang* had a great authority and

influence. *Buliang* intervenes only to bring about a compromise at the stage where the community interest and harmony are threatened.

**The Khowa :** Village council of Buguns (Khowa) called as *Nimiyang* where in each family of the village is represented through its head member.<sup>16</sup> The *Nimiyang* is headed by *Thopobokhaw* who is selected by the members of the *Nimiyang* keeping in view of his record of meritorious services, knowledge of tribal custom and convention and history, character and integrity. Next in hierarchy is *Zongmi* who presides over *Nimiyang* in the absence of *Thopokhaw*. The treasurer of the *Nimiyang* is called as *Gachhams*, who exercises a kind of dual influence on the life of the community.

**The Khamti:** Khamti chief occupies the highest position in the social hierarchy and is regarded as fountain of justice.<sup>17</sup> It is the belief that the chief and his council are the source of law. Chieftaincy is hereditary and he holds his office by virtue of hereditary rule. He is assisted by the council, whose members are elected members. There are written rules (*Thamasat*) on the procedure of election, principle of representation and tenure of office, etc.<sup>18</sup> The Chief and his council administers justice on the principles of their religion i.e., *Theravada* Buddhism. In addition to this, they have a well defined code of rewards for virtue and punishment for sin, in this world and in the next.

**The Mishmis:** The Mishmis do not have a close knit and well organized village institutions like that of the Adis and the Apatanis. The principles that rule them were “head for head, eye for eye”.<sup>19</sup> In Mishimi society, there is no strong village council like the *Kebang* of the Adis or the *Buliang* of Apatanis which can control the individual. However, there exists only a loose form of council locally called “*Abbela*” that too with limited jurisdiction among the Idu Mishmis. The *Abbela* constitutes the elderly males of the villages and most experienced and knowledgeable person is chosen as the head of the council.<sup>20</sup>

**The Monpa:** Monpas have a well developed form of village council with strong democratic tradition and protocol. There is evidence to suggest that Monpas village councils known as *Mangjombana* or *Mangmajon* existed since 11<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.<sup>21</sup> In this system, *Tsoble* (local headman) draws a panel of names of persons suitable for



election as *Tsorgen* (village chief) after making thorough consultation with the villagers. From the panel of names of suitable persons, one who is considered the fittest to become the *Tsorgen* (Village chief) is finally elected through deliberation. *Tsorgen* is elected for a period of three years but he is generally re-elected every three years.

**The Nyishi:** *Nele* is the traditional political institution of the Nyishi.<sup>22</sup> A Nyishi in his village is loyal to his long house that houses several families of close blood relationship. Each household is an independent political unit and thus merely a place of aggregation of household. They had been traditionally utilizing services of a unique arbiter system. The arbiters are called as *Bungreng Bungte* or *Buri*, or *Ayonbo*. These are professional intermediaries who negotiate the issue between parties and try to find out solution as a compromise which is bilaterally acceptable. To quote Elwin, “the *Gindungs* of *Dafla* (Nyishi) society are intermediaries who were trusted in matter of settlement of the dispute.”<sup>23</sup> They go to and fro in the interest of peace and compromise and finally convene a council or a *Nele* or *Nela* which consists of people chiefly concerned, the *Gindung* with local elders and official headman.

**The Nocte:** Nocte traditionally possess a strong political organization represented by their councils of elders and presided over by the chief of each separate section of tribe. The council of elders is called *Ngothun*.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, these bodies have not lost their importance and they still continue to regulate community life. Due to the necessity of centralized authority for the maintenance of law and order, the institution of village chief is hereditary. This has also led to the division of society, into two groups, the chief and his descendents called the *Lowang Jat* and the *Sanajat* respectively.<sup>25</sup> Here system of chieftainship prevails. The council functions like a regular panchayat, maintains law and order, settles disputes within the village and also organizes welfare and development activities.

**The Singpho:** Singpho are a community divided into several clans or small sub-groups, each under a chief. Chieftaincy in Singpho society is hereditary.<sup>26</sup> Theoretically, chief enjoys every power but elders exert some influence and each family operates as an independent political unit while paying some regard to the chief. The village council

of the Singpho is called *Tsa Tangdai* or *Siphang Tangdai*, which comprises of the village chief and elder member of the village community.

**The Tangsa:** Tangsas have a well organized council of elders, called *Khapua*, *Khapong*, *Khapo* and so on.<sup>27</sup> The council consists of a leader called variously a *Lungwang*, *Ngowa* or *Lowang* and a few members, known as a *Sangta*, *Khamba* and *Pedwa*, all chosen by villagers. The *Lowang* (the leader) is quite powerful and his decisions are final. The council of elders resolve all disputes and maintain peace and order in the society.

**The Wancho:** Wancho society like that of Nocte is characterized by the existence of class distinctions. The Wancho's have also the tradition of chieftainship system as the Noctes, each controlling a number of villages. In the Wancho areas, each village has a council of elders called *Wanch-Wangcha*,<sup>28</sup> where in each clan nominates a members. The chief of the village council is called the *Wangham*, who being the head of the council, presides over the meeting of the council of the elders. Several other functionaries with different specified functions assist the chief.

V. Elwin has noted that Noctes and Wanchos were governed by powerful chiefs and that the Sherdukpen and Akas, in spite of having councils of their own, were under the way of aristocratic families who expressed a great deal of influence in their village administration.<sup>29</sup>

As we have discussed, various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh area having different types of village councils with difference in name, composition, power and functions. A similar view is expressed by P.D. Gogoi, in his thesis "NEFA local polity". He has classified Arunachal tribal councils in the following forms. I) Chieftaincy ii) Gerontocracy iii) Democratic iv) Arbiter system.<sup>30</sup> K.A.A. Raja<sup>31</sup> however has described five distinct types of socio political organization of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh as mentioned below:

- a) Republic: an Adi type.
- b) Autocratic: Nocte and Wancho type

- c) Individualistic: Mishmi type.
- d) Theocratic Monpa type.
- e) Apatani type.

Here an attempt has been made to provide some broad frame work classification of the village councils of Arunachal Pradesh into the following three types of frame works:

### **Democratic Frame Work:**

The tribes which are neither individualistic nor socially stratified have conveniently developed the democratic systems like the *Adi Kebang* or *Aka Melly* though they too, earlier used to have chiefs.<sup>32</sup> The democratic frame work can be further divided into two subcategories:

- a) Republican type: In it, the village solidarity is stronger than clan or tribal affinities which operated within the village and inter- village affairs only. All activities of the community work are corporate in character involving joint decision and action<sup>33</sup>.
- b) Theocratic type: Almost all the Buddhist tribes such as Khamti, Monpa, Sherdukpen, and Zhakring can be grouped under this whose political life centers around Buddhism. Their villages, autonomous in internal affairs were knit together under one theocratic government with supreme Monastic authority.<sup>34</sup>

### **Chieftaincy frame work:**

Chieftaincy or authoritarianism can be defined as the rule of a village chief headman who enjoys almost autocratic age old institutions. Hereditary elements are quite prominent in chiefs' council. But in some of the tribes the people used to elect their chiefs.

The D. Ering committee in 1967<sup>35</sup> explains three kind of chieftaincy in Tirap. These three distinctive groups are:

- i) Where the chieftain is powerful and absolute.
- ii) Where chieftain still exercises but no longer absolute, and
- iii) Areas where there are chieftains but all powers in the village body of elders.

### **Arbiter Frame work:**

Some of the tribes, have failed to evolve a full fledged village council or indigenous self- government, like those of Adi and Apatanis take the help of specified system known as arbiter system, which refers to a process where arbitration is done by the people, who are specialized or skilled in settling disputes through negotiations and mediations. This was popular particularly among the Nyishis and the Mishmis, where villages are of small size located at distant places.<sup>36</sup> This system represents neither the authority of the village nor it is a regular body like a village council. Arbiter system gets very few limited functions. First the arbiter arbitrates the disputes assigned to him. Secondly, he has to decide upon the extent of guilt. Thirdly, he has to determine the fine and compensation. Fourthly, he has to be tactful in dealing with the parties. Lastly, by certain rite and feast, he tries to establish good will. This arbiter has the double role of judge and peace maker. An arbiter is not the head of the corporate body of a village.

These village councils have certain feature in common. They all derive their authority from tradition and the fact that they are the expression of the will and power of the whole people. They are supported not only by social, also by the supernatural sanctions, and to give false evidence for example, may call down the vengeance of the gods as well as excite the scorn of men sacrifices are commonly offered to avert supernatural dangers, of divine blessings on councils deliberations is invoked before to bring peace between the contending parties.

These village councils are acting as traditional democratic institutions, which are an integral part of the socio- cultural heritage of the people of Arunachal Pradesh. These institutions have given them a sense of democratic thinking and matured leadership. Tribes of this area have inherited these traditions of democratic life through generations. These democratic practices have become institutionalized and we may see

that the various tribal councils are functioning as they have done for centuries all over territories.

These village councils have played a vital role of village government of enjoying some sort of a sovereign status since time immemorial. There are both legislative and executive wings. These have saved an established form of jurisprudence and law, V.T. Krishnamachari said, "Owing to the life in village communities and measures of autonomy they enjoyed that we achieved social cohesion and stability and succeeded in preserving our traditional cultural values over many centuries."<sup>37</sup> That is how throughout the history, the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh organized themselves through their village councils.

In the want of any central government authority in the interiors, the tribes began to regard themselves as their own master and evolved a set of traditional laws to deal with criminal and civil affairs, without any extraneous interference. Each tribe, though were often subdivided into sub-tribes, clans,. Sub-clans, had territory of its own. The institution of village was very strong and the villages often leave sovereign bodies to decide all internal matters by traditional village councils.

These tribal councils were responsible for ensuring respect for the Socio-cultural order and discipline in the life of the communities inhabiting this area, and to considerable extent, the councils afforded opportunities to the villages to develop a sense of democratic spirit and also a sense of initiative and leadership. Those who are inspired with sense of justice, fellow feeling, dedication were normally accepted as the leaders of the communities and they were closely associated with the village councils.

These tribal councils are essentially and genuinely democratic bodies as there is popular participation in it and the people in the village attend these councils either for redressed of their grievances or with positive proposal for submission to the council which deliberates at length on matters that are brought before them. They are also democratic because they are based on the ideas that are democratic in spirit and function in the democratic way for the general welfare of the people.

The various groups residing in the state have maintained their identity by preserving their customary laws and institutions.<sup>38</sup> As a matter of policy, the administration has also not been zealous to see that these are changed to modern nations and institutions. The policy of not interfering in the matters regulating the social relationship has also enabled the growth of such indigenous system which conforms to the needs and aspiration of the tribal communities. The needs of a large section of the population in the area are thus catered to without having recourse to the application of the general law of the land. The enforcement of law and policy amongst the tribal has mainly been done through their own indigenously set up organizational forum, which are invariably found in the form of village councils or headman, or both. This authority could be exercised in all tribal communities.

The village councils were the basic political unit in all parts of state till the introduction of Panchayati Raj. The village councils still continue to function side by side with the statutory panchayats. The system of self government in Arunachal has evolved through the evolution of tribal society. The nucleus of this system is the village or the inter village councils or also called tribal councils.

## **FUNCTIONS OF TRADITIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS**

These councils are time-honoured institutions deriving their authority from age-old traditions and in fact, they function as village government, giving expression to the will and power of all members of the society constituting them. The village council is the pivot round which the corporate tribal life moves.

A typical village council generally consists of village chief, the local priest and elderly mature, respected and influential persons of the village. All the villagers (adult members) of the community would join and participate in deliberation. Many tribes, however, did not allow their women to take part in the deliberation of their councils, but in recent times, women also can step into the council which was a taboo in the past. In the council, everyone is at liberty to express his opinion even though the final say is the

prerogative of the village council and its leaders. The council was powerful and commanded respect and nothing could be done without its approval.

The jurisdiction of village council is confined to the village only. The council performs three types of functions: judicial, administrative and developmental. The village councils are also responsible for law and for all welfare activities of the tribe and village under their respective jurisdiction. The council is democratic in the sense that all vital problems of the village are freely and publicly discussed. Discussion and persuasion among the members wherever necessary is done, leading to a consensus. All civil and criminal cases are disposed off by the council in the same manner. Every kind of offence is within their Jurisdiction except those committed against state.

The tribal councils are informal in nature and free from legal technicalities and official formalities. They may not have the idea of regular membership, scheduled sessions or any kind of committees and secretariat staff, but they have a fixed place for meetings. The council meets as and when required. Deliberations of village council takes place in a democratic manner. The council allows both the defendant and complainant to speak a careful consideration of divergent statement of the parties and the customary laws. In this way disputes are taken up urgently and justice is administered speedily without the least inconvenience to any of the parties. Justice is free of cost, made available to everyone.

It is neither delayed nor denied for want of money, which is more often a constraint in the modern judicial proceedings. Thus, the tribal system of village justice is cheap, practical, and conducive to harmony in the society. The inter village councils are also prevalent among some communities. The tribal councils afforded opportunities to villagers to develop a sense of initiative and leadership. Those who are inspired with a sense of justice, fellow feelings and dedication are normally accepted as leaders of the communities and they are closely associated with the councils. The village council is the pivot around which the corporate tribal life moves. These councils harness their authority from age old traditions. Tribal social life is governed by the tribal customs and

conventions enforced by village councils. There had been both social and supernatural sanctions behind the authority of village councils. They all derive their authority from ancient times by the fact that they are expression of the will and power of the whole people.

In tribal societies, tribal customs were derived out of supernatural beliefs and religious faith was the sanction behind the customs. To disobey the tribal custom means to assure the displeasure of the God, who is working force behind the dictum of the village council. Social boycott, force, fear of punishment etc., are the other allied but associate sanctions behind tribal laws. A tribal rule of conduct is based upon ethical principles. These are well suited for maintenance of order in society and enable its members to lead their life in peace and tranquility.

## **POLITICAL AND LEGAL INSTITUTIONS OF SHERDUKPEN**

The origin of political institution in Sherdukpen area goes back to the time of Japtung Bura who is considered as the first king of the Sherdukpen.<sup>39</sup> If oral tradition on origin and development of village council is to be believed, it is associated with their migration. As per the tradition, the rule of Japtung Burah was started sometime during the Ahom rule. It is told that Japtung Burah came from Tibet and arrived at Monpa villages of But and Khoina in present district West Kameng at first with his followers<sup>40</sup> where he found that the neighboring communities such as the Aka and Mijis were at constant war. Japtung Bura took initiatives to stop war situation in the area by supplying salt, cloth and cattle to them. Subsequently he shifted his capital from But to Rupa. This is the beginning of administration in the Sherdukpen area.<sup>41</sup> However it is very clear that when Japtung started his rule at Rupa, the Kacharis were ruling in the adjoining region, including Charduar region, upto the foothills of Bhutan. The Ahom ruled Assam from 1228 to 1826 AD.<sup>42</sup> If tradition is taken into consideration, then Japtung Burah would have started his rule in the Sherdukpen area sometimes in early Ahom period, may be during 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century A.D. But interestingly, the *Buranjis*, the historical literature of Ahom period do not mention about the rule of Japtung Burah.<sup>43</sup> However, after the rule of Japtung Burah, we do not know about his descendent neither from literature nor from oral tradition. In the medieval period as per the *Buranjis* the *Charduar Bhutias* identified



as the Sherdukpen were ruled by the *Sat Rajas*.<sup>44</sup> It is believed that after the death of Japtung Burah, there was a vacuum in socio-political life of Sherdukpen. It is in this context for filling of the vacuum of political authority, the major clans (*Thongs*) formed a leadership in the name *Sat Rajas* to establish their own authority in their own Sherdukpen area. Here it may be mentioned that like that of the Monpas of the Kuriapara duar, the chiefs of Sherdukpens were called '*Sat Rajas*' by the local people,<sup>45</sup> the principal among them having the title of *Durjee Raja*.<sup>46</sup> G.A. Nevile,<sup>47</sup> even during early part of 20<sup>th</sup> century (1914-15) reported that the Sherdukpens of Rupa and Shergaon were ruled jointly by a council of twenty headmen, seven of whom were hereditary and called *Sat Rajas*. They started to rule within their own jurisdiction but as per oral tradition later on the *Sat Rajas* (seven chiefs) were engaged among themselves into conflict. Even the bigger problem was the continuous attack by the neighbouring Akas and Mijis. The emerging situations compelled the *Sat Rajas* to think about the problem of security and protection and especially even during the crisis of existence. The necessity would have given rise to a collective body or village council which was originated basically for satisfying the community interest as a whole. Thus the prevailing circumstances would have created a new political structure in the Sherdukpen area.

Earlier the village council started in two major villages<sup>48</sup> that is Rupa and Shergaon, and later at Jigaon. People of Shergaon and Jigaon refer to the village council as *Jung*. While the people of Rupa call the traditional village organization as *Jung Bhu-bla* or *Bhu-Bla*. The *Bhu-bla* is simply known as Shertukpen Council at present. Many of the early writers like Verier Elwin<sup>49</sup> refer to the Sherdukpen council as '*Jung*' thinking that the word refers to the village council of the Sherdukpen as whole. J. N. Das<sup>50</sup> however refers to the Sherdukpen council as '*Jumba*'. As the traditional capital of the Sherdukpen, Rupa village used to control the council in the past and any inter-village dispute was settled by negotiation under Rupa village council.

### **Formation of the Council**

The village council of elder is headed by one or two *Thik Abo Asu*<sup>51</sup> who is selected among the *Abo Asu* (Gaon Bura). The post of *Abo Asu* is not hereditary.<sup>52</sup> The

head of the village council is called *Bakho Asu* who is selected by the *Abo asu* (Gaon Bura). The candidate for the post is selected by the village elders. Besides, the village council consists of other members called *Khumi*. The *Abo Asu* often heads the statutory council introduced by the government as the *Gaon Bura*. The traditional council consists of *Abo Asu* (Gaon Bura), *Jungme Baso* (village council members), the *Kachang* or *Chowkidar*.<sup>53</sup>

### **Selection of village council members (*Jungme Baso*)**

Sherdukpen council is elected by villagers democratically in village forum.<sup>54</sup> As we have seen, the village council consists with various ranks of the members. Such as *Gaon Bura*, acting members, primary member, messenger, etc. The village council consists of members who are basically selected for the individual character and ability.

Every adult member of the society becomes primary members of the council automatically. Thus primary membership is hereditary. Active members are selected from among the primary members. The name of new active member is proposed by the villagers for filling of the vacancy caused by death of an active member or by termination of any member for some reason. Total active members are not reshuffled at a go. Generally the primary membership is not terminated as the membership is the birth right of every Sherdukpen. However, the membership may be suspended temporarily for some period due to dishonesty and major faults. The term of active members is full life span. Their numbers are limited to 10 to 12 only. The active members selected should have qualification like the power of judgment, rationality, impartiality, honesty, good personality, good oratory having proper knowledge about Sherdukpen culture and tradition, good in general aptitude, interest in social work and above all loyalty to the Sherdukpen community. The selection of active member solely depends on efficiency and quality of an individual. Age is not a factor for selecting an active member. Active member is offered to those who are born in respected and rich family. The economic status is considered in this respect. Generally the *Thongs* get first preference in this regard. One who is once convicted by the village council is not

selected. Over all selection depends on the proposal of existing members. Active members represent all clan and hamlets in the council to maintain the equilibrium in the society. Women cannot get the membership of the village council. Even women do not possess the right to speak in the village session. It is because as per tradition, it is believed that women participation in administration is not a healthy sign for the society and is considered as a sign of weak administration and feeble authority. The people also believe that the participation of women may hamper the family life.

Members do not receive any kind of remuneration or share from fines. Active members are also classified into different ranks. The rank of *Barso (Burso)* is offered to middle aged intellectual and well versed person. This post is in the rank of *Gaon Bura*. Generally the number of *Burso* consists of two or three members. *Burso* enquires the case at hand and report its findings in the open session. Thus his report and deliberations play very important role in decision making. Occasionally, *Gaon Bura* depends on his opinion in decision making on controversial issues. He conducts meeting and empowers to declare any decision at the end of the meeting. Unlike the council of other communities of the state, the Sherdukpen restrict speaking at the meeting, unless he is an active member.

Fines are deposited under the disposal of village council for the community development.<sup>55</sup> It is never used for satisfying individual interest. Member are not entertained by villager during the session of the council but at the time of general meeting of village council, members are entertained with local drink by the villagers. Deposited wealth and items are used for arranging community feast. There is no fixed term of office for the council and its members. All decision is taken collectively. As a result hardly the aggrieved party is dissatisfied with the rulings of the council.

## **Gaon Bura**

The *Gaon Bura* is locally called *Abo Asu* (village chief). They are either elected or selected. The office of the *Gaon Bura* is not hereditary and selected or elected by all the villagers in a general meeting. As a rule, once chosen, the *Gaon Bura* holds office for

life or until he becomes infirm. Though his office is not hereditary, his son or younger brother stands a good chance of obtaining the post in future. The selection of *Gaon Bura* is an important event of Sherdukpen community. *Gaon Buras* are selected from among the active members only. Wise and cool tempered person is selected as *Gaon Buras*. The *Gaon Bura* should be a man of hereditary, impartiality, unbiased, man of impeccable character and having good grasp of customary laws and tradition of Sherdukpen. As he is the central figure in the village council, he has to be of high moral character. In the selection of *Gaon Bura*, *Thongs*, considered as upper caste having originated from aristocracy are given preference. As such social hierarchy seems to be given importance in the Sherdukpen village council.

*Thongs* are basically confined to clans i.e. *Thongdok*, *Thongs* and *Kirme* and other sub-clan i.e. *Karmu*, *Musabi*, *Wangja*, and *Thongchi*. Selection of *Gaon Bura* is made democratically. Now a days, this custom of society is not followed in strict sense of term. Selection of *Gaon Bura* is made very cautiously and wisely and hence it takes a lot of time.

As per local tradition, every night villagers used to go secretly near the house of would be *Gaon Buras* and try to listen minutely his manner of talking, administering the family, power of management, rationality, dignity, temperament, etc. Members of village council also discuss among themselves informally about the character, power of judgment, psychological set up, etc. of would be *Gaon Bura*. In the general meeting, any elder member/members may propose a name for the acceptance of the villagers. The villager's votes have to be taken if necessary. If there is one candidate, then there is no need of vote. The proposed name is considered as accepted by all. If there is no objection from anyone, it is then considered as the decision of the community. Then the name is sent to administration for according recognition. In the Sherdukpen community there is more than one *Gaon Bura*. Originally there was one *Gaon Bura* for one village but in Rupa the biggest village was having three *Gaon Bura* like first *Gaon Bura*, second *Gaon Bura*, and third *Gaon Bura*. If the post of first *Gaon Bura* is lying vacant, then automatically the second and third *Gaon Bura* take charge of his predecessor

subsequently and the newly elected *Gaon Bura* will take the charge of third *Gaon Bura*. This tradition is followed with a view to make the newly *Gaon Bura* to have familiarity with the functions of the council. In this way, newly inducted *Gaon Buras* gets necessary experience and training for smooth functioning. The *Gaon Bura* may be dismissed or demoted if he loses the trust of villagers for any major faults.

### **Kachung or Chowkidar**

There may be two or more *Kachangs* or *Khachungpa* in a village to help the *Gaon Bura* in discharging of his duties. The *Kachung* are usually elected every one or two year from every clan on rotation basis. Their main duties are reporting and to act as *dak* runner or messenger. Their duty is primarily to inform each household of the next seating of the village council. Some special quality is required for the selection of *Kachangpa* such as common aptitude, power of observation, discipline, punctuality, good personality, etc. They do not enjoy any special privilege or any remuneration for the job. They have to maintain close relation with *Gaon Bura* for performing routine work of the council. He patrols the village at night. He also looks after the village water supply, sanitation, hygiene, staging hut and helps government officials on tour. He does not get any remuneration.

### **Juinyong Blu (Youth Force)**

The *Juinyong Blu* (youth force) is another sub-body of the village council.<sup>56</sup> The members of youth force are generally from fifteen year old to pre-married age. In Shergaon area this group is divided into four groups locally known as *Thuik*, *Yusir*, *Thonosa* and *Ghuiklong* for conducting village activities.<sup>57</sup> The headman assigns duty to the different groups. This organization is based on Buddhist theology and folk religion. Its primary function is construction and maintenance of religious shrines, *gompa*, etc. In Rupa this group existed and acted as the youth police force who assisted the village council for expediting the decisions of the *Gaon Bura* through forceful means or otherwise.<sup>57</sup>

## **FUNCTIONS OF VILLAGE COUNCIL**

The council has different functions towards the society of the area. There are administrative, development, judicial function, etc.

### **Administrative and developmental functions**

Every council administers their own area. They control their citizens and make rule for discipline life of the people for harmony in the society and for welfare of their citizens. The Sherdukpen village council performs various welfare duties which comes under administrative and development function of the council.<sup>58</sup> These are:

1. Village council looks after the village water supply using indigenous system i.e bamboo pipe.
2. Devotes their efforts to develop sanitary system and hygiene of the village.
3. They take programme to build *kacha* link road, temporary bridges and fencing around the cultivated land.
4. They provide necessary help to build necessary huts for economically distressed person.
5. They allot land for cultivation to the villagers within their jurisdiction.
6. They perform noble responsibility of bringing orphan if he/she is from Sherdukpen blood. They also arrange shelter for them.
7. To maintain integrity and cooperation among the villagers, organize community feast occasionally.
8. They organize and celebrate various festivals.
9. The council helps poor, sick and invalid as their social duty.
10. The council repairs religious establishment such as *Gompas, chorten, manes*, etc.
11. The council extends cooperation to the government officials who visit the village for development purpose.
12. The security of the village is maintained by the council.
13. They also take active part in disposing of the dead body of a person who has no one to look after him.

14. They take very active part in relief operation in the time of natural calamities.
15. The village council initiates to motivate villagers to introduce high yielding crop for the sake of productivity.
16. They fix dates for community hunting and fishing.

On the whole, the village council of Sherdukpen is exclusively a social welfare council. Most of the functions are for welfare of the village. Infact, village councils acts as a welfare state for the Sherdukpen people.

### **Legal functions**

In early days, the council used, to play a very important role in the field of administrative justice. The council sits regularly only two times in a year for the general meetings more or less on fixed days. The dates of the general meeting are fixed at the time of two major festival of Sherdukpen community and usually general meetings are commenced at night with minimum duration of eight hours. The date is fixed according to local time and Tibetan calendar. First general meeting is generally held during the time of *Choikar* festival sometime in the last week of May or first week of June. The day is locally called *Dawa-Jeepa*. The second general meeting is held at the time of *Khiksaba* festival. The date is fixed at a moonlit night of November, locally called '*Dawa-Chupa*'. Beside, if the council finds that there is enough cases to be settled, they can summon meeting at any time of the year but in the fixed place. The council bears all the expense of the meeting and gives a grand feast to the villagers. Date and agenda of the meeting is communicated to the related person by *Kchangpa* timely. After the meeting, *Gaon Bura* declares the decision which is acceptable by the majority. Messenger is sent to convey the council's decision to both disputed party for further action.

The village council settles all petty case such as local quarrels, theft, boundary disputes, dispute regarding division of property, sexual offences, breaking the village rule, attempt to murder, etc. Both civil and criminal cases are tried in the council. The final decision is taken by the *Gaon Bura* who invariably respects the consensus of the

public opinion. The head of every household participates in the proceedings of the village council.

## PROCEDURE OF TRIAL

R.R.P. Sharma<sup>59</sup> describes the procedure of meetings of Sherdukpen council which he came across in late 1950s. It is told that the plaintiff (an aggrieved party in a dispute) used to lodge his complain with the senior most *Gaon Bura*. The *Gaon Bura* then directs the *Kachang* to inform all the *Jungme* (ordinary member) of the village council to attend on a fix date. The village council then assembles to hear both the sides. The case is discussed at the meeting and the opinion of the majority usually prevails. The award is given by the *Gaon Bura* and is final and subjected to certain limitations. The judgement should not be patently unjust. If the dispute cannot be settled by discussion, it is solved by taking the help of oath and ordeal. If however this is not acceptable, the aggrieved party can appeal to the local administration.

The village council used to hold its meeting in the *Gompa*. In some village there is a separate building where the proceedings of council are held. There is a long procedure for settling the disoputes.<sup>60</sup> At first, victim or looser makes a complaint to the *Gaon Bura*. The victim would report verbally to the council with local drinks with a view to complain against anybody or anything. Then *Gaon Bura* will try to understand whether the dispute is valid and will justify whether the case is minor or major. If the case is minor, then *Gaon Bura* will wait for few days to have other cases. Because meeting of the council is time killing factor. Frequent meetings, may hamper the villagers own work in different spheres. So without proper justification and urgency, meetings are not convened. But if the *Gaon Bura* considers the dispute as major, then he can fix a date for the meeting as earliest as possible.

*Gaon Bura* then directs the complainant to attend the meeting. He will bring a local bamboo pot and on the pot three pieces of *Ghee* (Butter), along with three *khatas* and one Rupee. He will put those things infront the *Gaon Bura* at the meeting of the



council and put off his hat to pay respect. Thus, the loser will suit the complain and leave the meeting place.

Then minimum two *Barsos* will be sent to the accused to collect his statement about the complain against him. Then the same *Barsos* will come to complain also and inform him the statement of accused person about the complain. If they feel necessary, then *Barsos* will go again to the accused and want to know his opinion on the basis of petitioner's re-statement. When they feel that collected data is enough to give judgment, they will return to the meeting place. They will also put forward their opinion what they have realized from the statements of both the parties. Generally *Gaon Burah* and village council put emphasis on *Barsos* opinion to settle the dispute. So in this respect *Barso's* role is much important for peaceful settlement. Infact *Barsos* are vital organ for performing judicial function by village council.

In village council proceedings, there is underlying rationality for sending *Barso* (Mediator) to plaintiff and accused to settle the disputes. It is to give the scope to both the party for expressing their opinion secretly in their home not in the public meeting. Because everybody does not able to speak in front of the crowd or otherwise may be nervous and may not be able to express their opinions.

*Barsos* are sent before meeting of the council to minimize the dispute by dint of negotiation before hearing the case because the village council may be divided on clan wise in respect of the dispute sometimes. So with a view to avoid clan biases, *Barsos* (Mediator) are sent. In every step of judicial procedure village council's objectives are to avoid all possibilities of biasness.

If the two conflicting persons are well versed, they can attend the meeting and may present their own statement in the meeting. Previously, there was no system of advocating. But now- a- days advocating is permissible. Regarding minor dispute, both parties can try to settle within themselves informally before going to the village council. After announcement of judgment, accused or convict may appeal to reconsider the

judgment. He may appeal humbly with due regard and loyalty to council to decrease the degree of punishment, if he feels the punishment is too hard or imposing fine is beyond his capacity. But he can't challenge the decision in any circumstances. He has to express loyalty first, then he may appeal. Underlying spirit is that first obey the order and then you protest. It indicates the unique social norms and values of the Sherdukpen society. All individuals of society always readily pay respect on prevailing institution, tradition and social norms.

There are a number of rituals, Ceremonies socio- religious prohibition attached with judicial function of the council. There is fortnightly holiday in Sherdukpen society. That day is prohibited for cultivation, hunting, fishing; cutting jungles etc. if any person breaks those prohibitions, then he will be prosecuted by village council. If eye witness is not available or witness seemed to be not reliable, then the council takes help of the supernatural agencies through ritual procedure. For practicing supernatural agencies, the role of priest is vital in judicial function. At that time only priest is considered as member of village council.<sup>61</sup>

### **Oath and Ordeal**

There are various methods regarding oath and ordeal system to settle the disputes.<sup>62</sup>

### **Trial by ordeal**

When the usual method of providing justice fails, the trial by ordeal is undertaken. In this method, the accused can prove his innocence by offering his scarf in the name of the deity (Buddhist) and uttering (if I am responsible for the crime, blood will come out from my nose and mouth within three days if it is not happen his innocent is proved).In the second method one chicken is killed and the blood of the chicken is poured in a hole and covered with stone so that no one touches it. While pouring the blood into the hole, the *Jiji* (priest) chants *mantras*. It is believed that the guilty would meet some misfortune

such as death of someone in the family, falling from hilltop, from a tree, from a bridge, injured by his own *dao*, snake bite or bite by any animal within seven days.

The council also used to adopt the hot water method. In this method, water is boiled in a metal pot. A piece of tiger skin or a head of a snake is put into the water. The *jijis* administers the process. Then the accused is asked to put his hand into the hot water. If he can bring out his hand without injury, his innocent is proved.

One more method is the black and white stone method. Two stones are kept inside the pot of hot water. The convict is directed to pick up one stone. If he picks up the white stone, his guilt is established because it is traditionally believed that white stone symbolizes God and the God has identified the convict.

When the eye witness and hot water process cannot prove the guilty, the council uses a method called *Tarebappa* process, a long and complex ordeal procedure. Both the parties have to agree for using this method. They have to bring all their valuable properties and hire a *lama*. All the expenses of the process have to be borne by them equally. It is needed to purchase a land for sitting *lama*. The *lama* writes the name of both the parties in separate pieces of paper. Then he puts the two pieces of paper into a round of dough (*Atta*) and puts them in to a silver pot. While praying to god for getting judgment, the *lama* moves the container round and round. In the process one round of *atta* with the paper drops out of the container while in another round, pieces of dough remains inside the container. That name which remains inside the container is considered to be the guilty. On behalf of the council *Gaon Bura* gives reward to the truth teller or innocent by offering garland *khata* with due respect. The guilty person is compelled to give fine to the council.

## **CUSTOMARY LAW**

Custom is an unwritten law established by usage that has been transcended from time immemorial.<sup>63</sup> Like any other custom of the world, Sherdukpen's custom was

transcended from early times. Custom evolves in a society in response to the need of group living. To put it simply, custom is an unwritten law. It is not an arbitrary creation, however, but collective product which is backed by social sanction and not infrequently becomes embodied in law or acquires the force of law.

Customary laws have not been framed by any legislative assembly or parliament and have not thus been codified unlike formal laws of country. Like the codified law, there is no procedure for bringing to book a criminal here whereas Criminal Procedure Code is quite exhaustive. Law of evidence is quite detailed whereas is customary laws, it is whims and fancies of the village authorities. In the present days, people get prejudiced as village politics has affected the life of the people. The customary laws are tried only by the village authority.<sup>64</sup>

“Law” and “Custom” are not one. It is wrong to identify law with custom and to conclude primitive law is the totality of the customs of the tribe. It is mainly uncodified law but it is fully understandable. It is derived and not reality, it is then the abstract average which presupposes variations within customary law. The characteristics of customary law reflect that besides the normative elements, law should have social sanction and it should be compulsive or enforceable and regular.<sup>65</sup> Thus customary laws of a tribal society are a part of social norms and these are unwritten code and these unwritten codes are handed over by one generation to succeeding generations for strict obedience by all member of the community. The customary laws, therefore, have social sanctions and it enjoys every member of the society to fulfill the particular obligation and responsibilities toward the cohesive function of the society.<sup>66</sup>

Every society has its own system of customary laws which were designed to maintain peace, harmony settlement of disputes in the community on the basis of its religious customs, traditions and mode of behaviour. The basic principle of customary laws is to maintain the unity, solidarity of the community with definite behavioural pattern. The belief in the existence of the omnipotent power reinforce with people's

inner faith and support in the system enable the tribal society to live in contentment through the ages.

In the absence of a set of codified laws among the Sherdukpen, it is difficult to categorize the law of punishment in their society as civil or criminal, as these often overlaps each other. In the strict sense of the term it is not feasible to look to their socio-political organization through the mirror of the political system of an advanced society where there are established court of law with judges, juries and pleaders etc. The moral values together with the traditional way pf behaviour sanctioned by mythology come into play in these societies.

Presently the Sherdukpen customary law has been modified and set of rules and guidelines are approved by the council which is followed.<sup>67</sup>

### ***Mih-Mat-Ru***

When a *Thong* married woman dies, the relatives particularly, the brothers of the clan use to give animal or land as *Mih-Mat-Ru* to the husband's family as token sympathy and love. These days money is paid (Rs. 10,000/- equivalent to a plot of land)

### ***Obah-Usu- Sontong***

Under this customary law, as modified by the council the following offences are penalized:

#### 1. *Chao-Mat-Ru*.

When a *Chao* married woman dies the relatives particularly, the brothers of the clan use to give animal or land as *Cha-Mat-Ru* to the husband's family. These days money is paid in place (Rs. 5,000/- equivalent to a plot of land) as passed by the council)

#### 2. Act of Lawlessness.

#### 3. Land encroachment.

4. Negligence of duty by *Chhampo* (Sherdukpen cultural troupe) and *Khikjiji*
5. Violation of Customary laws.
6. Illegitimate relation.

***Lungpu Chik- Khr (rules of the village):***

1. Violation of *Duchin* (as per local calendar of Sherdukpen, during 8th,15th and 30<sup>th</sup> day of month no hunting, fishing or agricultural activities is permitted). If without knowing a person violates then penalty of *Duchin b'hoh Khan* is imposed i.e Rs. 150
2. Indulging in Banned activities.
3. Suicide/attempt of suicide and fire accident.
4. Vehicle accidents outside Shertukpen area.
5. *Kachang Satgo* (*kachangpo* has to give Rs.150/- before he leaves his job as *Kachanpa* after expiry of tenure)
6. Attempt to murder or murder.
7. Rape.
8. Negligence of duty by *kachang*.
9. Hunting with the help of hunting dogs is banned.

## **Divorce**

### ***Mih-Mat-Tohkhan:***

When a husband divorces his wife in *Thong* clan, the husband has to pay a penalty of Rs. 10,000/- (equivalent to a plot of land) under Section 10 (a) of the law passed by the council.

### ***Chao-Mat-Tohkhan***

When a husband divorces his wife in *Chao* clan, the husband has to pay a penalty of Rs. 5,000/- (equivalent to a plot of land) as passed by the council.

### ***Yamlung- jong- Khan***

Forgiveness fine to elders in house by the husband for his guilt (Rs 1000/- only) after divorce case is solved.

### ***Lecso***

As the case is solved so not to mind and forget the past so fine Rs. 1000/- only.

### ***Rong-gung***

Petty fine for quarrelling and beating may be after drunken, personal insult (Rs 300/- only) for minor offences.

However the man need not make payment of *Tohkhan* i.e., to a woman whom he has divorced if:

- she has not given birth to a child from him.
- she has her first child from previous husband or from any other man. Here the first husband or the father of the first child will pay the *Ru (Gum-Zangmu)* and fee pf

penalty will be remitted to the Tukpen Village Council by the girl and the second husband (Rs 750/- each).

- she refuses continuation of marriage without any genuine reason as judged by the council.
- she herself does not want this section to be applied to the man.

If the above is proven then the council judges the woman as the main culprit for divorce (she has to bear the fine of Rs 4000/- to Tukpen Village Council).

### **Illegitimate child birth**

If the council proves illegitimate relation, both the man and the girl is penalized Rs. 5000/- each. In case of an illegitimate child birth, the mother of the child is penalized with a fine of Rs 3000/- only. However if the father of the child is identified and proved and the man accepts the child as his son/ daughter, this fine have to be borne by the father of the child.

### **Inter-tribe marriage:**

In case of marriage of a Sherdukpen Boy/ Girl to a foreigner/ Non Sherdukpen, a fine of Rs 3000/- only has been fixed.

### ***Chhakaks***

During every *Chhatpu Nsey* (the general meeting of all Shedukpen household under Rupa council), appointment of new *Khomees* (new individual legal household recognition) is announced under various *chhakaks*. The following new *Khomees* were appointed during the year 2008 and distributed among the following *Chhakaks*.

### ***Thik Chhakaks***

1. Sri Sang Tsering Thongon S/o Late Pema Dorjee Thongon Rupa
2. Sri Sange Dorjee Thongci S/o R.D Tongchi Jigaon



- |                              |                        |            |
|------------------------------|------------------------|------------|
| 3. Sri Lam Norbu Thongchi    | S/o Late Nima Thongchi | Jigaon     |
| 4. Sri Sonam Tsering Dingla  | S/O R.D. Dingl         | Musakshing |
| 5. Sri Rinchin Dorjee Megeji | S/o Tanzing Megaji     | Chillipam  |

***Yusher Chhakak***

- |                                   |                       |            |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| 1. Sri Sange Tsering Karma        | S/o Phurpa Karma,     | Rupa       |
| 2. Sri Tsereing Norbu Dingla      | S/o Sri Lebo Dingla   | Rupa       |
| 3. Sri Chumbi Thongchi            | S/o R.D. Thongdok     | Thongre    |
| 4. Sri Rinchin Khandu<br>Thongdok | S/o Sri R.D. Thongdok | Thongre    |
| 5. Sri Wangchu Megeji,            | S/o R.D. Megaji       | Limbaktang |
| 6. Sri D.K. Thongon               | S/o Sri S.N. Thongon  | Limbaktang |

***Thongo Chhakak***

- |                                   |                       |        |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|--------|
| 1. Sri Rinchin Norbu Dingla       |                       | Rupa   |
| 2. Sri Bongpu Dingla              | S/o C.N. Dingla       | Rupa   |
| 3. Sri Phurpa Tsering<br>Thongchi | S/o Sri P.K. Thongchi | Jigaon |
| 4. Sri Pem Dorjee Dingla          | S/o Late Y.D Dingla   | Jigaon |

***Thik Khong Chhakak***

- |                               |                                |            |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------|
| 1. Sri Dorjee Khandu Dingla   | S/o Sri Lebo Dingla,           | Rupa       |
| 2. Sri Sang Tsering Wangja    | S/o Late R.D. Wangja           | Rupa       |
| 3. Sri Kejang Dorjee Megeji   | S/o Phurpa Dorjee Megeji       | Jigaon     |
| 4. Sri Netan Dorjee Thongdok  | S/o Sri Nima Dondu Thongdok    | Jigaon     |
| 5. Sri Netan Dorjee Thongchi  | S/o Sri Tsering Norbu Thongchi | Thongre    |
| 6. Sri Rinchin Norbu Thonghci | S/o Chengko Thongchi           | Mushaksing |

***Wangsher Chhakak***

- |                             |                          |         |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|---------|
| 1. Sri Dorjee Khandu Mosobi | S/o Sri Pema Mosobi      | Rupa    |
| 2. Sri Khandu Thongdok      | S/o Sri Rinchin Thongdok | Thongre |

### ***Ajilamu Chhakak***

1. Sri Topgey Thongdok	S/o Sri A.D. Thongdok	Rupa
2. Sri Chengko Megeji	S/o Ashuk Megeji	Lingbaktang
3. Sri Dorjee Phunchu Sinchajhi	S/o Norbu Sinchajhi	Lingbaktang
4. Sri Dondu Thongon	S/o D.K. Thongon	Thongre
5. Sri Rinchin Peljang Megeji	S/o Sri P.N. Megeji	Thongre
6. Sri Pem Wangdi Thongdok	S/o Sri Tseng Thongdok	Dikshi
7. Sri Dorjee Phunchu Thongchi	S/o Late R.W Thongchi	Jigaon

### ***Gompo Chhakak***

1. Sri Rinchin Norbu Dingla	S/o Netan Dingla	Chillipam
2. Sri Pema Dorjee Khrimey	S/o Late Rinchin Dorjee Dingla	Chillipam
3. Sri Pema Khandu Megaji	S/o Sri R.D. Megaji	Thongre
4. Sri Dorjee Tsering Thjongchi	S/o Sang Chewang Thongchi	Gorbow
5. Sri Noya Sinchaji	S/o R.N. Sinchaji	Mukuthing

### **Degree of punishment**

In the Sherdukpen dialect, the word *jaong* denotes punishment and *rangun* for fine. Generally crime is classified into two groups, minor and major. Punishment is fixed according to degree of crime and measured through unit. There are so many scales and units to fix up fine. For minor lowest crime, punishment is made by Unit 3. Unit three is equal to value of a calf. There is prevailing rule for punishment from 3 to 20 unit 20 unit is equal to value of a house.<sup>68</sup> Mostly the unit is prescribed like subsequently 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 9 Unit is equal to four thousand rupees or one grown up bull.

### **Breaking village discipline**

If any one violates village's prevailing rules or discipline, then the crime is considered as a minor crime and he has to pay fine according to 3 units. This type of crime may be justified whether he has violated rule, intentionally or not. If the crime is reflected as intention, then degree of punishment may be increased from 3 to 7 or 8 unit.<sup>69</sup> At that time convict has to pay a cow or horse or sheep with an *endi* cloth (like Assam silk cloth) or now days same valuation in currency. 8<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> day of a month are holidays. Hunting, fishing, cultivating is forbidden in these days by order village council. If anyone breaks this rule, he will be penalized. But this crime is considered as a minor crime. These three days of month are restricted for practicing rituals.

### **Indiscipline of youth**

Indecent dress, bad manners, rough behaviour, bodily conflict and adultery are considered as indiscipline. If such type of any fault is done by youth, then the dispute would be sent to the council.<sup>70</sup>

### **Adultery**

After adequate evidence, council enacts the punishment of the culprit as major crime. Culprit will be necked and stroke by long sticks. He will be ordered to pay fine according to 15 unit or its same valuation valuable property such as land, horse, cow, gold or same valuation Rupees in currency.<sup>71</sup>

Helper of the criminal whether men or women of the crime will also be punished in the same degree of main culprit. For cheating, culprit has to pay Rs. 18/12 fine to village council. He is rebuked for the misbehavior also.

### **Theft**

Culprit is punished according to same degree of punishment as rape case. And this type of case is justified as major crime also.

### **Illegitimate child**

It is a major problem of the village council in Sherdukpen area. According to traditional value judgment, to give birth to an illegitimate is a social crime. So the woman and the man, who are responsible for the birth, are prosecuted and punished by village council. If the mother of the illegal son is not able to identify the child's father, then she will be punished according to 10 to 15 unit.<sup>72</sup> If she identifies father of the child, then the man is firstly forced to marry that woman. If he does not agree, then he is penalized by village council according to 10 to 15 unit. He is compelled to pay fine to village council.

## **Murder**

It was considered as a major crime. After collecting full report and evidence, village council provides their judgment. Punishment is enacted in such way that all wealth of the criminal is ceased by *Gaon Bura* on behalf of village council and handed over to the victim family. From accused family, one person is brought to council and he is engaged as lifetime labourer in victim's family. If anybody want to interchange this servant or bonded labour, he should pay the some wealth which would be given to the victim's family. Here, degree or punishment is the highest unit. At present murder case is not judged by the village council.

## **Procedure of capital punishment**

The capital punishment is not enforced by village council now a days. Last capital punishment was exercised before independence, i.e., during the British period. Prem Dorjee Thungon, earlier *Gaon Burah* of Rupa village council, expressed his experience of capital punishment which was visualized by him in his boyhood.<sup>73</sup> No verdict of capital punishment was given since independence. It was also noteworthy that Rupa village was central council of the whole community; so other subsidiary councils had no power to give verdict regarding capital punishment. For this they had to come and report to Rupa Village council for major crime and punishment.

After committing repeatedly three times major crime, a man is considered as Jail-bird. In early times the convict was kept in a jail (*chon*). The ground floor of the Rupa

*gompa* was used as the jail. The capital punishment is enforced on that criminal at the occurrence of fourth major crime. After tying hands and legs, the convict is hanged publicly. At that time the duty of *Kachungpa* is to cut log *Danda* (sticks) from forest which is of one finger breadth and 5 to 6 feet long in size. Sticks are kept at the meeting place. After giving signal, a man (who must be of *musoubi* or *cinchajee* clan) begin to hit the convict by log- sticks with saying “you are still a devil. It is your adequate penalty. You are the living shame of our community” in their own dialect. This was the first stage of enforcing capital punishment.

After continuing this punishment some time blood may come out of convict’s body. At that time, the convict may pray for mercy in lieu of his all wealth. If the prayer is accepted by council, then convict’s life may be saved. If the council rejects his prayer then the punishment is continued.

After completion of the punishment, if convict remains alive, then he has to face another stage of punishment. In a prefixed place, villagers assemble and a spade is kept into fire until it becomes red hot. Then seven leaves (*chuchulu*) is put on two palms of the convict. Convict is ordered to hold that hot spade and to go seven normal steps forward. One of the members of the council count one to seven and as per his command convict is compelled to cover seven steps. If the convict throws the spade before seven steps, then he has to face another process of punishment.

Convict is brought to a place beside the river. In this stage a priest blesses the accused with putting an image (*Scheme Dorjee*) made by copper on his head- by chanting “your soul and spirit may get peace and happiness”. Selected persons from two specific clans- *Mousobi* and *Sinchajee* are engaged to cut the convict’s head after getting signal from *Gaon Bura*. The convict’s head is used to thrown into the river.

Certainly distinction is made in the punishment or penalty according to the motive of the culprit. The consequence of crime is considered important. Punishment varies after justifying the fault whether accidental or intentional. The degree of punishment varies after justifying the fault whether accidental or intentional. The degree of

punishment does not vary sex wise. If fines are imposed on convict, victim family gets a larger share of fine as compensation and the rest portion is deposited to the village council. Previously no one was allowed to appeal to a court of law against a decision of council. Now a days the trend to appeal to a court is found gradually. But, especially in Sherdukpen community, the numbers of such incidents are very few. Sometimes council may refer disputes or sent to court of law for settlement. As per suggestion and permission of council, villagers can appeal to court now. Then possible help is provided by village council to enforce judgment of court.

Now a days there is no role of political interpreters in the proceedings of the council. Previously they used to present in the proceedings as observer and used to send reports to local administrative authority for record. The social status and dignity of the culprit is affected, if anybody is punished for shameful crime like adultery. There is no role of the priest in the council, until ordeal is required.

There is no scope of bias in judicial function of the council. Because all the judgement are output of unanimous opinion by council members, guided by traditional rule. The Sherdukpen society is mainly based on traditional value judgment and exclusively law- abiding community. This value judgment is unique blend of oral tradition and religion. Their concept of morality is influenced by Buddhism. So, humanity is the main concept of their morality which is obviously universal and applicable in any civilized society. In some cases, it is felt that concept of their morality is quite better than so- called modernized society. Their focus of attention behind any decision is not only for the sake of humanity but also for the community interest as a whole.

The socio-economic survey of village Rupa in 1971<sup>74</sup> recorded the following scale of punishment in terms of offence and fine. Earlier the fines were taken in kind but with the introduction of monetary economy the fines were taken in cash. The following scale of punishment used to take place in Rupa.

**Table No.10.** Scale of punishment

	<b>OFFENCE</b>	<b>FINE</b> (converted to money value in Rupees)
1.	Land dispute, damages to crop or minor theft	5.00
2.	Illegal occupation of land, theft or illegitimate connection with married girl	7.00
3.	Theft, making unmarried girl pregnant or elopement	18.00
4.	Major theft or adultery	35.00
5.	Elopement by a Chao boy with a Thong girl	200.00

*Source: Census 1971, series 24, Arunachal Pradesh, district Census Report, Part X-A, Part X-B of Kameng District, Shillong, April, 1972*

## **CASE STUDIES OF JUDICIAL SYSTEM**

A few case studies are presented here for better understanding of the judicial system<sup>75</sup> One of the case study is of Pre-independence period and the two are of 1950's and 1960's, when the Sherdukpens were not much influenced by various external agencies, and as result they continued with their traditional customary law.

### **Case study 1**

The time period of the case was 1935. Dorjee Thongdok was *Gaon Bura* of Rupa village council. The name of the parties are:

- a) Sangha Lama-rung  
(girl; inhabitant of Shergaon)

Vs.

b) Dorjee Sheboy Thongdok

It was a most complicated case which is related with a social problem. The girl Lama-rung gave birth to a son before marriage. Council convened a session to discuss the issue. Then the girl was summoned by the council and enquired about the father of the son. The girl answered that Dorjee Sheby Thongdok was the father of that son. But Dorjee Thongdok did not agree with that statement and refused to be the father of that son and to marry her. It was curious that one Megheje claimed himself as father of that son, but the mother opposed his claim. The council gave a supplementary judgment. At that time Dorjee Thongdok was directed to pay fine for the charge of adultery at the rate of 9 unit. He was compelled to pay a cow and *endi* cloth as fine. After ten years, finally it was detected and the council again convened a session to give final decision. The son, named Tikara was not Thongdok's son but the son of Megheji. The verdict of council was in favour of Thongdok and the council ordered to Megheji to pay back fine to Dorjee Thongdok for the charge violating discipline. Then Megheji followed the judgment.

## Case study 2

It was a case of Rupa village council of 1952. The dispute was against one Sherdukpen girl and an outsider. A part of the case was settled by council spontaneously in the interest of the society. The names of parties are:

- a) Yashi Dema Singajee (*Chaos* Clan, Sherdukpen girl)
- b) Jog Bahadur (Nepali gardener of Government Hospital, Rupa)

Yashi, a Sherdukpen girl loved one Jug Bahadur and they had an affair. Once known all the representative of the council warned the girl and suggested to cut of the relation. But the girl did not obey the suggestions and used to visit Jog Bahadur often. One day the local youth caught Yeshi when she was in close physical contact with Jog Bahadur. She was brought to the council. Yeshi confessed her relation with Jog Bahadur and expressed her desire to marry him. Then Jog Bahadur was summoned by the council. The council directed him to marry her and imposed a fine in the rate of eight unit i.e. Rs. 2,000/- to Rs. 3000/-Jog Bahadur was compelled to obey council's judgment. Jog Bahadur married Yeshi and paid fine to the council for his fault.



### Case study 3

It was a case of Shergaon village council of 1962. The case was related to violation of customary law and village discipline. The names of the parties are:

- a) Dorjee Pema Krimey (Sherdukpen women)
- b) Nanda Raj Thapa (Government employee)

Ultimately, two parties were the man and woman versus village council. The village council convened a session for the judgment of his cross-caste marriage which seemed to the council as adultery. Nada Raj Thapa and Dorjee Pema Khrimey were indulging physical relation. As a result Pema Khrimey conceived in due course. Then they married. At that time, village council summoned them for the charge of violation of Sherdukpen customary rules. Council gave the judgement against Thapa and punished him. His punishment was fixed Rs. 1,000/- and six month in jail. Then the accused Thapa appealed to lessen his punishment. He argued that the girl was willing to marry him. So he had no fault and imposing punishment on him was not justified. Then the council again discussed among themselves. After negotiation, the punishment was relaxed. In presence of one Lama, one teacher and one medical employee as witness, accused Thapa paid rupees two hundred with a view to pay regard to council and the cross-caste marriage was recognized by the council.

As stated in the preceding pages, various scholars believe that the Sherdukpen council belongs to the theocracy model <sup>76</sup> of village institution, where autonomous villages are expected under one theocratic government with supreme monastic authority. However, as discussed, unlike the Monpas, who were organized under the administration of Tawang monastery,<sup>77</sup> the Sherdukpen were never under the administration of monastic authority. The elements of theocracy are absent in this regard. It is true that aristocratic families (*Sat Rajas* belong to *Thong* clans) used to play significant role in the council's formation and administration. The role of Buddhist Lamas and *Gompa* (monastery) are very minimal in this connection. The help of the indigenous priest is also undertaken for conducting oath and ordeal system. The village council performs developmental, administrative and legal functions. Though the *Sat Rajas*

played a very important role in the administration of the council but the disputes were settled unanimously. There was elaborate customary laws and traditional for governing the people. It is fact that the Sherdukpen village council has lived up to the expectation of the people. Till now the council is functioning efficiently side by side with Panchayat Raj system in the area.

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# RELIGION

## INTRODUCTION

Though ostensibly Buddhist, the religion of the Sherdukpens is flexible one, being a curious blend of Buddhism and local beliefs.<sup>1</sup> It may be said that their religion is more or less polytheism under a thin veil of Buddhist Pantheism because in addition to worshipping Lord Buddha and many other deities of the Buddhist pantheon at their *legangs* or monasteries, they also worship a number of non-buddhist spirits and deities and having a number of extra Buddhistic rituals, ceremonies and festivals which may be categorized as part and parcel of *Bon* cult or *Bon* religion.

## BON: CONCEPT & RELIGION

*Bon* (*bon*; Lhasa dialect) is the oldest spiritual tradition of Tibet.<sup>2</sup> Tenzin Gyatso, the fourteenth [Dalai Lama](#), has recognized the Bön tradition as the fifth principal spiritual school of Tibet, along with the [Nyingma](#), [Sakya](#), [Kagyu](#), and [Gelug](#) schools of Buddhism.

The history of *Bon* is difficult to clearly ascertain because the earliest surviving documents referring to the religion come from the 9th and 10th centuries, well after Buddhists began the suppression of indigenous beliefs and practices.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, historian Per Kværne<sup>4</sup> notes that "*Bon*" is used to describe three distinct traditions: (1) the pre-Buddhist religious practices of Tibetans that are "imperfectly reconstructed essentially different from Buddhism" and were focused on the personage of a divine king; (2) a [syncretic](#) religion that arose in Tibet during the 10th and 11th centuries, with strong [shamanistic](#) and animistic traditions, that is often regarded by scholars as "an unorthodox form of Buddhism;" (3) "a vast and amorphous body of popular beliefs" including fortune telling. However, other scholars do not accept the tradition that separates *Bon* from Buddhism; [Christopher Beckwith](#) calls *Bon* "one of the two types of Tibetan Buddhism"<sup>5</sup> and writes that "despite continuing popular belief in the existence of

a non-Buddhist religion known as *Bon* during the Tibetan Empire period, there is not a shred of evidence to support the idea... Although different in some respects from the other sects, it was already very definitely a form of Buddhism."<sup>6</sup>

The syllable *-po* appended to the name of any of the five main Tibetan spiritual traditions indicate a follower of that tradition; so, for example, "*Bonpo*" means a follower of the *Bon* tradition.<sup>7</sup> Often described as the [shamanistic](#) and animistic tradition of the Himalayas prior to [Buddhism](#)'s rise to prominence in the 7th century, more recent research and disclosures have demonstrated that both the religion and the *Bonpo* are significantly more rich and textured culturally than was initially thought by pioneering Western scholars.

### ***Bon spiritual practices***

*Bon*, while very similar to schools of [Tibetan Buddhism](#), may be distinguished by certain characteristics:<sup>8</sup>

- i. The origin of the *Bonpo* lineage is traced to Buddha Tönpa Shenrab (sTon pa gShen rab), rather than to Buddha *Shakyamuni*.
- ii. *Bönpo* [circumambulate](#) *chortens* or other venerated structures counter-clockwise (i.e., with the left shoulder toward the object), rather than clockwise (as Buddhists do).
- iii. *Bönpos* use the *yungdrung* (g.yung drung or [swastika](#) ~ a [vrdhhi](#) derivation of the [swastika](#)) instead of the dorje (rdo rje, [vajra](#)) as a symbol and ritual implement.
- iv. Instead of a bell, *Bonpos* use the [shang](#), a cymbal-like instrument with a "clapper" usually made of animal horn, in their rituals.
- v. A nine-way path is described in *Bon*, which is distinct from the nine- *yana* (-vehicle) system of the *Nyingma* school of Tibetan Buddhism. *Bönpo* consider *Bon* to be a superset of Buddhist paths. (The *Bonpo* divide their teachings in a mostly familiar way such as Causal Vehicle, *Sutra*, [Tantra](#) and [Dzogchen](#)).
- vi. The *Bonpo* textual canon includes rites to pacify spirits, influence the weather, heal people through spiritual means, and other "shamanic" practices. While many



of these practices are also common in some form in Tibetan Buddhism (and mark a distinction between Tibetan and other forms of Buddhism), they are actually included within the recognized *Bön* canon (under the *causal vehicle*), rather than in Buddhist texts.

- vii. *Bonpo* have some sacred texts, of neither Sanskrit nor Tibetan origin, which include some sections written in the ancient Zhangzhung language.
- viii. The *Bonpo* mythic universe includes the Mountain of Nine [Swastikas](#) and the [Tagzig Olmo Lung Ring](#) paradise.

The *Bonpo* school is said to resemble most closely the [Nyingma](#) school, the oldest school of Tibetan Buddhism, which traces its lineage to the First Transmission of Buddhism into Tibet.

Before the advent of Buddhism, the dominant religion of Tibet was *Bon*.<sup>9</sup> *Bon* was so much prevalent in Tibet that some scholars still think that the word *Bon* which Tibetans call to their land is a distortion of *Bon*, meaning the land of *Bon*. The meaning of the word *Bon* still remains unknown.<sup>10</sup> This is corroborated by Waddell.<sup>11</sup> S.C. Das<sup>12</sup> writes that “*Bon* is the ancient religion of Tibet which was fetishism, demon worship and propitiation by means of incantation the word *Chos*, which ordinarily means religion, is used as antithesis to *Bon*. *Bon* signifies the kind of shamanism which was followed by Tibetans before the introduction of Buddhism and in certain part still extend”. H. Hoffman mentions that origin of the word *Bon* is lost in the past and it is not readily definable, but in all probability once referred to the conjuring of the gods by magic formulas<sup>13</sup>. *Bon* teachings were first transmitted to the Tibetans by Shenrap Miwo (Bshen-rap-oni-wo).<sup>14</sup> ‘Shan’ means ‘heavenly’ or ‘divine’, ‘rap’ means ‘supreme one’ and ‘mibo’ means ‘great man’. According to the *Bonpos*, Shenrap lived long before Buddha, and works attributed to Shenrap has collection of some 400 hundred volumes still preserved. But it is evident that they have undergone heavy editing under the influence of Buddhism. There are many sects among the followers of *Bon* in Tibet. Of them two are mostly well known—the *Bon Chhal nag* (Black *Bon*) and the *Bon Chhal kar* with *Bon-terma* (White *Bon* and Treasured *Bon*). The popular appeal of Buddhism, however, soon took over the dominance of *Bon* and after an open debate between the

Buddhist and *Bonpo* scholar during the reign of king Trhisong Detson (742-797 A.D.), where the *Bonpos* could not defend their faith, most of the unhealthy and baneful rites and rituals of *Bon* called the 'white *Bon*' survived which was greatly influenced by Buddhism.

The followers of the *Bon* religion agree that Gshen-rab was born in Ol-mo-lung-ring valley of Zhan-Zhung country. Zhan-Zhung is identified with Guge, which falls in the Nga-ri province of Tibet. Some Buddhist historian like Thos-Kvan-Chhos-Kyinima and Jig-ten-gam-po are of opinion that Gshen-rab was born in central Tibet at a place called Am-shod-on, but the place can not be identified. Gshen-rab could control the spirits under his power and exhibit miracles. He was also known for making correct professes about future. He preached in his own way the rituals of the gods which subsequently became the *Bon* of Gshen-rab. It is to be seen that rituals were chiefly concerned with the way of making offerings to the local spirits, taming the evils spirits, subduing the enemies by black magic, other rituals as such.<sup>15</sup> Thus sorcery, exorcism, enchantment and devil dancing became essential part of these rituals.

In the Gzer-mying, we find the pantheon of the *Bonpas*. In the *Bon* pantheon *Bon-sku-kun-tu-bzang-po* is the supreme deity and the *Bon-skyong*, a nine-headed god as a guardian deity.<sup>16</sup> His sister *Srid-pai's rgyalmo* who has three eyes and six arms is taken to be *sri-devi* of Lamaism. There are further other gods with heads of various animals. Apart from these, there is a special group of gods dwelling on the tops of the sacred mountains.<sup>17</sup>

Sacrifice of animals and such other practices formed an important part of the religious observances of the *Bon* religion.<sup>18</sup> The Shamans called on the gods of heaven and earth, of the mountains and rivers, of the sun, moons, stars and planets to partake these sacrifices. However, when Buddhism became the state religion in Tibet, the *Bonpas* were prohibited to indulge further in these practices. But this form of sacrifice could not be eradicated because of the deep convictions of the common people. In the

changed situation the animal sacrifices were substituted by the practice of offering the images of men and animals made of *dough*, which are known as *torma*.<sup>19</sup>

After a brief discussion of the *Bon* religion of Tibet it may be observed that it was a Shamanistic religion. The doctrine of the *Bon* religion believed in hordes of mountain-gods, gods of rivers, lords of the soil and gods guarding the immediate surroundings of different habitats.<sup>20</sup> All the calamities were considered to be the handiwork of these supernatural beings. Hence, to protect themselves from their malignant activities and to secure the welfare of the people, the adherents of the *Bon* religion took the assistance of the *Bonpo* priests for the propitiation of these gods. These supernatural beings were propitiated as per the prescriptions of the priests by performing the necessary rites. Such rites used to follow the phenomenon of Shamanism, i.e. spirit possession of a person or the system of divination to identify the supernatural being responsible for the malaise or the calamity, as well as exorcising the recalcitrant supernatural being and propitiating it with sacrifices of animals.<sup>21</sup>

In contrast to Buddhism, *Bon* religion is mainly concerned with the creation of the universe among the Tibetan people. They pay little heed to the pursuit of salvation through the practice of austerities. *Bon* aspirants sought magical power through union with the divine nature as manifested in mountain, trees, lakes and rivers. It is believed by the followers of *Bon* that nine cosmic deities (*Se* and *Degye*) created the world, a world in which birth, death, marriage and sickness all have their place. If the worshipper can attune himself with these gods through various ritualistic ceremonies and by thorough understandings of these ceremonies, one will be in position to fulfill whatever is demanded of him by the cosmic order.

The supreme divine principle of the *Bon* religion is referred to as *yeshen* (*ye-gshen*).<sup>22</sup> This supreme deity has the same quality of cosmic totality that is found in most theistic religions. *Ye* mean primordial or original and *shen* means alive, heavenly or spiritual but is also has anthropomorphic implication. *Yeshen* is seen as passive and peaceful rest for the worshipper. The energetic aspect of the sphere of the divine is represented by another principle called *Se* (*Gsas*), who communicates directly with man. *Se* sometimes called *Lha* (God) is the chief principle and other *Degyees* are his

messengers. *Degye* are the eight cosmos creating deities. *Degye* might more accurately be regarded as types or principles, than as individual beings, since each may have many local manifestations partaking of its essential character. Each *Degye* also has a retinue of minions, attendants, helpers etc. operating on its intentions. There are 3(Three) Types of *Bon* viz. *Jola Bon*, *Kyar Bon* and *Gyur Bon*.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Jola-Bon***

Francke considered the Gling-chos tradition of Ladakh as the remnant of the pristine phase of *Bon-chos*, identified as *Jola-Bon* in the *Grub-mtha-shel-gyi-me-long*.<sup>24</sup> From the folksongs, he has provided a long list of *Jola-Bon* deities, such as, *Gung-sngon anyan-tha* (the God of Heaven), *Spang-dmar-lha* (the God of the Red Meadow i.e Earth), *Nya-rgod* (Sun), etc. besides *Pho-lha* and the *Mo-lha*, representing the male and female creative principles. Local deities were associated in the *Jola-Bon* at different localities. Human sacrifice formed an essential part of propitiation of the *Jola-Bon* deities. Apart from propitiation of the demonic deities of the *Bonpas*, human sacrifice for confirming an oath, founding a house and for occupying it for the first time had been prevalent among them. No remnants of *Jola-Bon* are noticed in the Sherdukpen area.

### ***Kyar-Bon***

The Buddhism from India must have influenced the *Bon-chos* tremendously from post-Mauryan period and it was under these influences that the concept of Adi Buddha was incorporated into the *Bon-chos* as that of *Kuntu Sangpo* (*Kuntubzang-po*). The concepts about the ethics, eschatology and metaphysics in the *Bon* religion became very similar to those in the Buddhism. Even the most important personage of the *Bon* pantheon, Senrob Mibo came to be considered an incarnation of Buddha. The Brahmanic ideas also crept to the trans-Himalayan heights due to socio-cultural intercourse between Brahmanism with the *Bon-chos*. The Brahmanism in order to create a foothold among the local population in the interior of western Himalayan region admitted various animistic practices by introducing new rituals. The Tantric doctrine of *Shakti* and cult of Yoni are the best example in this regard. The ancient Indian cult of *Rudra* was adopted into the *Bon-chos* as the 'Mountain God' by the nature propitiating

*Bon-pas*. Even the worship of Sun adopted by the *Bon-pas* reveals Brahmanical influences and that is why this religion is alternatively called as *gyung-drung-Bon* or the *Swastika-Bon*.<sup>25</sup> This concept is unknown to the Sherdukpen.

### ***Gyur-Bon***

The last phase-*Gyur-Bon* is considered coeval with the first epoch of Buddhism in Tibet from the time of Trhisong Detson (c. A. D. 747-797) to persecution by his grandson Langdarma.<sup>26</sup> During this period, *Bon-chos* came to fall out with Buddhism, and as a result, the *Bonpos* strongly opposed the Buddhism. Credit goes to *Padmasambhav*, who very wisely adopted and assimilated many *Bon-Chos deas* and godlings in his Buddhism and thus the mountain gods, the river gods, the tree gods, the field gods, the house gods, the family gods, spirits etc. and a number of associated cults were admitted into the Buddhist pantheology in Tibet. In various parts of Himalayas, it is common to find small stones and pebbles heaped to a raised platform, surrounded by low cairns on the mountain passes and are considered offerings to the pre-Buddhist deity, named *Lu*, who lives on the mountain peaks. This deity was adopted and transformed as *Mani* in the Buddhist traditions in Tibet. Even the *Bon* traditions may be found associated with the Buddhist monasteries of Tibet and other votive structures. The *Bonpos* also have their mystic mantra: *Om-ma-trihmou-Ye-sa-lah-du* after the Buddhist *Om mani padme hum*, and *hod*, the practice of erecting *Bon-chos* structures in Lakakh in Meru and elsewhere. All these are indicative of some sort of reciprocity between Buddhism and *Bon-chos* in Tibet. However, after the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet, *Bon-chos* could not find favour with the kings, except a brief period of three years between 838 and 842, when the anti-Buddhist king Langdarma reigned in Tibet and the *Bon-chos* remained triumphant over Buddhism. S.C. Das notes that *Nyingmapa* has much of its sectarian literature in common with the *Bon-pos*.<sup>27</sup> The *Bon-chos* priest however, wears the red garment and is identified by the *sa-nak*- the black hat he wears, which is different from the *Nyingmapa* counterpart who wears the *Nyingmapa sa-mar*, the red hat. But we do not know clearly whether many aspects of *Nyingmapa* doctrine came from *Bon* or the *Bon* influenced the *Nyingmapa* doctrine. Indeed, it may be said that it was *Nyingmapa* sect which opposed the *Bon* and defeated the *Bon* teachers in

debate and the king thereafter launched his offensive against the followers of *Bon*. This phase can be identified among the Sherdukpens.

## **Bon Rites**

There are four categories of rites, which were included in almost all the pre-Buddhist rites of Tibet which were later on adopted by Buddhism.<sup>28</sup> Almost all rites are noticed among the Sherdukpens. These rites are *Lhasang*, *Lalhu*, *Toh* and *Doo* and are performed throughout the Himalayas.

### ***Lhasang (Lha-Basangs)***

The most popular rite of pre-Buddhist age still observed is *Lhasang*. This ceremony is usually performed on the highest peak in the locality. The *cedar* is believed to be the tree of *Se* and its smoke brings divine down into the stream of human life and elevates the performers into the sphere of divinity, thus believed by the devotees. Therefore, this ceremony purifies and energizes the positive powers of the event or the individuals for whom it is performed. The performers get absorbed themselves in the smoke; go round the fire and shout *ki-ki-so-so-lhagyal-lo* (may god be the victorious). Certain messages are read in the pattern of smoke. A gentle rising white smoke signifies acceptance, while dark smoke constantly interrupted by wind signifies obstacle.

### ***Lalhu (bla-bslu)***

Another important rite is *Lalhu* meaning ransoming of *La*. As per the concept of *La*, a man needs three things to keep alive, i.e. *La* –the soul, *Tshe*-longevity of life, and *Srof*- living force. In the *Bon* belief, animals do not possess *La*. The *La* is part of one's being but it can be stolen, confiscated or regained, as well as reinforced by the spiritual power. When the *La* of person leaves him, his health, and vigour deteriorates and if not revived, the man becomes ill and finally dies.

*Lalhu* ceremony is performed partly to demagnetize the *La* of the sick person. It is also performed to stabilize the *La* of a new-born baby. The ceremony includes reconsecration of *La-yu (ble-gyu)*, *La* (turquoise stone, *La phor (bla-phor)*, *La* cup, and

*La-lug (bla-lug)* *La* sleep. On the final day of the *Lalhu* ceremony, a figure of a sheep is made of butter with *Layu* inside it and placed inside the *La-phor*. *La-phor* is then made to revolve in a basin full of water and messages are read in this ceremony as to whether the *La* has returned or not.

### ***Toh (gto)***

It is another category of pre-Buddhist rites, which has got an astrological background as well. As per belief, this rite along with Chinese astrology (*wag-tsi*) spread to Tibet through *Kong-tse-khrue-gyi Gyalpo* and was widely practiced by the *Bonpos*. *Toh* is a group of rites designed to achieve great results by employing simple and sometimes idiotic methods. Some simple ceremonies consist of just throwing sheep droppings into the river while difficult ones require licking of red hot iron by the performer. In fact, there are *Toh* methods to solve every human problem right from warding off the bad stars to the extent of birth control measures. *Toh* methods are grouped into two categories: one to bring benefits and the other to bring harm. However this method is extinct today among the *Shedukpens*.

### ***Doo (Mdos)***

The *Doo* ceremony is performed to appease different *Degyes* and their routine. In its original form, it requires the sacrifice of animals which were later substituted with figures of animals made of dough or mud. In this ceremony, the *Degye* is offered a new castle, a very elaborate but miniature construction called *Doo*. The remnants of *Doo* consisting of lots of figures made of mud or dough and a colourful structure fashioned out of thread and bamboo is a common site on the road-sides of hill stations of the Himalayas. With the help of *mantra* and meditative power of the performer, this structure is magnified into a heavenly abode abounding in all the luxuries of the world. Since everything that *Degye* would want, would be available in this castle created by the meditation, *mantra* and materials. The intent of this rite would be to lure the particular

*Degye* into the *Doo* not only out of the sick person but also out of his own dwelling place and bid him never to harm anybody.

Here it may be mentioned that Buddhist accepted the above mentioned four popular *Bon* rites, which are observed by them throughout the Himalayan belt. The most significant change in all the pre-Buddhist rites performed by the Buddhist is that they are performed in the Buddhist way, i.e. beginning with refuge prayer and *Bodhisattva* vow and ending with dedicating the merits for the sentient beings. Many changes have taken place in these rites not in their basic structure, but in the concept, purpose and philosophy behind them.

### **Elements in Bon**

In *Bön*, the [five elemental processes](#) of: [earth](#), [water](#), [fire](#), [air](#) and [space](#) are the essential elements of all existent phenomena or [skandhas](#) (aggregates). [Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche](#) (2002: p.1) states:<sup>29</sup>

The names of the elements are analogous to categorised experiential sensations of the natural world. The names are [symbolic](#) and key to their inherent qualities and/or modes of action by [analogy](#). In *Bön*, the elemental processes are fundamental metaphors for working with external, internal and secret energetic forces. All five elemental processes in their essential purity are inherent in the [mindstream](#) and link the [trikaya](#) and are aspects of primordial [energy](#).

### **BON AMONG THE SHERDUKPENS**

During pre-Buddhist days, the Shedukpens believed in many deities or spirits for their prosperous life. The *Bonpo* priest practiced the art of the traditional faith and beliefs to get the benevolent effect of the spirit or deity praying by *mantras*. The spirits or deities are satisfied by offering and sacrificing or slaughtering birds and animals at a selected place. The *Bonpo* priest locally known as *jijis* performs the worship on behalf of the person, who wants to get the blessing of the supernatural power and accepts some cash or kinds from the person concerned.<sup>30</sup> Though there is no particular caste for performing *pujas*, everyone can not perform them as one has to



learn the art of *pujas*. This is done whenever benevolent effect of the supernatural power is required. Although the Sherdukpens are Buddhist, they also believe in various spirits and deities. Sacrificial rites are observed to propitiate them. Exorcism is also practiced to avert evil. The religion Sherdukpen retains remnants of old *Bon* religion. The followers of this religion are called *Bonpos*. Old beliefs and rituals are still adhered to by the Sherdukpen even though they are essentially Buddhist.

We find distinct similarities of indigenous religious practices of Sherdukpen with those of the *Bon* religion of Tibetans. Religious rites of this community have been chiefly concerned with taming of a host of supernatural beings for curing illness and warding off natural calamities and epidemics. The supernatural beings residing in mountains and other natural surroundings are propitiated through exorcism, sorcery, enchantments and animal sacrifices. To observe the various facets of these rites and rituals so as to enable to make their comparison with *Bon* religious practices certain case studies at the village level have been taken in Sherdukpen areas particularly in village Rupa.

Pantheon of traditional gods or supernatural beings has been investigated by scholars in other villages of the Sherdukpens in the present West Kameng districts.<sup>31</sup> In fact even after the introduction of Buddhism in these areas the laities had a lurking fear in their minds and whenever there was a calamity like failure of crop or rain, disease and death, they apprehend these as expression of the wrath of these gods for not being worshipped.<sup>32</sup> Hence, in many cases old mode of propitiation of these gods continued along with the observance of the Buddhist rituals. Though many of these gods were adopted by Buddhism as local defenders of the faith and allowed their worship following the Buddhist rituals, even then a few of these gods remained unrecognized to the new faith and people had to revert to the old mode of rituals to be at peace with them. In fact, in the Sherdukpen areas the Buddhist monks seemed to have compromised with the priest of *Bon* faith. Among the Sherdukpens of Rupa village the local deities like *Shawang* and *Ama Jomu* are worshipped simultaneously in the Buddhist and *Bon* modes of rituals with the sacrifices of a goat and a fowl. However, the local deities of Rupa and Shergaon village, like *Sherpu*, *Ngangphu*, *Jenguche chung*, *Dombolhari* and *Larjoangpo* are now worshipped following the Buddhist mode of rituals.

The Sherdukpens have a good deal of faith in their own local deities and spirits, whose help they invariably invoke in times of disease and sufferings. Every village has its own presiding deity to look after its welfare.<sup>33</sup> Some of the important deities considered as protectors of human beings are:

*Gombu Chha Dakpa* who is said to have six sons and yields different weapons to protect human beings from the evils spirits and is represented by the *tarmus* of wheat flour. (a) *Dam Chan Chhle Ge*: He is said to have the shape of a human being with horns of an animal and cures human beings affected by evil spirits or influenced by magic. (b) *Gepu Namse*: He tries to meet the wishes and desires of the people who pray to him sincerely. (c) *Phakwa Chandrezi*: He is worshipped so that he may be pleased to guide the soul to the heaven after death. (d) *Jamu Wang Sing*: He presides over the all forest areas. (e) *Phu Sawang Sorra*: It is a deity residing in the Rupa area. (f) *Phu Servi Mangbi*: It is a forest deity of Shergaon.

*Sherphu*, *Nganphu*, *Jenguche chung*, *Dombolhari* and *Larjangpo* are mountain gods believed to have haunts in the hills around the Sherdukpen village of Shergaon. The *Sherphu* and *Nagnphu* are Sherdukpen village Gods. Now –a-days these gods are worshipped in the village temple on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of the 10<sup>th</sup> Monpa month following the Buddhist mode of rituals, and are painted in the murals of the Kalaktang *gompa*.

*Shawang* is the guardian deity of the Sherdukpen village of Rupa and the painting of his is found along with others in the *kakaling* of Rupa monastery. In the painting, he has depicted in gorgeous customs, riding a horse and trans-fixing an evil spirit with his spear so that the evil cannot harm the villagers. The people of Rupa arrange in the 10<sup>th</sup> Sherdukpen month the annual rites of this deity in which the priest (*Jiji*) of the old religion officiates. The rites are accompanied with the sacrifice of a sheep and fowl. The lamas of Rupa make oblation to this deity according to the Buddhist mode of rituals on the 8<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, and 13<sup>th</sup> of each month. Rupa has another local deity called *Ama Jomu*. Though the lama worships it with offerings according to the Buddhist mode of rituals, simultaneously another person slaughters a sheep and offers its entrails and heart to the deity. As it is very trying job for a lama to minister to such a ritual, the people of Rupa once stopped it. But a number of calamities visited them after the

incidents and the priest *imin* (a religious functionary who has the favour of being possessed by gods and thus possessed the acts as the medium of divine revelation) ascribed these to the wrath of *Ama Jomu* for the discontinuation of its worship and thus, the worship resumed again.<sup>34</sup>

Other important deities of the area are *Chungba Sangze*, ruler of the animal kingdom, and *Lapon Rimbucho*, protector of mankind against birds who prey upon men. They are regarded as great, powerful and benevolent. The people also believe various spirits.<sup>35</sup> The spirits which reside in water are black water spirits- *Basu Ta*, *Ne Gawa*, *Lui Gepu Tinki Raja*, *Lui Nakpu* and *Chhadur*; White water spirits- *Lui Gepu Gawa Dang*, *Lui Gepu Ichhan*, *Lui Gepu Nagaraja*, *Li Gepu Norjin* and *Lui Karpu*; Yellow water spirits- *Lui Sirpu*; and red water spirit- *Lui Gonpu*.

Black water spirits are not benevolent and are responsible for spreading diseases among men. *Basu Ta* alone is believed to be responsible for as many as 148 diseases and he also holds the power of rain in its less conducive aspect. When dysentery or any other water-borne disease breaks out in the village, the lama or *Jiji* ties a row of flags across a stream to assuage his wrath. The *Chhadur* spirit is said to live at the confluence of two streams where water is muddy and dark.

*Lui Karju*, *Lui Nakpu*, *Lui Sirpu* and *Lui Gonpu* are said to live in springs and therefore rise to the sky and wander across it in search of wives as lovely as themselves. Whenever a rainbow appears, it indicates the path traversed by them across the sky and the drops of rain that follow are the spill over from the cups of tea and rice beer they take on their journey to refresh themselves. Similarly, the sky has two spirits- *Brak* and his wife *Ninbatapa*, and lightening and thundering is caused due to them. The Shedukpens believe in seven suns, all feminine, living together but only one moon, a man.

A malicious spirit called *Thenrang* lives on the great rocks amongst the hills and it catches hold of children and makes them cry. Another harmful and supernatural beings are *Sinpus* (male) and *Sinmus* (female), who are believed to live beyond the Himalayas where there is land of women. The *Sinpus* were the chief enemies of the

lamas in the early days and are believed to have sent mosquitoes to torment men, and rats to eat the sacred books. A specially troublesome *Sinmu* or female demon is *Eskandome Jaima*, who comes to men in dreams and robs them of their strength and happiness.

The *Bon* priest among the Sherdukpens are locally called *Jijis*, capable of counteracting evil spirits and are usually drawn from the *Chhao* sections of the community.<sup>36</sup> These priests are initiated into their profession after a series of visions and are married to tutelary spirits. The *Jiji* performs all rites and rituals for appeasement of spirits of the country –side. He offers sacrifice to them and presides over the festival which is specially celebrated in their honour. He is also a diviner and a magic man. He divines the causes of illness and other calamities by examining eggs or lives while playing with a kind of dice. After diagnosing the cause of a disease, he recites charms, offers sacrifice and if necessary, may magically extract bones and worms from a patient's body.

#### **Ordination of *Jiji*:**<sup>37</sup>

There are two types of *Jiji*. One type is *Khikjiji*, who study and have arduous learning process from his *Guru* (Senior *Khikjiji*), another is *Jiji* who learns from his own knowledge and experience. He cannot enter the area of space provided for *Khikjiji* in *Khiksaba* ground and cannot perform offerings like *khikjiji* in *Khiksaba* festival. A person is not anointed to become *Khikjijiljiji* in childhood. He becomes by this own interest and aptitude from 12/13 years of age.

Among all the clans of Sherdukpen only *Dinglow* and *Megeji* can become *Jiji*. These some what draw a conclusion that that these two clans might have been a priestly class, a higher caste than the Chaos.

**Table No. 11.** Number of *Jijis* and *Khikjijis* at present:

<b>Name of villages</b>	<b>Nos . of <i>Khikjiji</i></b>	<b>Nos. of <i>Jiji</i></b>
Rupa	3	3
Thungri	-	2
Limbaktang	-	2
Chilipam	1	1

Jiagon	-	2
Gorbow	1	1
Mukhuthing	1	-

Source: Field Work

On an appointed day all the eligible and qualified *Khikjiji* gathers in *Khiksaba* ground and made to sit in *Srikamcha* (place where *Khiksaba* is celebrated). There prayers are offered to *deo*, and *khada* (a silk muglar) is garlanded by villagers and *Gaon Buras* to all of them in recognition to their qualification as *Khikjiji*. Later they are instructed by their *Gurus* about their duties and functions. *Khikjijis* dress comprise of *Khen*(horn-like hat covered with assamese traditional towel called *gamusa*) , *kutung* (cap made of yak hair), traditional bag and beads of silver.

### Non-Buddhist Rituals performed by Jijis:

***Dingposungba*** - It is the first ritual in a calendar year which is performed in the month of May. *Khikjiji* offers prayer in the house near prayer flag hoisted on the roof top. After this all flags are collected from every household and placed at *kakaling* near *chankong* and *mane erring*. After offering prayers, one *Khikjiji* accompany a *Gaon Bura* and goes around the village which terminates in *gompa*. Some of them visit *kamcha*. All *jijis* have to have an *eri* (silk) cloth measuring not less than seven meters in length and take out a procession accompanued by elders belonging to *Chhao* clans. *Thongs* are not allowed in this procession. The *Kihikjiji* offers *lao pani* to *Deo* with a chanting to cast away evil spirits form the house and offers prayers for safety and happiness of the family. Immediately after this *Yomukhodikpa* is performed in which every *jiji* deposits some cash along with *eri* cloth. *Jiji* offers prayer for health and wealth.

***Rekneuhap***- Earlier this ritual is performed just after the budding of Maize in the field. In all four corners of the land, ceremonial offering of *lao pani* is made while chanting prayers to *Deo* requesting to protect the crop from pest and bless with fertility. The *lao pani* is continuously sprinkled with a *nyulung* (local leaf of a wild vegetable) to appease the *Deo*. This ritual is no longer performed these days.

***Pottenba/Piyotemba***- This ritual is performed after the ripening of the Maize which is used during the *Khiksaba* festival. In this ritual the *jiji* offers 69 small flags (8"-9"

size) of different five decorative colours for 69 *Deos* which are hoisted in two poles laid on the ground horizontally. In this ritual *jiji* offers *lao pani* in 6 *nyings* (silver jugs), 6 brass plate, 6 *Gaos* (a silver amulet worned by ladies), 6 *daos* (knife), 6 *khik* (beads of garland). This is done to appease the *Deo* to protect and welfare of the village and probably to protect riped maize form the pest and damages as these are used in the *khiksaba* festival. During this ritual while the maize is collected in a place the people eat roasted and raw maize before it is taken to *gompa*.

**Potsebha-** After selection of good quality of ripened maize every household is to contribute one *breh* of high quality maize. *Breh* is a local container made of bamboo which can contain near about half kg or more of maize. These days silver container is used. The *Kachangpa* collects the maize in a separate hall constructed in *gompa*. The *jiji* chants prayer for two hours while *lao pani* is continuously offered to *Deo* for clean and safety of the maize from pest and theft.

**Poksansamba-** This is a ritual performed just before the *khiksaba* festival and during the preparation of *lao pani* (local wine) which takes around 11 to 12 days. For preparing *laon pani* clean water is used from river. A ceremonial collection of water from river is also performed. The *khugo* (bachelors) take bath and wear local traditional dress called *sape* for fetching water from *Dhimi kho* (river). The water is brought in *poksansamba* field below *Lhabang* where rice is cooked in *kulsi* (earthen pot) for preparing *lao pani*. Meanwhile *kachangpa* and *jiji* prepares stone hearth and make fire for cooking. *Khugo* are not allowed to speak during fetaching of water and cooking. They have to remain silent till the rice is cooked. The *jijis* can only speak and instruct the *khugo* who has to reply only in symbolical body language. Probably this is because they do not wish to disturb the *deo* (spirit) and spoil the atmosphere.

After dring the cooked rice, the mixed ingredient for preparing the *lao pani* is buried under a stone near the *lablang*. The senior most *jiji* offers prayer to *deo* (stone spirit) for protecting it from any damages and giving a quality brew. It is belived that after this prayer by *jiji* even the rats do not eat the mixed rice. The place is guarded by the youth for 8 days. This stone is considered sacred and *jiji* offers prayers along with *lao pani* to *Deo* (spirit) of

**Thungshit Ja Chuongba-** This ritual is performed when *Thungshit* (*Thung* – King; *Shit* –seven) collects *posa*. 5 *Thungs* from Rupa (Two each from *Thungdok/Thungdokchung* (one who offers *khiksaba* festival) and *Khrimey*, and one from *Thungon*); and 2 *Thungs* from Shergaon (one each from *Thungon* and *Lama Guru*). In earlier days the *posa* was collected in Assam, in Doimora. While collecting the *posa jiji* used to offer prayers and *lao pani* and hoist more than 100 small flags (8”-9” size) of different colours on two poles laid on the ground horizontally taking the name of all *Deos*. These days the *posa* is collected from the government on every 26<sup>th</sup> day of January. In Rupa the *posa* is paid at *Japtung* ground.

**Phakchot-** This is performed for the safety and security of person(s) travelling to another place. Before taking the journey the *Jiji* performs a small offering *lao pani* (wine) to *Deo* (God) The *lao pani* is filled in *Nying* (silver cup) and *jiji* sprinkles the *lao pani* continuously while chanting the prayer.

**Ninikestarlanba-** This ritual is also performed for naming a new born baby. The horoscope of the child is seen and named by the *Jiji*. *Lao-pani* (wine) is offered to *Deo* (*spirit*) for giving a good name. A small cube made of elephant tusk with six faces with numericals from one to six is used to determine the name of the baby.

**Pudosungba-** This is performed by every household once in a month for the well being and happiness of the members of the household. The *jiji* performs the same rituals by offering *lao pani* to *Deo*.

**Rinchatshakpo-** This ritual is performed once in a year before the beginning of the *Choiker* festival. This is not compulsory. This is performed to avoid ill health on a day fixed for the village council meeting.

**Yangsrijom-** It is an offering made to *Laksmi* (a Hindu god) before the agricultural activities begins. In this each member requests *jiji* for offering *Ha* (cooked rice), dry fish and *lao pani* to *Deo* for the well being, wealth and fertility of the field. The offering is made in *Chankong* (temple). This is done after the *pottenba* ritual.

**Yamsoluba-** When the house is constructed a ritual is performed before laying of wood floor by the *jiji* by offering *lao pani* to *Deo* and chanting of prayers. This is done to cast away evil and bad omens that might come along with the wood that is brought from different areas of jungle.

**Somopanba:** Every year the Sherdukpen used to go to Doimara and settle their for three months in the time of winter not only for their trade but also for escaping harsh winter in their hills. The journey to Doimara was known as *Besme Ungba*. In Sherdukpen, Doimara is known as *Nochung*. The *khikjiji* used to accompany *Sat Raja* to Doimara. Before travelling to Doimara, the *Khikjiji* performs a ritual called *Somopanba*. A gate is constructed in an angular design where two poles criss-cross each other at 45°. On top of it a horn of a sheep is placed, near to which a chicken is sacrificed and its head is hanged on the gate. The *Tambu Lanba* (liver of chicken) is examined to predict and foretell whether the journey to Doimara will be fruitful or not. All these are done to appease and pray to *Deo* and request him to protect and guide them to Doimara. If the answer to the prayer is negative than another chicken is sacrificed. This is done till *Deo* is satisfied and happy. After reaching Doimara the same ritual is performed but in addition to chicken a goat is sacrificed. In this too chicken's liver is examined to ascertain whether the stay in Doimara will be fruitful or not and further all *jijis* make a common request and prayer to *Deo* enabling them to stay at Doimara. It is compulsory for one *Khikji* to accompany the *Sat Raja*. These days this ritual is not performed.

**Apso:** Before coming back from Doimara to Rupa another ritual is performed called *Apso*. In this *jiji* and a person accompanying him offers prayer and sacrifices a goat and request the *Deo* not to allow evil spirit of plains to follow them. While doing this the *Sat Raja* and people who came to Doimara wait the *jiji* and his accomplice in quite distance. Just after offering and sacrifice both of them rush back to join them. This is done to evade the evil spirit while they are being offered sacrifice.

**Deo (spirit) of Khikjiji**



The following are the spirits which the Khikjiji used to worship while conducting various rituals:

- i. *Sumkhikpho*- is the most powerful of all *Deos* and top in hierarchy. He is considered to be residing in mountain above *Chilipam*. Considered as having supernatural power.
- ii. *Sro*- Mountain spirit
- iii. *Nambong Lakin*- mountain spirit
- iv. *Jiding Kho*- river spirit
- v. *Nyabong*- mountain spirit
- vi. *Jumu Ropti*- mountain spirit
- vii. *Jumo Wangsing*-mountain spirit
- viii. *Sawang Dachao*- spirit of speaker who speaks a lot. Gives advices to *kachangpa*.
- ix. *Jangu Nyiring*- mountain spirit.
- x. *Bilu nyering*- mountain spirit
- xi. *Namdung Blapsar*- mountain spirit
- xii. *Jerchi Gombu*-powerful spirit of war who is considered dangerous. He gives power.
- xiii. *Larjao Wangphu*- mountain spirit.
- xiv. *Chumu Leto*- spirit of river in Assam who is revered in prayers.
- xv. *Loplong santong*-spirit of *chaksat* a ritual where all clans bring bamboo in *Srikamcha* where *Khiksaba* is celebrated.
- xvi. *Poksam Sangtong*- spirit of *khiksaba* where *lao pan* (local brew) is prepared.
- xvii. *Sinrangthok*- spirit of gold grinder (*Sin*-gold; *Rangthok*-grinder).
- xviii. *Ning Jongphu*- spirit of worshipper.
- xix. *Abi Khome*- Spirit of stone
- xx. *Yangsrijong*- spirit of wealth. Goddess *Laksmi* is worshipped.
- xxi. *Denik Rochung*- river spirit.
- xxii. *Nambang Rochung*- river spirit

- xxiii. *Dorbu Khanka*- spirit of lake formed out of river
- xxiv. *Jao Khanka*- river spirit
- xxv. *Mone Khanpu*- a spirit of memorial stone built during pre-British worshipped to cast away spirit.
- xxvi. *Amsenghingri Leting*- spirit of tree/wood.
- xxvii. *Sotung Suma Pandan Lamu*- spirit of *gompa*
- xxviii. *Dan Chan Chhe Ge*: It is the name of a deity who has the shape of human being with the shape of horns. He cures human beings affected by evil spirits, etc.
- xxix. *Gepu Namse*: It is a deity who tries to meet the wishes and desires of the people pray to him sincerely.
- xxx. *Gombu-Chha-Dakpa*: He has six sons and with the help of his weapons he protects human beings from evil spirits.
- xxxi. *Phakwa chandrez*: He is worshipped to make him pleased to guide to soul to heaven after death.
- xxxii. *Jamu wang sing*: Deity residing in the Forest.
- xxxiii. *Phu sawang sorra*: Deity residing in the Runa area.
- xxxiv. *Phu Mangbi*: A forest deity of Shergaon.
- xxxv. *Chungba sangze* : Ruler of the animal kingdom
- xxxvi. *Lopon Rinpoche*: Savior of mankind.

They also perform many non-Buddhist rites such as *Khiksaba*,<sup>38</sup> *Kamcha-Kyap-sanba*, *Khonoripa-Sakpa*, *Apsa* and others which involves sacrificing of pig, goat, sheep and fowl etc. in their villages as well as at their annual winter fair at Doimara in the foothills. These rites performed by their local priests (*Khikjiji*) are intended to propitiate many spirits and deities of Nature.

## **Khiksaba**

The *Khiksaba* festival is observed in November or December as fixed by the *lama*, and this festival ensures that the forest spirits do not attack the people on their long trek through the jungles to reach the plains. Just after the completion of *poksanamba* rituals and before the festival begins, whole village has to be kept very clean in terms of spiritual and physical form. Beating of drums in any form even by the *lamas* and loud noises are not allowed. Complete silent has to be observed. Pregnant woman has to deliver the baby outside the village. Burning of fire in any form is not permitted. No villagers are allowed to go to jungle for cutting firewood or bamboo. If any body violates the above a fine is imposed. However, agricultural activity is allowed but without any burning of fire. Even marriages can be performed but without any festivity and drum beats. These restrictions are observed so as to not disturb the *deo* (spirit) who is sleeping and taking rest before the festival.

The announcement and commencement of *Khiksaba* is made by beating of drums, the moment when seven stars and moon comes to very close. The *jijis* and *kamcha* who stays at *kamcha* (*khiksaba* ground) carefully gazes the movement and position of the seven stars and moon without sleep at night. The moment *jijis* sight the seven stars and moon in nearest position he beats the drum loudly indicating the beginning of *Khiksaba* festival. After this drum beat all restrictions mentioned above and imposed by *jiji* is relaxed. The restrictions are so strict that even the dead body is not permitted to be cremated before the beat of drum indicating the beginning of festival. If a person dies during this period then he is clandestinely taken out of the village and preserved under the ground till the beginning of *khiksaba* festival. The body is exumed from the ground and cremated.

On commencement of the festival, a person is deputed to Assam to bring *Thuk* (bunch of bettle-nut not in single pieces), bettle leaves, rice, loin cloth, weaving thread. These are brought from place like Oran, Mazbat, Panbari, Dogra and Romari in Assam since early times. After arrival of these items, late in the night six group of young boys known as *Mokpen*, each representing a clan goes to jungle across the river as instructed by *khikjiji* to collect bamboos. The bamboos brought are decorated with flower on the tip of it and each clan place it at near *kamcha*.

Next day *Choksatpa* ritual is performed at Lhabang at Rupa. In this, items like bettle, *sampo* (pot containing rice), *khaji* (vegetable cooked and fired) placed over *sampo*, *kulsi* (earthen pot) filled with *lao pani* (wine), *chebom* (a desined flower made out of flour) which is beautifully coloured and placed over the *nying* (silver jug) with designs of mithun, sheep and other animals for celebration are brought and kept in order to offering to *deo*. Even the neighbouring communities Buguns used to bring food items like potatoes, sweet potatoes, etc. All *deos* are invited to the feast. The *Mokpen* and a group called *Chokbo* participate in dance. *Chokbo* is a group of six membes each representing a *Chhao* clan who wears the dress of *Raja*(king) who is accompanied by six members of *Chhao* each carrying a beautiful local traditional bag with *Nyungtu* (silver jar/cup) and a small carpet. After the dance, the *Mokpe* sit in a place just below where the *Thongs* sit and are asked whether any difficluty arised while bringing the bamboo from the jungle.

Next day, a prayer called *Lachunglingba* is offered. In this each member of nine *khikspu* (clan) brings *lao pani* at Kamcha and offer *lachunglinga* prayer for *Chokbo* who sits on one side of *kamcha* and are called *lichotoba*. It is belived that this prayer is done so that *Chhao* members of *Chokbo* are not hurt by the spirit while removing the *Raja* dress and return the same to *khikspu* owner and wear their own dress.

In the following day, a ritual called *Gomchichuba* is performed in *kamcha* where whole people of village come and receives *prasad* mixture of *bukum* (local vegetable), chili and carrot while *Khikjiji* offers thanksgiving prayer to goddess *Laksmi* for blessing them with abundance and making the festival successful. At the end, the *lao pani* that was prepared during *poksansamba* is distributed to person who hoists prayer flag at three different places viz. *Khohamu Loma*, *Chablang* and *Jumuhao Hong*. While hoisting the flag, *Khikjiji* offers prayer holding the cotton thread-*Hongon noba*, giving it to *deo*. Later, nine *khikspu* (clan) donates sheeps and are presented one each to *Khikjiji*, *Lorjong Baidong* (one who goes around and perform prayers) and *Chokba*. They receive the sheep and organize their own picnic party and go back to their own house. With these Khiksaba festival comes to an end.<sup>39</sup>There are also several other festivals

like *Rek Lapsang Chhongba* (agricultural festival), and *Photenya* (agricultural festival) which are performed by the *Bon* priest.

At last it may be recapitulated that the Sherdukpens believe in the old faith, which was very similar to the *Bon* faith of Tibetans. With the advent of Buddhism in the area the forces of change were set in motion in their religious sphere. Here in this area Buddhism has made a unique compromise with the local faiths of the people. Instead of seeking to completely wipe out the indigenous beliefs and practices, attempt was made by the Buddhist monks and monastic institution to coalesce and syncretise or even to allow the two cultural traditions to co-exist.<sup>40</sup>

## **BUDDHISM AMONG THE SHERDUKPENS**

Before discussing Buddhism among the Sherdukpens it is to be noted here that living Buddhism is practiced in various parts of the state. To understand Buddhism among the Sherdukpen it is pertinent to understand Buddhism in Arunachal Pradesh.

The state of Arunachal Pradesh is the home of at least a dozen of Buddhist tribes, who live in the eastern as well as western part of the state, and professing both *Theravada* as well as *Mahayana* form of Buddhism.<sup>41</sup> The Sherdukpen in West Kameng districts are followers of *Mahayana* Buddhism or may be designated as Tibetan form of Buddhism. It may be mentioned that Buddhism in the state is a living religion having monks, monasteries, stupas, rituals, dances, festival, arts, and crafts, which provide an idea of Buddhist cultural heritage of the state. At the same time impact of Buddhism in the day –to-day life of these can be clearly studied in the state.

In the state of Arunachal Pradesh living forms of Buddhism; *Theravada* form of Buddhism as well as Tibetan form of Buddhism is noticed. There are number of communities who profess living tradition of Buddhism. The Tibetan form of Buddhism is followed by the Monpas, Sherdukpens, Membas, Khambas and Meyors located in western as well as central part of the state bordering Bhutan and autonomous region of Tibet (China).<sup>42</sup> As per the tradition the Tibetan form of Buddhism was popularized by *Padmasambhav* or locally known as *Lopan Rinpoche* sometime in 8<sup>th</sup> Century .A.D.

However, archaeological remains of Buddhist monuments noticed in the area belong to 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. at the earliest. The *Nyingmapa*, *Gelugpa* and *Karmapa* monuments are noticed.<sup>43</sup> The early *Nyingmapa* monuments are located in Tawang namely the Urgeyling,<sup>44</sup> Sangeyling and Tsorgeyling monasteries dated to 11<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. With the growth of *Gelugpa* tradition in Tibet and institution of *Dalai Lama* the *Gelugpa* school of Buddhism became popularized in Tawang area from 15<sup>th</sup> Century A.D and onwards. *Lama* Tanpi Dronme and his several incarnations contributed a lot in the establishment of a number of *Gelugpa* monasteries in the Tawang area.<sup>45</sup> However, the most important monument of the *Gelugas* is the Tawang monastery constructed by monk Mera Lama who with the advice of V *Dalai Lama* constructed the monument in 1680-81 A.D. This monastery is locally known as *Gaden Namyal Lhatse* or the celestial paradise of the divine site chosen by horse.<sup>46</sup> This is perhaps the largest monastery in India where development of Tibetan Buddhist art and architecture and iconography can be noticed. In fact throughout the district of Tawang and West Kameng Buddhist monuments are constructed. Even the VI *Dalia lama* is said to have born in Tawang.<sup>47</sup> Tibetan Buddhist monasteries are also located at Dirang, Rupa, Kalaktang (District West Kameng), various parts of district Tawang, Geling, Mankhota, Menchuka and in different parts of the district West Siang and Upper Siang. A number of *stupas* and minor Buddhist structures are constructed in the area. The Gorcham *stupa* at Zimithiang of district Tawang constructed by monk lama Prathar of early 17<sup>th</sup> Century happens to be one of the largest Buddhist *stupa* of India (more than 100ft of height).<sup>48</sup>

The *Theravada* Buddhist tradition can be noticed in the eastern frontier of the state bordering Myanmar mainly in district Lohit and Changlang.<sup>49</sup> The communities like the Khamtis, Shingphos and Thikhak Tangsas follow *Theravada* Buddhist tradition in their day to day life. The *Buranjis* (Medieval historical literature of Assam) and British literature refers to the prevalence of *Theravada* Buddhism among the Khamptis in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>50</sup> The Khampti monasteries are concentrated in Namsai Chowkham area of district Lohit. Almost all the monasteries were constructed in 19<sup>th</sup> and early part of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Chowkham monastery built sometime in early 19<sup>th</sup> century by one Khamti ruler Chaucha who happens to be a direct descendant of Namsom clan. During archaeological excavation a *Theravada* Buddhist *stupa* of the Khamptis has been

excavated by the research department, Government of Arunachal Pradesh in 1970 at Vijayanagar, district Changlang. A number of votive images of Buddha made of metal, quartz, amber, clay, etc have been noticed in the site.<sup>51</sup> The Singphos community has also constructed a number of Buddhist monasteries. In this aspect the monastery at Bordumsa, Kherem and a *stupa* near Miao are the earliest monument of the area.<sup>52</sup> A few subtribes of the Tangsa community such as the Tikhak Tangsa started following *Theravada* Buddhism in later part of 19<sup>th</sup> century and there is hardly any village in the Tikhak Tangsa area at present without having a monastery.<sup>53</sup> Infact the *Theravada* Buddhism of Arunachal Pradesh is highly influenced by the Buddhsit tradition from Myanmar and Thailand. Even the art and architecture of the area reveal the influence of late medieval art of Myanmar and Thailand.

The Buddhsit people have their dances, festivals, rituals, traditional arts and crafts where influence of Buddhismn can be identified. In the day to day life Buddhsim plays an important role. The monks and monastery used to play a pivitol role in various sphere of Buddhist society.

The traditions of Sherdukpens claim that the message of Buddhism was brought to them in the eight century by the *Guru Padmasambhav*, who helped the Tibetans to eastablish the creed in Tibet during the same period.<sup>54</sup> It is said that *Padmasambhav* had extensively travelled in this area and married a Monpa lady.<sup>55</sup> However, Buddhism was not institutionalized in this area during his visit. *Lopon Rimpoche* and *Lopon Pema Jungme* are the local names of *Padmasambhav*. The legends, therefore, place the visit of the master if not the advent of Buddhism itself in the eight century. The Sherdukpen cherish nine places hallowed by association with *Padmasambhav*- such as Jambring, Khang, Gisih, flujima, Machulu, Chupit, Jakhuang, Pemaloso, Chaksung, and Shrahanoma.<sup>56</sup> This lead by *Padmasambhav* was followed by several monks from Bhutan and Tibet, who helped the Sherdukpens to establish Buddhism in this remote corner of India.

*Guru Rimpoche*, the great Buddhist preacher of Tibet is popularly known to them as Kejang Doyeng Tanning. He is identified by R.P. Anuradha<sup>57</sup> with *Guru*

*Padmasambhava*, a renowned exponent of Nalanda University, in India. According to R.P. Anuradha, *Guru Padmasambhava* first came to Tibet from Nalanda University during the reign of King *Khri-Sronlde-btsan* (755-797 A.D.). His name has been suggested to the King by *Santaraksita*, the famous Buddhist *Bhikksu* who had been in Tibet for a couple of years at the request of the King to preach Buddhist doctrines among the Tibetans as at that time the *Bon*-religion (Sorcery or Shamanism) was powerful in Tibet. *Bhikksu Santaraksita* laboured hard to preach the doctrines of Buddhism among the Tibetans but ultimately he failed in his mission partly because of his extreme nihilistic doctrines and, partly because he was too scholastic for the common people.<sup>58</sup> The start given by the *Bhikksu* however, culminated in success with *Guru Padmasambhava* who defeated the *Bon*-followers in Tibet and established the *Nying-ma-pa* sect or the so-called Red sect and introduced a conical shaped cap for the Buddhist monks in order to distinguish them from the Black-Cap wearers, the *Bon*-priests:

It is avowed by the Sherdukpens that, in a later re-incarnation, *Guru Padmasambhava* came to Rupa, the then only Sherdukpen village in Kameng District, by way of Bhutan, with a view to preaching and propagating Buddhism among the Sherdukpens as well as the neighbouring tribesmen. At all events there is a legend about the acceptance of Buddhism by the Sherdukpens from Guru Rimpoche which is as follows:<sup>59</sup>

One day, all of a sudden, *Guru Rimpoche* came to Rupa village in the guise of an almsman and for begging alms, he went to the house of one *Gyaff Thong*, an old inhabitant of the village. Instead, however, of giving alms to the beggar, *Gyaff Thong* offered him a bowl of *Phak* (the local beer made of maize). The mendicant did not receive the offered drink in the bowl but took out a golden bowl from his bag. Then holding out the bowl for the *Phak* he began to recite grace and from the behaviour of the beggar, *Gyaff Thong* knew him to be a pilgrim and immediately bowed his head to him in devotion. In recognition of *Gyaff Thong*'s sincere devotion to him, the beggar presented a cane stick to *Gyaff Thong*. In this way *Guru Rimpoche* was received by the



Sherdukpens as a religious preacher. In the beginning, *Guru Rimpoche's* attempts to persuade them to adopt Buddhism and to follow its doctrines met with no success. His sermons and religious discourses could not gain ground as the Sherdukpens were then animists and had only heard of Buddhism from their neighbouring tribesmen, the Monpas. Therefore, in view of the *Guru Rimpoche* had to perform some superhuman feats in order to convince them of the surprise power of Buddhism and he gave a new twist to the preaching of Buddhism by virtue of his spiritual and magical powers, boring stones and bending iron rods with his fingers and making imprints of his shoes on rocks. One such stone treasured by the Sherdukpens at Rupa monastery shows several holes prominently. The Sherdukpens assert that these holes had been made by the *Guru Rimpoche* himself.

In time sermons backed by the superhuman activities of the *Guru* came home to the Sherdukpens and they accepted the ideas and principles of Buddhism as expounded by the *Guru* as the “beau ideal” and since then the Sherdukpens had given up the traditional practice of worshipping some of their tutelary deities and spirits and adopted Buddhism. The *Guru* advised them to construct a monastery at Rupa village.<sup>60</sup> With a view to perpetuating the Buddhism religion amongst them.

Before the advent of Buddhism,<sup>61</sup> the Sherdukpens believed in the existence of numerous spirits all around them. These were held to personify the powers and forces of their wild highland landscape and were responsible for all the calamities threatening their welfare. So they propitiated these spirits by performing rites in which the sacrifice of animals formed an important part, Buddhism stopped these rites.

Three Buddhist sects, *Nyingmapa*, *Kargyupa* and *Gelugpa*<sup>62</sup> operated in Sherdukpen area. Only one of sub-sects of the *Kargyupa*, called the *Karmapa*, came into this region. Among all these sects, the *Gelugpa* was the last to come. With the establishment of the Tawang monartery, this sect gradually but steadily gained supremacy and the other sects lost their hold. The *Karmapa* completely disappeared, only the *Nyingmapa* lingers and too mostly among the village priests.

The *Lamas* and the laity firmly believe that the *Lopon Rimpoche* visited the Sherdukpen areas and planted the germ of Buddhism there. There are places hallowed by his visit. *Lopon Rimpoche* is the local name of the famous Indian Monk *Padmasambhava* who arrived in Tibet in 747 A.D. in response to the invitation of the Tibetan King, Thisrong Detsen and finally established Buddhism there. These legends, therefore, place the visit of the great Indian preacher, if not the advent of Buddhism itself, in the eighth century.

The Sherdukpens cherish nine places hallowed by association with the Master.<sup>63</sup> One is Jambring, about two miles to the east of the village of Rupa. A rock, on which he sat for some time, bears the impression of his body. As he rested on it, it is said, a few men of the neighbouring Aka community came and offered him some flour of the pith of *nik* ( a species of palm). Before partaking of it, he dropped a little on the ground as an offering to the divinities. It fell on a rock on the opposite bank of the stream that flowed by, and grew into a thick clump of *nik* plants. Another is Khang Gisih, about three miles to the east of Rupa. There is a big stone on which, it is said, similar one once lay. This is no longer there. The stone is said to have looked like a Sherdukpen shoe and legend says that it was actually the petrified shoe of the Master Flujima, about one mile to the west of Rupa, prides itself on a rock with the Pug-marks of a dog and the imprints of a shod foot on it. Here the master came with a dog. Machulu, about three miles to the west of Rupa, also holds the footprints of the Master and the pug-marks of his dog besides a hole in which he planted the stave of his bow. In chupit, about three miles from Rupa and near the foot track between Rupa and the village of Jigaon, there is an impression of a hand on a rock about six feet above the ground. It is believed that the Master pressed that rock with his hand when passing that way. In Jakhung, in the foothills on the boundary of Assam, there used to be a stone shaped like a Sherdukpen shoe. This too, as in Khang Gisih, is believed to have been the Master's. It is missing now. Pemaloso is in the foothills at the place where the stream Dojibuti flows out from the hills to meet the Gavrunig river in the plains. There is a lotus carved on stone on a small hill. It is said to have appeared miraculously when

the Master came there. The Master passed some time at Urgyanpemagon in meditation. This spot is at Chaksung, about half a mile from Rupa towards Jigaon.

About three miles to the south of Rupa, there is a place called *Shra-ha-noma*, meaning goat-blood-line. Here an evil spirit opposed the Master in the form of a wild goat (*shra*) as he was passing that way. The Master hit him on the head with a pellet from his sling and the blood (*ha*) flowed from the wound in a line (*noma*).

In the context of these legends about visit of *Padmasambhava*, it is of special interest to learn that he had among his five earthly *Dakinis*<sup>64</sup> who are initiation goddesses transmitting the teachings of transcendent knowledge or the magic lessons of the Tantras. In their human form they are called *yoginis*, who act as the feminine partners of the yogins, or spiritual constorts '.....a woman from the Himalayan districts (*Mon*) named '*Kra-shis Khye-dren* .....<sup>65</sup>. This name in Monpa is pronounced *Tashi Khyeden*. The fact that the Master had a woman of the *Mon*<sup>66</sup> area as one of his five *Dakinis*, lends credibility to the legendary visit of the Master to the Monpa and Sherdukpen areas. The historicity of these legends is difficult to assess. But they at least indicate that the *Nyingmapa* preceded the *Karmapa* and *Gelugpa* in this region.

The legends about the eighth century visit of *Padmasambhava* to the Sherdukpen areas provide no clue as to the actual date of their conversion to Buddhism. Some manuscripts in the Tawang monastery mention that Meme Gyapten, whom the Sherdukpens honour as their "ancestor", came to this area as a lay associated to Tanpei Donme some time between 1475 and 1543. The Gelugpa was the first organized sect to work among them some time around 1742.<sup>67</sup>

The Sherdukpens are at present the followers of *Nyingmapa* traditions. All the village *gompas* are following the principle of *Nyingmapa* Buddhist sect. The *Nyingmapa* gives preference to worship of *Padmasambhav*<sup>68</sup> and that is why in most of the *gompas* the chief image in the prayer area that of *Padmasambhav* who is locally known as *Lopan Rinpoche*. The pre-modial deity of the *Nyingmapa* is *Samatabhadra* and *Dzogchan* as its mystical insight. *Dorjee Phurba* is considered as tutelary demonical Buddha and *Honpo Gong* is the guardian demon. The *Nyingmapa Lama* wear red hat

and rarely practice celibacy and abstinence.<sup>69</sup> Among the Sherdukpens there are two types of *lama*, *Ngakpa*, one who can marry, and *Gelung* one who cannot marry.<sup>70</sup>

## RELIGIOUS STRUCTURES AND TERMINOLOGIES

The Sherdukpens like their Buddhist neighbours Monpas have indigenous terminologies for various religious structures and its parts.<sup>71</sup> The sight that strikes the eye as one approaches a Sherdukpen village is the tall wooden poles dressed with streamers of cloths or papers with invocation to the gods or religious symbols printed on them. These are *phans* or prayer-flags carrying the prayers far and wide for the welfare of the individuals, community and the world. The tallest is called *darsing* and the smaller ones *lungtoh*. These are set up to acquire religious merit or as part of a funeral ceremony. The roofs of the houses carry a small *phan* in the front and another at the rear. These are joined by a cord with small prayer-flags hanging from it. If the prayer-flags are printed, the whole thing is known as *lungtuphan* or *dumphan*. At some places a cord, from which are hung pieces of paper or cloth sometimes bearing religious formulae, is stretched from one tree to another or to a rock. It is called *chephan*. Sometimes, one *chephan* or a bunch of these is fixed on a bush, generally beside the track. Small prayer-flags, about twelve inches long and without any print, are stuck to bamboo sticks. These are *fohing*, kept singly or in a bunch and used in ritual performances. The setting up of a prayer-flag is believed to confer religious merit on the person or persons doing it.

The people set up a *darsing* or *lungtoh* on an auspicious day in consultation with a lama. The lama and the men, women and children of the village assemble at the selected site to see the prayer-flag set up. The lama performs a rite called *thru*. He sits at the base of the prayer-flag, chants a litany inviting the divinities to come and take their seat on a small metal mirror called *melong*, set on a metal bowl and with a religious scarf placed over it. He pours water from the holy-water vase called *bumpa* to bathe the divinities. Then he consecrates the prayer-flag with *ramne* in which he chants religious formulae and occasionally throws a few *namkaling* (It is the seed of some plant with two white peta-like appendages for facilitating wide dispersal. The *lamas* use it is

as substitute for flower as in their cold country flowers are not always available. The *namkaling* can be stored for a long time and that is an additional advantage) and grains of barley and rice towards the prayer-flag. He follows it up with rite called *serkem*. In this he puts some barley and rice in a metal cup placed on a bowl, chants a formula and occasionally pours country wine over the barley and rice. The assembled villagers then shout the chorus '*lha-sholo*' [Oh! gods, please accept these offerings] and '*ai-hu-hu*' [an exclamation of happiness] several times. The people smear each other's forehead and hair with flour for long life.

Another common religious structure is a pile of stones with an upright stick in it on the summits of all passes. The stick is stuck with strips of paper or cloth. It is called *luing-puing* by the Sherdukpens. The passer-by put flowers, stones or small pennons on it as offerings to the local spirits. It is constructed for the propitiation of the spirits haunting such places.

Every family has a small chapel in the shape of an altar called *chosam* at the rear of the house. It is wooden and has a few shelves on which are kept images of several divinities and ritual articles. The rich have a separate room for the altar. The religious books, if one has any, are kept in pigeon-holed shelves beside the altar.

A small structure of stone, about six feet high, is found in front of the temples and houses. It is known as *sangbum* and juniper twigs are burnt in it as incense during ritual performances.

The *sachubompa* is an earthen vessel painted with sacred symbols containing ritual articles. It is made once a year by the lamas of the Tawang monastery. It is placed inside a stone structure, also called *sachubompa* which is almost like the *sangbum*. The place it is constructed is believed to start a spring and cause good crops and increase in the number of domestic animals in the whole areas around it.

In the temples and private chapels are hung up on the wall and posts brightly painted religious scrolls called *kuthang* by the. These are paintings of various divinities done on cotton or rarely on canvas. Some of these are donations to the persons seeking welfare and prosperity. Some are put up by the lamas themselves. Others are

from the kins of the departed as part of the mortuary rites. These last have a name of the departed written on the back. Each religious scroll is known according to the name of the divinity painted on it. The *Lopon kuthang* has the eight forms of *Padmasambhava* painted on it. The divinity for the *Tsepame kuthang* is *Tsepame [Amitayus]*, the Buddha of Infinite life. On the *Tungshak kuthang* are depicted the thirty-five Buddhas of confession. The *Chagtong chantong kuthang* bears the painting of the divinity called *Chenrezi chagtong chantong*, a form of *Chenrezi* with a thousand arms and eyes and the *Jigje kuthang* of the fierce, two horned and blue complexioned *Jigje* in close embrace with his consort and with smaller fierce demons below and benign divinities above him. There are many other such religious scrolls.

The *mane* is a wooden cylindrical barrel fitted with a wooden shaft passing longitudinally through its middle and forming its axis. This barrel is painted on its outer surface as well as filled with rolls of paper printed with mystic formulae, the commonest being the '*Om mani padme hum*' pronounced as '*Om mani peme hum*'. These are of the essence *mantra* of *Chenrazee (Avalokiteshvara)* being *Om-ma-ni-Pad-me hum*) pron Om-Ma-ni-Pay-me-Hung)...*Chenrazee* being the patron-god, or national tutelary deity, of Tibet, and this being his *mantra*, its repetition...is credited with bringing to an end the cycle of rebirth and thereby giving entrance into *Nirvana*. In the Tibetan work called *Mani-bkah-hbum* (pron *Ma-ni-kah-boom*), i.e 'History of *Mani* (or *Mantar* of *Chenrazee*)' this *mantra* is said to be 'the essence of all happiness, prosperity, and knowledge, and the great means of liberation'; also it is said that the *om* closes the door of rebirth among the gods. *Ma*, among *asuras* (or titans). *Ni*, among mankind, *pay*, among the sub-human creature, *me*, among *pretas* (or unhappy ghosts), and *hung*, among the inhabitants of hell. ['Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus' or 'Hail to him who is the Jewel in the Lotus']. There are different sizes of such prayer-wheels fitted in various structures. Sometimes a prayer-wheel is placed vertically inside a small hut near a stream. The lower part of axis is fitted with wooden spokes. Water is brought from the stream, passed through a wooden aqueduct and made to fall from a height to strike the spokes with sufficient force to make the prayer-wheel rotate day and night with the revolution of the spokes. Sometimes the prayer-wheel is so big as to hold one *dung* i.e. ten crore rolls of paper printed with mystic formulae and such a prayer-wheel is called *dungjur*

*mane*. The outer walls of the temples and *stupas* have sometimes a long niche in which rolls of prayer-wheels are fitted. The pilgrims and votaries circumbulate the temples and *stupas* keeping to their right. While making the round, they turn the prayer-wheels with their right hand and mutter the mystic formula '*Om mani peme hum*'. They are considered to have chanted the mystic formula as many times as the prayer-wheel has rotated. There are also small prayer-wheels which are carried by hand and whirled for the same purpose.

There is another type of *mane* which is erected in the shape of a stone wall of varying lengths. It stands on the middle of a track, generally at the boundaries of villages. This may be as small as about ten feet or as long as one hundred feet or more. The two extremities of this structure are fitted with prayer-wheels or stone tablets with the same mystic formula, '*Om mani peme hum*', engraved in relief. In shelves cut into the main body of the wall are ranged stone tablets with their mystic formula or a divinity called *Jampe-yang* [*Manjusri*, the God of Wisdom] or a group of three divinities collectively called *rig-sum gonpa* engraved. In this group, *Jampe-yang* is flanked by *Chenrezi* and the fierce-looking *Chana-Dorje* [*Vajrapani*]. The engravings are in relief and in bold colouring. Such *mani*-walls, even if without such stone tablets, are also called *mane*. The passers-by always keep them as they pass and turn the prayer-wheel, if there be any, with the right hand muttering '*Om mani peme hum*'.

The setting up of a *mane* is considered as an act of piety and is believed to bring religious merit. Sometimes the bereaved kins put up a *mane* and dedicate it in the name of the deceased, so that the departed soul is spared torment in hell and gets a good rebirth. The *mane* is set up by the efforts of the whole villages, a group of families or a single family.

The most typical shrine is the stupa called *chorten* usually standing near the paths. When erected as a cenotaph enshrining the earthly remains of the departed, it is called *kudung*. The *chorten* containing the personal possession of the departed is known as *dungten*. These cenotaphs are set up with the hope that the departed soul may get a good rebirth. But most of the *chortens* contain only sacred images and religious texts and these are erected by the laity to ensure communal welfare. Miniature *chortens* of

metal or clay are placed as offerings on the temple altar and some times in the niche of a *mane-wall* or a *stupa*. The *chortens* are solid masonry structures and the construction of such a *chorten* is considered to be an act of religious merit.

The *chortens* are mainly of two forms. In one form, the hemispherical dome enclosing the relic rests upon several plinths. The dome is surmounted by a square capital with a spire consisting of thirteen steps-like segments which in turn is topped by one or more umbrellas. The sides of the capital sometimes bear a pair of eyes. In the other form, which is more common, a solid square dome rests on a five-tier platform which is set on a square base. The dome is surmounted by a thirteen-ring spire, topped by a solar disc set on a lunar crescent. A circular device rests on the solar disc.<sup>72</sup>

In the sherdukpen area one can notice a number of Buddhist monasteries called as *Lhagang* by the people. Old monasteries are noticed in Rupa and Shergaon. In villages like Jigaon and others monasteries are constructed mostly in later part of twentieth century. Rupa Gompa is considered as the earliest monastery of the area.

### **Rupa Gompa:**

Rupa is renowned for the monumental *gompa* (monastery) which is adorned with the images of Lord Buddha, decorative paintings and gates. The *gompa* at Rupa is the largest and the oldest Buddhist temple in the Sherdukpen area.<sup>73</sup> The local name of the Rupa *gompa* is *Pema Tsoling gompa* or *Lhagang* of Rupa. The approach to the *gompa* is 1 km journey by road from Rupa town. It belongs to the *Nyingmapa* sect. The length, breadth, and height of the *gompa* is 15.3 x 10.25 x 9.1 m respectively. Different types of material i.e. stone, clay, wood and binding materials were used for the construction of the *gompa*.

The Gompa has a beautiful and well decorated *Kakaling* of about 15 feet high, with a domed roof elaborately painted with conventional designs and images of the Buddha. It is built of stones with walls on two sides only and a passage right through it. *Kakaling* is erected so that there may be better harvest of crops and people may not suffer from



disease. Its construction is also believed to usher in an era of peace and prosperity among the people. It scares away the evil spirits and prevents the outbreak of epidemics in the village. It does well to those who pass through its gate. It is believed that even animals passing through it are blessed and will be born as human beings in their next lives. A Rupa *Kakaling* painting represents a *gompa* in the town with four gates, having inside a eight-figured circle depicting the lamas who prepared a medico-religious book and around this are two rectangles, the last one containing 24 figures. Around this circle containing the eight images of the lamas, there is a rectangle whose four corners are decorated with stylized patterns, collectively called *Dayan Nanga* and said to represent *regcah* (cloth piece), or (food), *dra* (conch shell), *dre* (cymbal) and *zuk* (mirror). These are essential items, which the lamas should take with him. Above this is another rectangle containing sixteen images. Each wall of the rectangle contains an equal number of figures. Principal amongst them are those depicted in the south, east, north and west, namely *Jambe Yang Serbu*, *Chandre Zi*, *Chhana Dorjee* and *Jigtun Jambe Gombu*.<sup>74</sup> They are the God of wisdom and intelligence, God of justice, God who protects from evil, and God of world (who will rule over the world after 2500 years). There are also gods of animals, gods of rain and sky.

The monument is three storeyed. The structure of the *gompa* is of trabeate pattern. There are 108 *manes*. *Manes* are stone which are in the shape of walls, 10 to 20 feet long, 2 to 3 feet wide and 6 to 8 feet high. Tablets bearing the sacred inscription, 'Om mani padme hum', are arranged on small shelves cut into the wall. These shrines are erected where there is danger from demons or where strange noise is heard. We notice 3 small *chortens* in the *gompa*. It is a stupa-shaped structure where prayers are held occasionally. The *lama* sits on a piece of ground in front of the *stupa* and leads the prayer. The people go round the *chorten* three times. Many religious flags as minor structures in and around the monument are noticed. The important aspect of the *gompa* is its *dukhang* (prayer hall) and two stone statues. We notice various religious inscriptions on the rampart of the *gompa*. Tibetan scrolls are hung from the walls. *Shawang* is the guardian deity of the Sherdukpen village of Rupa and a painting of his is found along with others in the *Kakaling* of Rupa *gompa*.

The first room of the *gompa* is called *dukhang*. The area of the room is 9.5 x 8.4 x 2.7 m in length, breadth and height. *Wu-bana* (Buddha) image is nicely decorated in the *dukhang*. On the right side we find the image of *Chanderezi* (*Avalokitesvara*) and on the left hand side is *Guru Padmasambhava*. We see the deity of *Shawang* (the guardian deity) in the middle. In the painting he has been depicted with gorgeous costumes, riding a horse and transfixing an evil spirit with his spear so that the evil spirits cannot harm the worshippers/local people. The people of Rupa arrange in the tenth Sherdukpen month, the annual rites of this deity in which the priest (*jiji*) of the old religion officiates. The rites are accompanied with the sacrifice of a sheep and a fowl and the lamas of Rupa make oblation to this deity according to the Buddhist mode of rituals on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of each month. Rupa has another local deity called *Ama*, who is worshipped in Buddhist mode of rituals. It is believed that all these images and icons were made by the Bhutanese sculptors. Certain changes were brought in course of time.

In the second floor, there is a big room mainly meant for prayer. The area of the prayer hall is 9.4 x 8.3 x 2.8 m by length, breadth and height. This hall is also called *dukhang*. *Jo Rimpoche* is placed in the centre of the *dukhang*. On the right hand side we notice the image of *Chanderezi*, *Drolma* and *Jambeyang* (Mother Goddesses) and on its left side we see the images of *Drolma*, Buddha and *Chanerezi* having four arms. There is a stone image of *Vishnu* in the Rupa *Gompa*. It is a standing stone image of the Hindu divinity named *Vishnu* holding in its four hands the four emblems namely, conch, discus, mace and lotus. It is of black stone and eighteen inches high. The images of goddess *Laksmi* holding a lotus and *Saraswati* with a vina in her hands stand on the right and left side respectively of *Vishnu*. All these three divinities stand on a lotus. On the outer sides of *Laksmi* and *Saraswati*, there are two smaller images and side-piece columns of a human figure, a *makara* (a mythological aquatic animal), a lion and an elephant, one above the other in that order. Two flying figures are on the two sides of *Vishnu*'s head and another two in the pedestal in the posture of obeisance. This image of *Vishnu* is a *Bhogathanakamurti* of the *madhyama* class.<sup>74</sup> This image has been placed with others of Buddhist on the altar and is referred to as *Jo Kharsapani*. It

is said to have been brought by the forefathers of the Sherdukpens from somewhere in the Assam plains.

Various wooden masks are put on the walls. These are deer mask, snake mask, monkey mask, lion mask, eagle mask, dog mask, etc. More than twice, the renovation of the gompa has been completed. To renovate the *gompa*, architects from Bhutan were invited.

On the first floor, one room (hall) is converted to museum where arefacts, potteries, paintings, books, household articles of Shedukpen, war equipments quite of them are brought from Ahom period one which is of interest is gun dated to 1624, probably presented by an Ahom king, *totpa*(man's skull cup), weaving cloth, seal, *Tunpa Pungshi* and various other Buddhsit paintings and artifacts. We also find one kitchen building, one residence mainly for the head of the monastery i.e. lama, one building meant for the monks and one for lighting lamps by the people. These are the strctures inside the boundary of the *gompa*.

The date of Rupa *gompa* is not clearly known to us because of lack of either literary or epigraphical sources. However, R.R. P. Sharma believes that this *Gompa* was constructed after 1742 when Sherdukpens (People of Rupa) embraced Buddhism in large number. Thus the *Gompa* might have been constructed in late eighteen century.

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### **Jigaon Gompa**

The Jigaon *gompa* was constructed by the villagers for their ritual purpose. The *Gompa* belongs to *Nyingmapa* sect.<sup>76</sup> The *Gompa* is double storey. In the upper storey, one clay sculpture of *Chantong Chantong* (Buddha) is noticed. The size of the room is 4m 53cm in length and 48cm in breadth. In the lower storey, the ritual room is of 9m 53cm in length and 8m 20cm in breadth. In this ritual room, seven big clay idols are preserved. The names of these seven sculptures are *Guru Padmasambhava*, *Bodhisatva*, *Yeshi Chojo*, *Wopame*, *Trisong Dechen*, *Magon*. Besides, 27 small idols made of brass are also found. There is a statue of Buddha which is black in colour.

A separate building of *Mane Dungjur* of the size is of 3m 17cm in circumference and 12 feet in height is noticed. There is no painting in the room. The size of the room is 5m 37cm in length and 5m 37cm in breadth. A kitchen is having two attached rooms 4m 8cm in length and 3m 35 cm in breadth is 3m 43cm in length and 3m 30 cm in breadth respectively. Besides the kitchen there is a building, used as community hall of the village. The size of this is 10m 80cm in length and 6m 89cm in breadth. On the back side of the kitchen, a building is constructed and used as sitting room for *Komeir Lama* (incharge of *Gompa*). This building has three rooms and made of cement.

Around the *gompa* four *Chortens*, made up of clay sand stone are noticed. The size of the first *Chorten* is 7m 81cm in circumference and 5m 41cm in height. The size of second *Chorten* is 7m 35cm in circumference and 5m 14cm in height. The third *Chorten* is 11m 25cm in circumference and 5m 14cm in height. And the fourth *Chorten* size is 12m 34cm in *Song Bumpa* which is made of cement. The size of the *Bumpa* is 3m in height and 4m 15cm in circumference. This monument is dated to later part of 19<sup>th</sup> century AD.

### **Chilipam Gompa**

The name of the *Gompa* of Song Ngaj Choikhar Dargeling Songdorpe.<sup>77</sup>

The *gompa* was built by Khunsang Dechenlingpa Rimpoche. It is recently constructed in 1996. This *Gompa* is constructed at Chilipam, which is on the way to Kalaktang from Rupa. The *Gompa* belongs to *Nyingmapa* sect. The myth of the *Gompa* was that the *Rimpoche Khunsang Deehenlingpa* came from Tibet and stayed at Tawang. The message to spread the Buddhist religion came in his dream and hence the *Rimpoche* has decided to construct a *Gompa* in order to spread the religion. As a result, this *Gompa* was built by him. He established the *Drachang* (school) to help the poor people and to impart knowledge of religion to the people. There is a prayer hall where 110 volumes of *Kanjur* (*Chos*) and 210 volume of *Tanjur* are preserved. In this prayer hall, twenty five idols made up of brass are kept. The size of the prayer hall is 11m 75cm in length and 9m 56cm in breadth. All the paintings of the prayer hall are new.

The *Gompa* consists of three-storeyed. The size of top-most storey is 7m 20cm in length and 7m 26cm in breadth and middle storey is 12m 20cm in length and 12m 15cm in breadth. The size of the lower storey is 21m 85cm in length and its breadth is 14m 77cm. There are number painting and sculptures inside the *Gompa*. In between the main *Gompa* and the prayer hall, there is a small separate building. In that building, three sculptures are *Guru Drakpu*, *Fodrang* and *Sangey Chomdandee* are kept. On the left side, the statue of Guru Padmasambhava is noticed. It is said that these three deities protect the *Gompa* from the evil spirit. There is one building which is used as hostel for Lamas. In this building there are 18 rooms having some size of 6m 12cm in length and 4m 29cm in breadth. Again there is an attached hostel consisting of five rooms having of the size of 3m 9cm in breadth and 4m 29cm in length.

### **Shergaon gompa**

Shergaon has got two monasteries. The lower one called *Lhagang* and the upper one *Zengbu*. *Lhagang* has got dedicated monk and his assistant to carry out the work. It is located at half a kilometer from Shergaon town. It is 200 years old. It is managed by village committee of Shergaon. Apart from rituals and local religious festivals the Sherdukpen communities use this *gompa* as community meeting hall. In physical description, the monastery is in semi urban surrounding with two-storied with decorative walls in exterior, wall paintings, masks, icons of different deities, wall hangings in interior. Some of the moveable collections are icons, wall hangings, prayer materials, masks, books, etc. Structural system is normal indigenous timber base with tin roof constructions. Building technique used is simple indigenous traditional style. Material used is timber, bamboo, clay, lime tin sheets, etc. Lots of prayer flags in and around the monastery, mostly erected by families of departed souls are found. It differs from normal prayer flags as they are printed in black ink.<sup>78</sup>

### **Zengbu gompa**

Among religious structure, the *Zengbu Gompa* is one of the oldest, 300 years belonging to 18<sup>th</sup> century situated on a hillock near the Shergaon.<sup>79</sup> Although the site of the *Gompa* was shifted slightly below from the original area, the materials of the *Gompa*

are said to be same and the deity too remain the same namely, *Zengb u Chochong*. The name of the *gompa* is derived from the local dialect, Zeng, the honorific word for construction. The *lama* of *Zengbu Gompa* is locally known by *Phu Lama*. Being the religious head of the *Gompa*, he is to perform the offerings called Kangso thrice in a month i.e on 8<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> day for the welfare of the village.

The villagers of Shergaon had constructed two additional wooden house for the keeper (*ko-nyer-lama*) and helper (*Gon-rok*) just below the *Gompa*. They also fixed up the rates of annual contribution or taxes in kind known as *Gon-Khrai* of each family of the village for the *Ko-nyer Lama* and the *Gon-rok* who were solely responsible for the maintenance of the *Gompa*. Following *Gon-Khrai* were collected: 1. *Jarmin-Gon-Khrai* (2 kg(bre) of wheat) 2. *Phentang Khrai* ( a small conical shape basket of Maize) 3. *Gichan-Gon-Khrai* (2 bre of Millet) and 4. *Nise and Khichen gon-Khrai*( Grains)

The *Gompa* is managed by village committee of Sherduken community. It is associated with rituals and seasoned festivals with regular prayers are held with traditional customs. In physical description, the monastery is in semi urban surrounding with two-storied with decorative walls in exterior, wall paintings, masks, icons of different dieties, wall hangings in interior. Some of the moveable collections are icons, wall hangings, prayer materials, masks, books, etc Structural system is normal indigeneous timber base with tin roof constructions. Building technique used is simple indigenous traditional style. Material used is timber, bamboo, clay, lime tin shets, etc.

In the *gompa* there is a stone statue of a goddess<sup>80</sup> locally known as *Norjinma*. It is a four armed stone image of goddess with a crown on its head and standing on a pedestal. This image is said to be of the goddess *Norjinma*. But *Lama Phuchu*, the village priest, has his doubt as he claims that *Norjinma*, as described in the religius texts, should be in a sitting pose and has two arms. The history of this image, as narrated by him, is as follows. *Jengobhili*, a village of the community named Kacharis, is about a twelve miles from Doimara. Once the Kacharis, about a generation back, went for fishing in a reserved forest. There were plenty of fishes in the water but strangely they could not catch any. Then they discovered two stone images of a god and a goddess lying in the water and they thought that these two had defeated their efforts in

fishing by giving protection to the fishes. In anger, one of them hit the image of the goddess with a stone cracking its nose. When the people of Shergaon heard this report, they visited the site but could find only the image of goddess. The other has miraculously disappeared. They brought this image in their village, placed it on the alter of this temple along with images of the Buddhist divinities and started worshipping it as *Norjinma*. It was later given a coat of paint. The crack in its nose is still there. Perhaps this image is of goddess *Laksmi*. It is a product of medieval art of Brahmaputar valley.

Each *pam* (hamlets) and villages have its own *Gompa* where prayers are being offered as per the Buddhist tradition. It may be mentioned here that most of the small villages of the Sherdukpen area are having *gompas* of recent period

### **Remains of stupa**

Doimara, situated at the foot of Rupa hill ranges, was a nerve centre of the Sherdukpens, and an important *Duar* of the four *duras* of Charduar area through which Assam trade with Tibet was transacted in pre-colonial and colonial period.<sup>81</sup> The annual migration of Sherdukpen to Doimara during the winter season has left impact in their socio-religious life. Exploration in Doimara, reveals two Buddhist *stupas* and few antiquities.<sup>82</sup> The first *stupa* is said to be constructed by the people of Rupa, measures, 4.16m in length, 3.78m in breadth and 1.95m in height. The hemispherical dome *stupa*, has a rectangle base with bottom spire steps and the path of circumbulation is intact. Stone tablets containing mystic formula '*Om Mani Peme Hum*' are laid on the vault. The second one, built by the people of Shergaon, measure 9.20 x 2.10 x 2.75m in length, breadth and height. The rectangular basement has a dome surmounted by a small square capital, and the upward spire consists of thirteen step like segments. Both the *stupa* contains sacred images and religious texts inside the dome and are erected by the laity to ensure communal warfare. Most probably the structures are of late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century. A rock inscription inscribing the mystic formula in Tibetan is noticed on a rock at a distance of three kms north-west of new Doimara village.

A number of *stupas* majority of them are votive, are noticed in the length and breadth of Sherdukpen area. Both the variety of *stupa* known as *kudung* and *dungten*

as noticed in other *Mahayana* Buddhist area of Arunachal, are also identified in this area. Infact the *stupa* culture is in vogue among the people and it is constructed for the peace, prosperity or in the name of deceased, etc.

### **FUNCTIONAL APECTS OF MONASTERIES** <sup>83</sup>

In almost every Sherdukpen village, a *Gompa* can be located. The *Gompa* is generally located away from the settlement area of the village. The village priest is called *Lama*. Daily life of the people is intimately associated with the *Gompa*. So it is a very imprtant centre of the people. It is the place where people perform rituals for their prosperity. Since, monastery is one of the important socio-religious institutions for the village, there is the provision of looking after it regularly. The villagers have arranged the system of looking after the *Gompa* in such a way that a *Lama* is selected for a period of time.

Education was the essential function of the monastery from its very inception. This fact is fully borne out by the functional details of the *Samya* furnished by Nain Singh in 1874 A.D.<sup>84</sup> *Samya*, the first monastry founded in Tibet 794 in A.D., was primarily meant to be an 'academy' as it svery name *bSam-ya Mi-gyur-Lhun-gyis grub-pai gTsug-lung-lung-khang* i.e., 'the Academy for obtaining the heap of unchanging meditation' suggest. Beside the *Kangyur* and the *Tangyur*, the *terma* treatises also form an important part of Lamaistic literature. These manuals have served well to record the folk traditions about the exploits of *Pamasambhava* by different *lamas* which otherwise would have been lost to posterity. The monasteries developed on the pattern of renowned monastic universities, shouldered the task of education and literacy under a collective body of teacher. The monasteries introduced an entirely new collective system of knowledge with meticulous speed to drive away primitive ignorance and the plethora of tribal beliefs and traditions. This was done by the monasteries primarily by popularizing the written language and literacy to replace the oral tradition. The monasteries helped to dispel many primitive beliefs, supersitutions and dogmas by its more rational outlook.



The Rupa *gompa* in Sherdukpen area was an important education centre and acted as school in early period where novices were provided education related to Buddhist religion, rituals and ethics.<sup>85</sup> No doubt the lead taken by Rupa gompa not only popularized Buddhism among the common masses but at the same time helped in to drive away a number of superstitious beliefs and tradition.

In the development of various arts and crafts, the contribution of monasteries is perhaps the most significant. These have served as scriptoria for the illustration and copying of manuscripts and workshop for casting images, paintings murals and *thankas* and repositories for priceless works of art.

Studies reveal that highest concentration of the *Gompas* was found in those areas where they had strong resource base. Monasteries play a very important role during the agricultural pursuits of the village. After sowing of maize, villagers perform *Chheker* in the village *during* which villagers assemble in *Gompa*. The *Chhekar* festival commences with the reading of Holy Scriptures, such as *Kanjor* 100 volumes, by Lamas at the monastery. All the scriptures available in the monastery are read during the '*Chhekar*' festival. The ripen maize are collected in *Gompa* and kept safely before the onset of *Khiksaba* festival. *Gompas* like Zengbu in Shergaon organize and manage apple orchard whose proceedings are used for community development and further growth of agricultural activities.<sup>86</sup> The income from the land-holdings by way of share-cropping system created large buffer stocks of grains in monasteries, the surplus of which was bartered with other precious items and used for beneficial purpose of the society. Thus, these monasteries not only developed into repositories of arts and crafts but also generated employment avenues for the skilled artists and craftsmen.<sup>87</sup>

The monasteries, which had so far subsisted on the popular support from laity by way of alms and gifts, were drawn into the temporal affairs of managing the land and realization of taxes etc. These functions necessitated that the monasteries asserted their authority to exact the stipulated share of the harvest from the tenants of the monastery-holdings and also exercised executive powers within the territory. Being the only organized and educated class devoted to religious pursuits, the monks were already respected by lay folk. And, on being invested with the administrative rights and

feudal privileges within the specified territory, their social status commanded higher respect as a clerical aristocracy. Because of their professed objective of proslytisation, the monasteries were established in such far-flung areas where the non-Buddhist population predominated. The monasteries in such pockets, therefore, emerged as the political and administrative centres.<sup>88</sup>

Monasteries also play a vital role in the political life of the people. The very existence of the *Gompa* in the village creates a sense of awe and fear so that people do not dare to commit any sin, robbery, murder, or any other crime. In Rupa Gompa, the ground floor was used as *Chon* (jail) for imprisoning the convict in village council. All meetings of Sherdukpen village council are held in *gompa* where lama offers prayer before meeting begins.<sup>889</sup>

All the socio-religious functions are used to organized in the monasteries in this area. The Buddhist monks play a very important role in this regard. The komeir lama used to attend various rituals concerning the people's prosperity and good health. In fact the monastery was the institution which binded the people under one umbrella i.e. Buddhism. In fact monks in monasteries use to act as, friend, philosopher and guide of the people. Credit goes to the monasteries and monks of the area to have peaceful relation with all the non-Buddhist neighbouring community.

Thus we have seen that the religion of Sherdukpen is an admixture of *Mahayana* Buddhism and some traces of *Bon* cult as practiced in Tibet before the adoption of Buddhism by the people. The Sherdukpen used to also believe in number spirits, deities and perform various rituals, festivals, etc. which can be categorized as part and parcel of *Bon* religion. No doubt with the coming of *Mahayana* Buddhism the Buddhist monks have made a compromise with the *Bon* tradition to popularize Buddhism in this area.

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# BUDDHIST RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

## INTRODUCTION

The *mahayana* tribes of the state including the Sherdukpens perform various forms of religious practices, which are important part and parcel of living Buddhism of the area. The religious practices can be better understood with regard to devotion, ethics, *sangha* and meditation. This chapter provides an idea of these practices with an understanding of Tibetan Buddhist practices.

Most traditions of Buddhism consider *saddha*, 'trustful confidence' or faith, as a quality which must be balanced by wisdom, and as a preparation for, or accompaniment of, meditation. Given this provision, devotion plays an important part in the life of most Buddhists. While it can often have a meditative quality to it, it is formally classified under 'morality' in the triad 'morality, meditation and wisdom'.<sup>1</sup>

## FOCUSES AND LOCATIONS OF DEVOTIONAL ACTS

Devotion to Buddha and *Bodhisattva* is focussed or channeled by the use of various artifacts such as images. At home, it can be expressed before a home shrine, which may be as simple as a high shelf and a picture in a quite corner. In temples, there are some kinds of shrine-room or image-hall, where large images are housed. In *Mahayana* monastery, there is often a group of three heavenly Buddhas, or a Buddha and two *Bodhisattvas*, perhaps with images of sixteen or eighteen chief *Arahat* disciples along the walls of the hall. There are always accommodations for monks and/ or nuns. Thus temples are in fact temple monasteries. There is frequently a *Stupa* of some kind, including the multi-roofed form. Most *Stupas* are such that one cannot enter them. They



can be anything from a meter high, with some large ones being the major feature of a temple. Temples may also have: a meeting/ preaching hall; a separate meditation hall; a library and administrative buildings, and finally shrines for one of more gods or nature spirits. Most temples are free-standing.<sup>2</sup>

Devotional artifacts may be paid for by a community or an individual, in either case, the community can share in its embellishments. As giving generates 'merit', which can be shared, artifacts may be specially donated, perhaps for the benefit of new-born child, some who has recently died, success in a business venture, or an end to a war, The motive of generating 'merit' means that temples often have more images than are 'needed', and new *Stupas* may be build beside crumbling old ones. This is because there is generally more joy in starting something new than in repairing something. Greater joy leaves a stronger wholesome 'imprint' on the mind and so is seen as producing better quality karmic fruits.

The Sherdukpens worship at monastery (*gompa*) and *stupa* (*chorten*). The monastery is known as *Legang*, which is a single or double storeyed and made of stone and wood. Inside each house of the Sherdukpen there is a place for worship for Buddha and Buddhist divinity known as '*chosom*'.<sup>3</sup> It is made of wood and has a few shelves on which are kept images of several divinities and rituals article. Sometime the rich people have the separate room for the alter. The religious books are kept in pigeon hole self beside the alter.

### **BOWING, OFFERINGS AND CHANTING**

Most Buddhist devotional acts are not congregational in essence, though they are frequently occasions for coming together in a shared activity and experience. In the home, they are often carried out in the morning and/ evening. Temple-visits can be at any time, though they are most common at festivals, or at special 'observation days'. On visiting a temple, a person performs acts which amount to showing devotion to the 'three refuges'. The Buddha is represented by image, *Stupa* and *Bodhi-tree*; the *Dhamma* is

represented by a sermon, or informal teachings which the monks may give, and the *Sangha* is represented by the monks. Devotion at home or temple is expressed by *pūja*; 'reverencing' or 'honouring' which involves bowing, making offerings, and chanting.<sup>4</sup>

In Buddhist culture, people bow on many occasions. Children bow to parents and teachers; adults bow to monks, nuns, b Lamas and the elderly; and monks bow to those ordained for longer than themselves. Such lowering of the head acknowledges someone else as having more experience of life or of spiritual practice, and develops respect and humility. It is natural, then, to bow before sacred objects which point towards the highest reality, and also to locate a Buddha- image on the highest 'seat' in a room. Within a shrine-room or the compound surrounding a *Stupa* or *Bodhi*-tree, humility is also shown by not wearing shoes; for in ancient times, wearing shoes was a sign of wealth and status.

Bowing before sacred objects is generally done three times, so as to show respect to the 'three refuges'. A person stands or kneels with palms joined in a gesture known as *namaskara*. They are held at the head, lips and chest: symbolizing respect offered by mind, speech and body. From a kneeling position, a person then places the elbows, hands and head on the ground. In Northern Buddhism, a fuller form known as a 'grand prostration' involves laying full-length on the ground. Devotion is also shown by circumambulation of *Stupas*, *Bodhi*-trees and temples, which in Northern Buddhism may be done by repeated prostrations.

Offerings are usually accompanied by appropriate chanted verses. Together, these aim to arouse joyful and devout contemplation of the qualities of a holy being, and aspiration for spiritual progress. Such acts consequently generate 'merit'. The most common offerings are flowers. During the construction of *stupa*, many Sherdukpens people individually bring small quantities of all their agricultural produces except Japor, beads, small clay images of divinities and trinklets studded with semi-precious stones. The grain of Japor is black and is used in the rites for exorcising evil spirits, so it is not

used in any religious work. These are individual offerings for religious merit and material benefits. The village infact collectively offer several clay *chortens*, a few religious texts and images of divinities. The lama put all the offerings inside the *chorten* at the time of its construction.<sup>5</sup>

The pleasant odour of smouldering incense-sticks frequently greets a person on entering a Buddhist temple. Another common offering is the light of small lamps or candles, a reminder of Buddhas as 'Enlightened' or 'Awakened' beings who give light to the world through their teachings.

In Northern Buddhism, butter-lamps of finely wrought silver often burn perpetually before images. It is also common for seven kind of offerings to be set before an image. Water 'for the face' and for the feet' symbolize hospitality, while flowers, incense, lamps, perfume and food represent the five senses, ideally expressing a devotee's dedication of his whole being to spiritual development. The offerings are placed in seven bowls, or water and grain in these are visualized as being the offerings. The devotee uses *mudras*, ritual gestures representing offerings such as flowers, a lamp, or the whole world. He may additionally offer a white cotton or silk *kha-btags* (pron. *Kuttha*), generally known as a 'scarf of felicity', to an image. These are normally used as friendship offering to put a relationship on a good footing. Here they are used to form a bond of friendship with a holy being.

In all schools of Buddhism, chanting is very common as a vehicle for devotion or other ceremonial acts. Its use derives from early Buddhism, when Indian society made little use of writing, and a learned person was 'much-heard' rather than 'well-read'. Chanting aided accurate memory of the Buddha's teachings, as it has a rhythm which encourages the mind to flow on from word to word, and lacks melody, which might demand that the sound of some words be distorted. It is also a public medium, so that errors of memory could be known and corrected. After the teachings were written down, it was still thought better that they be well memorized, and chanting had also become part of devotional life.

Buddhist chanting is neither singing nor a monotonous dirge. While being deep-toned and lightly solemn, it holds the interest with its small variations of pitch and rhythm. It is particularly impressive when a group of monks and/ or nuns chant, for they may use different keys, all blending into a harmonious whole. The chants are usually old Tibetan, thus giving them an added air of sanctity. This, plus their sound-quality and accompanying thoughts, generates a mixture of uplifting joy, often felt as a flow of warmth in the chest, and contemplative calm. Such states tend to arise even in those listening to a chant, if they do so with a relaxed but attentive mind. Thus monks and nuns can transmit something of the tranquility of their way of life when chanting for the laity. Many monks know the full meaning of the chants, as they know the relevant language to some extent, and can explain them to the laity. Vernacular chants also exist.

In Tibetan traditions, the most common chants are short verbal formulas, which may be strung together or repeated to form longer continuous chants. Rosaries can be used to count off repeat chants.

In Sherdukpen area bowing are shown to *stupa* (*chorten*), *gompa*, Buddhist images and elders, and also to lama (*guru*) before entering *gompa*. The offerings in the *gompa* include butter lamp, incenses, *sharkin* (washed rice and black tea) which is offered to protector deity called '*chunmar*'. Other protective deities are *Amajamo*, *Tashi* and *Omber*. Chanting '*om mane peme hum*' is done throughout the day.<sup>6</sup>

## THE REFUGES

The key expression of commitment of Buddhism is 'taking the refuges'. The ancient formula for this, in its Pali form, begins: '*Buddham saranam gacchami, Dhammam saranam gacchami, Sangham saranam gacchami.*' This affirms that 'I go to the Buddha as refuge, I go to the *Dhamma* as refuge, I go the *Sangha* as refuge.' Each affirmation is then repeated 'for the second time ....' (*dutiyam pi...*) and 'for the third time....' (*tatiyam pi...*). The threefold repetition

marks off the recitation from ordinary uses of speech, and ensures that the mind dwells on the meaning of each affirmation at least once. The notion of a 'refuge', here, is not that of a place to hide, but of something the thought of which purifies, uplifts and strengthens the heart. Orientation towards these three guides to a better way of living is experienced as a joyful haven of calm, a firm 'island amidst a flood', in contrast to the troubles of life. The 'refuges' remind the Buddhist of calm, wise, spiritual people and states of mind, and so help engender these states. Their value is denoted by the fact that they are also known as the *Tiratana* or 'three jewels': spiritual treasures of supreme worth.

In the *Mahayana*, the 'Three body' doctrine means that the Buddha refuge refers not only to Gotama and other Transformation-body Buddhas, but also, and more importantly, to the heavenly Enjoyment body Buddhas. The Buddha is enlightenment, the *Dharma* is truth, the *Sangha* is purity... take refuge in the Buddha within yourselves... If you do not rely upon your own nature, there is nothing else on which to rely'. In the *Mahayana*, the *Dharma* refuge, in its highest sense, refers to *Dharma*-body, ultimate reality. Holy *Bodhisattvas* are included in the *Sangha* refuge, and taking refuge in them is allied to taking vows, often repeated on a daily basis, to become like them.<sup>7</sup>

In the Sherdukpen, Buddhism, extra refuges are taken, prior to the three usual ones, a person takes refuge in his *bLama*, the source of his deepening knowledge of the other refuges and regarded as an embodiment of their virtues. After the usual refuges, an individual may then take refuge in his *yi-dam*, a holy being which is his tutelary deity. An adept preparing for training in meditative visualizations must also complete preliminary practices of a devotional and pacificator nature. Five or six such practices are generally given, each of which done while holding wooden blocks, to prevent the hands being blistered by repeatedly sliding along the floor (or a special wooden board) to the fully prostrate position. As this is done, the devotee may say: 'I, so-and-so-, on behalf of all sentient beings and freely offering my body, speech and mind, bow to the earth in adoration of the *Guru* and the Three

Precious Ones. Accompanying this affirmation is the visualization of a 'refuge tree': a concourse of holy beings whose radiant light suffuses the devotee. After a period of struggle and pain, the practice is said to induce great joy. It also conduces to a balance of 'self-power' and 'other-power': relying on oneself and on the power of holy beings.

## ATTITUDES TO IMAGES

Images always function as reminders of the spiritual qualities of holy beings, if in no other way. The Spiritual qualities expressed by the form of a good image also help to stimulate the arising of qualities in one who contemplates it.

In Northern Buddhism, images function as more than reminders. Especially in *Mantrayan* schools, they are seen as infused with the spirit and power of the being they represent.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, as image and being 'meet' in both being ultimately 'thought-only' or emptiness, the image comes to be seen as an actual form of the being. For this, it must have the traditional form and symbolism and be consecrated. This is done by chanting prayers and mantras over it; by placing in it scriptures or relics, and even internal organs of clay, and by completing and wetting the eyes. This associates it with holy sounds and objects, giving it a power-for-good, and animates it, the wet eyes suggesting the response of a living gaze.

## PROTECTIVE CHANTING

In all schools of Buddhism, chanting, or listening to it, is often used as a form of protection. In Northern traditions, chanted formulas used in a similar way to *partitas* are *dharani's*, utterances 'preserving' Buddhism and its followers. These are strings of Sanskrit words and syllables, originating as mnemonic formulas summarizing a *Sutra*, an extract from the Lotus *Sutra*.

## DEVOTION TO AVALOKITESVARA

Devotion to *Avalokitesvara* pervades Northern Buddhism.<sup>9</sup> A text much used in liturgies is the verse section of the *Avalokitesvara Sutra*, an extract from the *Lotus Sutra*. Statues and paintings of *Avalokitesvara* are found in abundance, depicting him in around 130 different ways, each aiming to express some aspect of his nature. An artistic form common in Tibet shows *Avalokitesvara* with 'a thousand' arms (fewer, for practical reasons, in statues) and eleven heads. Seven hands hold various emblems, while the rest represent his boundless skilful means. Each makes a *mudra*, or 'gesture', denoting 'be fearless', and on its palm is any eye, representing his ever-watchful nature, ready to rush to the aid of beings. His eleven heads are explained horror and tears caused him momentarily to despair of fulfilling his vow to save all. His head then split into ten pieces, as he said it would if he ever abandoned his resolve. *Amitabha* Buddha then brought him back to life to renew his vow. Making each of the head-fragments into a new head, he assembled them on *Avalokitesvara's* shoulders, and surmounted them with a replica of his own head, symbolizing that he would continue to inspire the *Bodhisattva* in his work. With eleven heads, *Avalokitesvara* was now even better equipped to look for beings in need! From *Avalokitesvara's* tears, moreover, two forms of *Tara* had been born.

The *Avalokitesvara Sutra* says that *Avalokitesvara* will instantly respond to those who 'with all their mind call upon his name'. 'By virtue of the power of that *Bodhisattva's* majesty', they will be unburnt by a fire; saved at sea in a storm; the hearts of murdering foes will turn to kindness; as prisoners, guilty or innocent, they will be set free from their chains; merchants will be freed from the dangers of robbers; threatening wild beasts will flee; success will be attained in a court of law or battle, and a woman will have a virtuous child, of the sex of her choice. Devotees will also be freed from attachment, hatred and delusion by 'keeping in mind and remembering' *Avalokitesvara*. Much of this is comparable to the power attributed to *paritta*-chanting. The wondrous help of *Avalokitesvara* is understood both as a literal intervention in the world, perhaps



through the aid of mysterious stranger, or a vision guiding someone through mists on a dangerous mountain, an as coming from the power of a devotee's faith. In the *Surangama Sutra*, it is said that *Avalokitesvara* aids beings by awakening them to their compassionate Buddha-nature, and in accordance with this, any act of great kindness may be seen as the 'help' of *Avalokitesvara*.

In Sherdukpen Buddhism, the *Mani mantra* is very popular in invoking the help of *Avalokitesvara* and in developing compassion. *Avalokitesvara* is locally known as *chandese* as in Tibet. Accompanied by the click of rosaries, it is frequently heard on the lips of all who have any degree of devotion to Buddhism. It may be uttered as a person goes about his or her business, either under the breath or as an audible rhythmic murmur called 'purring' by the Tibetans. The Tibetans also activate the power of his *mantra*, and generate 'merit', by use of the '*Mani* religion wheel', known in the West as 'prayer wheel'.<sup>10</sup> The formula is carved or painted on the outside of a shorter cylinder, and is written many times on a tightly rolled piece of paper inside. Each revolution of the cylinder is held to be equivalent to repetition of all the formulas written on an in it, an idea related to that of the Buddha's first sermon as the 'setting in motion of the *Dhamma-wheel*'. '*Mani* religion wheels' are of various types. Hand-held ones have cylinders about 7 centimeters long, mounted on handles about 12 centimeters long; a small weight attached to the cylinder on a chain enables it to be spun on a spindle fixed in the handle. Wheels around 25 centimeters high are also fixed in rows along the sides of *Stupas* or monasteries, so that people can turn them as they circumambulate these. The largest wheels, found at the entrance to temples, may be 4 meters high and 2 meters in diameter, and contain thousands of *Mani* formulas, along with scriptures and images. There are also wheels driven by streams or chimney smoke. The *Mani* mantras also carved on stones deposited on hill-top cairns, on rock-faces by the side of paths, on long walls specially built at the approaches to towns, and is printed on 'prayer flags'. 'Merit' accrues to those who pay for any of these or produce them, to all who glance at them, thinking



of *Avalokitiesvara* and his compassion, and even insects who come into contact with them.

In almost all the Sherdukpen monasteries, *mani* are attached on the outside wall.

## DEVOTION TO PADMASAMBHAV

Among the Sherdukpen, *Padmasambhav* has been portrayed in a more than life size stature endowed with divine attribute.<sup>11</sup> The eight fold Tantric manifestation of *Padmasambhav* express him as human and supra human faculties in various iconographic form. The most popular one show him *Guru Rimpoche* attire in his characteristic head dress and robes, holding a '*vajra*', a scull bowl filled with the water of life in his hand. Another represents him as *Padmasambhav pamasolwa* in *yab-yam* posture. Another manifestation depicts him as *Nymaozer* clad in Tiger skin he hold a trident in right hand and is shown playing with Sun rays with his left one. *Sakyasengge* is his compassionate manifestation as the second Buddha. Clad in the monk attire he sits on a lotus cushion holding a begging bowl and *vajra* in his hand.<sup>12</sup> The Sherdukpen celebrate the birthday of *Padmasambhav* on the tenth day of the fifth month by performing a ceremony *Tsosingrang*. In this ceremony the villagers arrange a service in this village temple or in one of the houses on the recitation of any of the text called *Lhapung*, *Droiechach*, *Manlah*, *Dokesang* or *Gyateng*.<sup>13</sup> Here it may be mentioned that in all the Buddhist Gompa of the area the principal images is invariably of *Padmasambhav* because the Sherdukpens are predominantly followers of *Nyingmapa* religion

## PILGRIMAGE

Pilgrimage is a fairly common practice in Buddhism, and may be done for a variety of reasons: to bring alive events from the life of holy beings and so strengthen spiritual aspirations; to make 'merit'; to be suffused by the power-for-good of relics and *Bodhi-trees*; to receive protection from deities at the sites; or to fulfill a vow that pilgrimage would be made if aid was received from

a certain *Bodhisattva*. The most ancient sites are those of the Buddha's birth, first sermon, enlightenment and *parinibbana*. The Buddha said these should be visited with thoughts of reverence, such that anyone dying on the journey would be reborn in a heaven. The most important is *Bodh-Gaya*, whose focus is an ancient *Bodhi*-tree directly, descended from the one under which Gotama attained enlightenment. Its sagging boughs are reverently propped up, prayer flags flutter from its braches, and pilgrims treasure any leaves which fall from it.

Pilgrimage to holy places is believed to help in the building of merit. The Tawang monastery though happens to be the most important pilgrimage centre in the area, the Sherdukpen also used to visit *Urgeling* and *Sangeling* of Tawang considered to be oldest *Nyingmapa* temple in the area.<sup>14</sup> The *Saron gompa* (Tawang), *Lahgyala gompa* in the Kalaktang area, *Bagajang gompa* (on Sela top) and *Gorcham chorten* are the local places of pilgrimage. The Sherdukpen also prefer to visit Bodhgaya (Bihar). They also visit the place called *Hajo* (Assam) which is associated with a tradition of Buddha's demise. A temple complex called *Viswakarma Thai* near the Singri hill at Dekiajuli in the Darrang district of Assam is also visited by the Sherdukpen.<sup>15</sup> Some sites in Bhutan and Nepal also attract pilgrimage of the Sherdukpen.

## FESTIVALS

Buddhists enjoy and appreciate festivals as times for reaffirming devotion and commitment, making 'merit' for the individual and community, strengthening community ties and values, and merry-making. The Northern tradition has their major festivals, and there are also national variations on these, as well as local festivals, for example on the anniversary of the founding of a temple. Some festivals which Buddhists celebrate are not Buddhist, as such, but pertain to the agricultural cycle, national deities, or traditions.

As in Northern Buddhism, the lunar cycle also marks off the *Sabbath*-like *uposatha's* or 'observance days', at the full-moon, new-moon and, less

importantly, two half-moon days. Except at times of major festivals, observance days are attended only by the more devout, who spend a day and night at their local monastery. The monks are solemnly offered food, commitment to certain ethical precepts is made, the monks chant for the laity, and sometimes a sermon is given. The rest of the time is spent in expressing devotion, reading, talking to the monks, and perhaps in some meditation.

Other than in Nepal, several festivals in Northern Buddhism more or less coincide with corresponding Southern ones: the celebration of the enlightenment and *parinirvana* of the Buddha (his birth being celebrated eight days earlier), the first sermon and the descent from a heaven (here seen as the *Tusita* heaven). The different schools also have festivals relating to their founders, with the death of *Tsong-kha-pa* (in November) being of general importance; monasteries also have festivals relating to their specific tutelary deity. The festivals of the Shedukpens are discussed below.

### Choikar festival

*Choikar*<sup>16</sup> is celebrated for a happy and prosperous life of the community for prevention of disease, mitigation of sufferings, as also for a good harvest. With this festival is associated another ceremony called '*Marme*' which is performed in the *Gompa* during all the days of *Choikar* festival. The ceremony consists of striking of butter lights (*Cheome*) on the scaffold where images of Lord Buddha and other Buddhist pantheon are installed at the monastery. On different days of the festival other traditional ceremonies such as *Lhabang*, *Charton*, *Kangche*, *Barton*, *Thui*, *Ramne*, *Malam*, *Mande*, *Tashi*, *Marme-Sakpa* etc are also performed.

The *Choikar* festival commences with the reading of Holy Scriptures, such as *Kanjor* 100 volumes, by Lamas at the monastery. All the scriptures available in the monastery are read during the '*Choikar*' festival. While reading the scriptures the Lamas perform the '*Barton*' worship to beg off misspelling and mistake which have occurred at the time of reading the scriptures. Just

before the day of reading the *Boom* Scripture, '*Lhabsang*' worship is performed in the second floor of the main monastery building where images of Lord Buddha and other Buddhist pantheon are installed in the Chapel on a wooden scaffold by offering various articles, like tea(*Jyolap*), milk(*Nging*), gold(*Shin*) green maize (*Phentage-e ho*) etc. Playing of musical instruments, such as drum (*Sing*), cymbal (*Suckle*), prayer bell (*Gribu* and *Dorje*) etc, accompany the priest.

After '*Lhabsang*' comes the '*Kangche*' worship. Edible foods available in the village are offered at this worship. The '*Kangche*' worship is an attempt at appeasing the evil spirits like, *Yidam*, *kahndo*, *Chekyong*, etc. so that the villages can live in peace. At the end of reading at the monastery, '*Charton*' worship is performed.

The festival is celebrated on the day of *Buddha Purnima*. '*Chhe*' in Sherdukpen means religion and '*Kar*' means moving around the villages. During the festival, the scriptures and images of Lord Buddha and his disciples carried by the village girls and women on their backs, visit several places in the locality before returning to the monastery. The carrying of scriptures and images in a procession is usually done on the third day of the festival as on the first and second day, only prayers are offered at the monastery. In prayer the Lamas use *tormas* made from flour in the name of some of the devils as they believe that during their return from Doimara (their winter foot hills camp) some of the devils might have followed them resulting in the soared diseases. *Tormas* made for this purpose are abandoned in a nearby stream. On the second day, similar *tormas* are prepared in the name of a king (*Thong*), his two ministers (*Loupon*), and two servants (*Meche*) and also in the name of the Supreme Being. The *torma* for the king is placed on a black horse (*Stu*) made of earth. A story current in the Sherdukpen society is associated with this ceremony. According to this story, an Ahom King came to Doimara to see off the Sherdukpen king. So, to show respect to the Ahom king this prayer was offered during the '*Choikar*' festival. All the four *tormas* made to represent the king, minister, servants and the Supreme Being are kept in a small house

made of bamboo biers and paper and the house constructed is placed on a bamboo biers and it is carried by four men to a little distance from the monastery. Rice and maize are thrown at the bier by Lamas and other attendants and the bier is left on the branches of a tree as they have a belief that whoever goes under that bier would be free from disease and sins.

On the third day of the festival, early in the morning two men go out from the monastery, one carrying the *Getongpa* book and the other blowing a conch shell and they visit *Chhortings Dungjors* and *manes* one after another and then return to the monastery for keeping the book and the conch shell. On this day the villagers are divided into three group namely *Blangdokpa*, *Sherubalngpo* and *Tongkoblangpo*, each having a leader. A procession starts from the monastery with all scriptures and portable images carried by village girls and women and the party takes with four flags on long poles, one in the name of the public and other three in the name of the three groups. The party also takes a flag (*Jeethang*) depicting the portrait of *Guru Rimpooche* (spiritual head). During the procession the group leaders go on horse back wearing royal dress. On this day, the head Lama of the monastery also goes on horse back but other Lamas go on foot. Before the procession starts from the monastery, *Thui* and *Ronme* worships are performed by the Lamas. After these worship the procession starts from the monastery for the *Banpu Chhorting* or *Chhorten* and two other *Chhortings* (all *stupa*-shaped structures) and the Lamas perform *Thui*, *Ramne* and *Thasi* worships at all the *Chhortings* to drive away the evil spirits. Offerings are made in the name of three gods, 'La', the god of heaven, 'Lu', the god of the under world, and 'Sun', the god of earth.

Once the prayer is over, the procession moves to *Thuksare Dungjor* where the *Thui*, *Ramne* and *Tashi* worships are performed for the welfare of the villagers. All the participants of the procession, including the Lamas, take lunch at *Thukare Dungjor*. From there the procession moves to an open field where the Lamas offer prayers to the gods i.e. *La*, *Lu* and sun. After that the procession further moves to another *Dughjor* which is situated in the western

part of the village where similar worships are performed for the welfare of the people as well as for a good life in the next birth. Lastly the procession moves to the western Mane (*Gyumoching*) and *Lagangbau* (a level ground near the Monastery). The Lamas offer prayers in all the above places to propitiate the evil spirits and for the welfare of the villagers. In all those places, *Chesdam* is performed by Lamas. 'Ches' means words of Lord Buddha and 'Dam' means to subdue. So, the performance implies recitation of the Lord's words to subdue the evil spirits. When the procession ends at the monastery, all the villagers assemble in the eastern corner of the monastery and make two rows from there upto the monastery courtyard to pay homage to the scriptures and images of Lord Buddha and take blessings from the Lamas. They touch the images and the scriptures while the procession moves round the monastery for three times. At the end all the scriptures are kept in a shelf at the adjoining monastery building at Rupa and images are kept in their original places. After that 'Mande' worship is performed at the monastery begging for God's forgiveness.

On the fourth day of the festival, 'Marme-Sakpa' worship is performed by the Lama in two groups with a view to neutralizing faults that might have occurred unknowingly while carrying the scriptures and images to several places. On the fifth and the sixth day, prayers, are offered at the monastery by Lamas and pantomime dances are performed.

In Sherdukpen dances, masks are used in addition to their colourful costumes. The dances which are invariably performed and the occasion of the 'Choikar' festival are (a) *Ajilamu* Dance (*Lamu Dsham*), (b) Yak Dance (*Yak-Suba*), (c) Deer Dance (*Jik-Suba*), (d) *Sangothong- Thow* Dance, (e) *Keng* Dance, (f) *Ashojung-Yon* Dance and (g) *Thung-Thung* Karma Dance etc. These dances are performed with a view to appeasing the Supreme Being as well as to show respect to their traditional forms of worship. Of all these dances the *Keng* dance, which is performed only during the 'Choikar' festival and construction of houses and monastery, had great significance. It is commonly believed that performance of this dance drives away the evil spirits

from the locality. The dancers put on masks during all the six days of the festival.

The Sherdukens of Shergaon also celebrate the festival. They celebrate *Kro-Chekor* with great pomp and gaiety. The celebration of *Kro-Chekor* is quite different from those celebrated Sherdukens of Rupa.<sup>17</sup> It is every year celebrated in the month of May-June. It falls in forth month of Lunar calendar. It is celebrated in the pious month of *Jipa Saka-Dawa*. This is celebrated for good harvest and overall development of the society. This rite is organised in the village by the whole village community with the aim of providing supernatural protection to the crops sown, for good harvest and to drive away evil spirits, which may cause harm to the village community.

The celebration starts a month ahead by reciting holy scripts of Buddhist sacred texts. The recitation programme starts minimum fifteen days ahead of the main day, which falls on full moon day in the same month. Every year the village council call upon the village elders and the head monk of the village and discuss which holy text they will be reciting and on consensus of the villagers and monk the selected text is recited. During this holy month all forms of hunting and fishing are stopped. If any one is found hunting and fishing then they are fined according to the village council law, which was fixed by the forefather of the village. Every villager follows this act very sincerely. The village council nominates *Kachung* (village council worker) from four families from every clan viz. *Thoongon* (it has two groups), *Lamaguru* and *Khrimey*, for a year in *Phaksam* (it is again a local festival which falls in the month of August-September) for a year to carry out village council work. These are the people who cook food and carry out every aspect of work for smooth functioning of every festival. The lamas (monks) stay there in *Gompa (Lhagang)* till the end of the recitation programme and the main event i.e *Kro-Chekor* starts.

## Losar

*Lo-gsar*, is the Tibetan word for "new year." *Lo*<sup>18</sup> holds the semantic field "year, age"; *sar* holds the semantic field "new, fresh". *Losar* is celebrated for fifteen days, with the main celebrations on the first three days. On the first day of *Losar*, a beverage called *changkol* is made from *chhaang* (a Tibetan cousin of beer). The second day of *Losar* is known as King's *Losar* (*gyalpo losar*). *Losar* is traditionally preceded by the five day practice of *Vajrakilaya*. Although it often falls on the same day as the Chinese New Year (sometimes with one day or occasionally with one lunar month difference), it is generally not thought to be culturally directly connected to that holiday. It is culturally more related to *Tsagaan Sar* in Mongolia than to the Chinese New Year festivity. *Losar* is also celebrated by *Yolmo*, *Sherpa*, and in Bhutan, although different regions in the country have their own respective new year.

The '*Losar*' festival is associated or connected with the tribes of 'Monpas' and 'Sherdukpens' and it is accounted as the New Year festival by the people following the '*Mahayana*' sect of Buddhism. '*Losar*' festival is celebrated continuously for seven days annually amidst great enthusiasm and with pomp and gaiety by the Sherdukpens. Generally, the '*Losar*' is celebrated during the last part January and in the first part of February.

The '*Losar*' festival is celebrated with the performance of '*Tongchin*' worship in the village monasteries (*Gompas*). According to the existing belief, after *Tongchin*, these two tribes, Monpas and Sherdukpens performs '*Marme*' worship to have a good and beautiful life in the next birth. Next, they performs worships known as '*Singhe*' and '*Seje*' which are performed for the welfare of the entire village communities, which is followed by worship of '*Sojan*' meant to get together after death. Lastly, they perform worship like '*Sechang*', '*Semar*' and '*Dadar*' for longevity.

These various kinds of worships are performed on different days by the Buddhist priest (Lamas) where different holy scriptures are read. With other obligations, the local distilled drink is a must for the Sherdukpens. People rise



early, take bath, put on new cloths and prepare food and drink for themselves as well as for the guest on the first day of the festival. Then, they start visiting their neighbours houses and the visitors are entertained with great hospitality by feeding them with food and drink.

On the last day of the 'Losar' festival, right from dawn to dusk, the priest (Lamas) have to remain busy and active both at the monastery and at the village for various functions. On that very day, the 'Lamas' are invited to every house in the village in the wee hours of the morning to usher a very happy and prosperous new year to the respective family members of the house. When this function is over, all the villages go to prayers, by touching the image of lord Buddha (*Sange- Somdondé*) to receive blessings from him. Next, all the villagers gather in a particular place, which is far away from the village and enjoy a feast there. The young men and women of the village take active part in songs and dances and enjoy by sprinkling water on each other. After this, they return back to their respective house, where they feed their domestic animals and pets. In the family, the young ones take the blessings from the elderly people by prospering before them.

In this way, the 'Sherdukpens' celebrate their most popular 'Losar' festival with great joy, gaiety and devotion, thereby forgetting all their hardships and difficulties of the past. In addition to this, on the occasion of the 'Losar' festival, a variety of pantomime dances such as Yak dance, *Ajilamu* dance, deer dance are performed by various dancers and artists at the respective village monasteries (*Gompa*)<sup>19</sup>.

Beside the above mentioned important festivals of the Sherdukpen the people also celebrate a number of other festival and ceremonies throughout the year.<sup>20</sup>

### Wang:

The festival is observed in November or December and is meant to appease the forest deities, especially *Phu Servi Mangbi*. The observance of this festival ensures that the forest spirits will not attack the people on their

long trek through the jungles down to the plains. Offerings in the shape of rice, flowers and fruit are made. On completion of religious ceremonies, people spend several days in feasting and drinking. The prayer is offered to *Guru Padmasambhav* to seek his blessings.

### Jonkhlon

This ceremony is observed soon after the Sherdukpens return from Doimara. Its purpose is to ensure proper growth of crops through adequate supply or rain water.

### Rek Lapsang Chhongba

The people observe this ceremony when the yield of crops is not satisfactory. The *Lama* goes to the field and reads religious books there for several hours. *Tarmus* are made. Some of them are eaten after the ceremonies and, the rest thrown in the field.

### Photenya

It is a ceremony observed after harvesting of crops. Shoots of cereals are hung up in the temples. And the *jijis* offer them also to the forest and water.

### Ba Jung Khloba

Known also as *Spu Zibro Ra*, this ceremony is observed by the people just before sending the cattle to Doimara. The main purpose of the ceremony is to ensure that the cattle, especially the cows, do not suffer from any epidemic during their sojourn at Doimara. As in similar other ceremonies, the *tamus* are prepared and the *Lama* reads the sacred books for an hour or two.

### Saka Dawa:

The fourth month, called *sa-ka dawa*,<sup>21</sup> is also held to be very auspicious, for in this month Buddha was born. The effect of any action, good or bad, in this blessed month, like the first, is believed to get multiplied twofold. They devote themselves more diligently to acts considered meritorious. They

arrange services on the recitation of scared texts in their houses. They count their beads and ply the prayer-wheels with more zeal.

### **Tendel Senchu<sup>22</sup>:**

It is celebrated by the Sherdukpen during the tenth month of the Tibetan calendar for long life.

## **RITUALS**

A ritual is a set of actions, performed mainly for their symbolic value. It may be prescribed by a religion or by the traditions of a community. The term usually excludes actions which are arbitrarily chosen by the performers. The field of ritual studies has seen a number of conflicting definitions of the term. One given by Kyriakidis<sup>23</sup> is that Ritual is an outsider's or "etic" category for a set activity (or set of actions) which to the outsider seems irrational, non-contiguous, or illogical. The term can be used also by the insider or "emic" performer as an acknowledgement that this activity can be seen as such by the uninitiated onlooker. A ritual may be performed on specific occasions, or at the discretion of individuals or communities. It may be performed by a single individual, by a group, or by the entire community; in arbitrary places, or in places especially reserved for it; either in public, in private, or before specific people.

The purposes of rituals are varied; with religious obligations or ideals, satisfaction of spiritual or emotional needs of the practitioners, strengthening of social bonds, social and moral education, demonstration of respect or submission, stating one's affiliation, obtaining social acceptance or approval for some event—or, sometimes, just for the pleasure of the ritual itself.

In religion, a ritual can comprise the prescribed outward forms of performing the *cultus*, or cult, of a particular observation within a religion or religious denomination. Although ritual is often used in context with worship performed in a church, the actual relationship between any religion's doctrine and its ritual(s) can vary considerably from organized religion to non-

institutionalized spirituality. Rituals often have a close connection with reverence, thus a ritual in many cases expresses reverence for a deity or idealized state of humanity.<sup>24</sup>

The Sherdukpens observe various rituals, such as life cycle rituals, daily rituals and rituals associated with festivals, etc. which are presented here for better understanding of their religious practices.

## LIFE CYCLE RITUALS

### Pregnant and Miscarriage

Rituals activities are associated with most of the stages of the life-cycle of an individual in the Sherdukpen community. Generally they have no ritual observances during the stage of pregnancy, but if a pregnant woman had earlier miscarried or given birth<sup>25</sup> to a still-born child, they arrange some rituals services as a protection against the recurrence of such mishap. A lama is invited in the house to minister to such services, who recite the sacred text like *Tashi Chekpa*, *Drolma* and *Chiluit*. The *Drolma* text is recited invoking the goddess *Drolma*. With the recitation from *Tashi Chekpa* and *Drolma*, they light lamps and burn incense on the later of the family chapel while with that from *Chiluit*, a *torma* is also placed on the alter. After the service is over, this *torma* is thrown in a stream at the outskirts of the village in the name of a spirit called *Druiche* and another group of five spirits collectively known as *Drenga*. They believe that it is these spirits who are the sources of trouble during pregnancy. If they try to play any mischief after the service is held, the evil effects are believed to fall on this cast-off *torma* and the labour, the assistance of a lama is sought, who consults a scripture called *Lhamo-gechi* to find out which particular text is to be recited and the associated service held to get over the difficult. Accordingly they perform that service.

### After Birth

Three nights after birth, father approaches a lama,<sup>26</sup> presents him a pot of country wine and requests him to cast the horoscope taking into account

factors like the star present at time of birth and the time, day month and year of the birth. After naming him, the lama is invited to the house, where he performs a rite called *sang* for ritual cleansing of the pollution attendant to birth. The lama recites the text called *sang* when incense is burnt both inside and outside the house. It is followed by another rite called *serkem* praying to the divinities to look after the welfare of the child. The lama chants a litany, puts in a metal cup a small quantity of barley with the right hand and country wine with the left and then throws upwards a small quantity of barley with the right hand. It is repeated several times. The mother then takes out the child in the open for the first time.

### Marriage

A lama is consulted at the early stage of negotiation for marriage.<sup>27</sup> He takes note of the element (*kham*) and animal (*lo*) of the years of birth of the child and finds out whether these match or oppose each other. If it is matching, then negotiation is proceeded with. In case these turn out to be neutral to each other, the lama resorts to divinization to find out which of the sacred texts needs to be read and the associated service held to get these matching. This act of divination is called *somu*, in which lama lights a lamp and burns incense on the altar and takes in his palm three small cubes having the numbers from one to six inscribed on their faces. He chants an incarnation and drops these in a cup. He brings to a total the numbers on the upper faces of these cubes and consults the scripture called *Lhamo-gechi* or *Majorgemu*. This text contains instructions about which particular text is to be recited and the associated service held for what number. The service, as found out from text, is held. According to the Sherdukpen marriage custom, the friends of the boy forcibly carry away the girl without the knowledge of her father and bring her to the boy's house. On the following day, the boy's parents invite a lama, who ministers a service with recital from text called *Tashi Chekpa* with offerings of lamp and incense on the altar of the family chapel. The girl is kept for three days. The boy lives in one of his relative's house for three days. The girl is

sent back to her parent's place on the third day. If the parent accepts the proposal, the date of marriage is finalized in consultation with the lama.

### Death

When death occurs in a Sherdukpen house,<sup>28</sup> a lama is sent for as soon as possible. Lamps are lighted in the family chapel and near the corpse. Incense is burnt in the family chapel and near the seat of lama. The lama recites the text called *Jengo Pecha* when the spirit of the deceased is offered food. This food is placed near the corpse. The lama performs the rites called *singoh* and *molom* when three texts called *Tungsha*, *Jangche* and *Jambe Molom* are recited. If the family be well to do, recitation of a larger work called *Thoidol* is arranged to assist the spirit of the deceased to reach the western paradise of *Oipame*. The lama then consults a text called *Naktsi*, which contains instructions about the day, time and the direction to which the corpse is to be disposed, persons having such-and such lo in their years of birth being eligible to carry the corpse for disposal, the divinity of whose religious scroll or image is to be presented to the village temple, the direction to which the death-demon (*jandre*) carrying off the soul of the deceased has fled and the sort of service to be performed for ensuring the welfare of the members of the bereaved family. Generally the death body is disposed within two days after death. When the funeral party returns the lama performs a rite called *thun* in which he renders some cereals potent by treating these with spells and then sprinkles these, accompanied with chanting of spells, on the members of the bereaved family to ensure their safety against death-demon. He also scatters these cereals to various corners of the house of the bereaved family as well as to those of its consanguineous kinsmen for driving away the death-demon, if it is in hiding in any of those houses, so that it cannot harm the member of those houses.

### Funeral

The funeral ceremony lasts for forty-nine days,<sup>29</sup> which is the intermediate state for the wandering of the spirit of the dead in between the state of death

and rebirth called *Bardo*. After passing three nights, the lama puts an effigy of the deceased in spot of the room where the deceased breathes his last. Such an effigy is called *mikjang* and it is made by dressing a suitable object in the cloths of the deceased and inserting a print of a person at the place where the face should be. The name of the deceased is inserted in the blank space left for it in this print. The lama repeats the same ritual; activities as was done immediately after death. The bereaved kins set up a prayer-flag near the village temple, *stupa* or *mane* and get it consecrated by the lama. This funeral payer -flag is called *mane phan* as it carries the prints of the mystic formula, 'Om mani peme hum'

### Daily Rituals<sup>30</sup>

The laity in Sherdukpen area has no rituals activities to be observed daily. But the religious -minded persons, particularly old men and women, generally manage some time to recite the rosary and offer lamp, incense and *yonchap* (*yon*-metal bowl; *chap*-water) i.e. water in the metal bowls on the alter of the family chapel. Everyday, water of these metal bowls is changed thrice-in the morning, at noon and again in the afternoon-by any member of the family. But a woman in her menses cannot do it and in fact she is not even permitted to enter the family chapel for those few days. In the temple it is the caretaker lama who offers *yonchap*. This ritual practice of offering *yonchap* is believed to have been introduced in Tibet by *Dipnakara Sri-jnan*. He gave the commandment that water in Tibet was formed by the confluence of many streams and so the simple offering of this water to the divinities would itself be an act of religious merit. Even the poor can make this offering as it involves no expenditure.

### Holi days<sup>31</sup>

The eight (*Sarjat*), fifteenth (*Sankhu*) and thirtieth (*Tongchhin*) day of each local month are regarded as holi days by the Sherdukpens. They do not take to hunting or fishing on these days. Some even avoid tilling land lest the insects living in the earth die. They try utmost to avoid all activities which may



cause harm to any living being. The religious-minded persons and more particularly the old people make good use of these days to recite the rosary, twirl the prayer-wheel, visit the *gompa* and *chorten* and circumambulate these and mutter the popular mystic formula, '*Om mani peme hum*'. Some of them offer lamps before the image of the divinities in the temple. The villagers arrange, individually or jointly, the recitation of some liturgical texts with the performance of the associated services on some of these days.

## FESTIVAL RITUALS

### Losar

The *Losar* carnival is observed in the first month of *Dawa Dangpo*. It is the New Year's festival, which begins on the first and continues almost up to the middle of the month. All are in festive mood and they entertain each other with food and drinks. Pantomimes are organized. This first month is held auspicious and called *chotul dawa* as *Sakya-muni* is believed to have had experiences and insights in his spiritual quest for salvation from the miseries of this worldly existence. In this month, they generally arrange services on the recitation of the sacred texts in their houses.<sup>32</sup>

### Sa-ka Dawa

The fourth month, called *sa-ka dawa*, is also held to be very auspicious, for in this month Buddha was born. The effect of any action, good or bad, in this blessed month, like the first, is believed to get multiplied twofold. They devote themselves more diligently to acts considered meritorious. The people arrange services on the recitation of sacred texts in their houses. They count their beads and ply the prayer-wheels with more zeal.<sup>33</sup>

### Tsosiwang

*Padmasambhava* was born on the tenth day of the fifth month. The annual celebration of his birthday is observed by performing a ceremony called *Tsosiwang* by the Sherdukpens. In this ceremony, the villagers arrange a service in the village temple or in one of the houses on the recitation of any of



the texts called *Lhapsang*, *Droiechoh*, *Manlha*, *Netan Chakchoi*, *Dokesang* or *Gyetong*.<sup>34</sup>

### Drukpa Chesish

The first sermon of Buddha, on the truth he had discovered,<sup>35</sup> was set out on the fourth day of the sixth month. The pious people arrange the *Drukpa Chesih* ceremony on this day every year to commemorate this event. A service is held in the family chapel on the recitation of the *Nangema* text.

### Sher Joma

The followers of *Nyingmapa* sect like Sherdukpen celebrate on the 28<sup>th</sup> or 29<sup>th</sup> of the sixth month a ceremony called *Sher Jomu*.<sup>36</sup> A *Nyingmapa* lama recites passage from the *Thokhor-rolpa* text in a *Nyingmapa* temple or, if there is no such temple, in a house of one of the followers of this sect. Immediately after the recitation, which is generally over by about midnight, the *lama* and the male folk assemble on the upper side of the village. They visit all the house on their way to the lower side of the village. During the visit, the laymen take off their cloths, carry lighted torches in their hand and make wild noises. One of them carries pine dust (*som*) treated with spell by the *lama* and thus rendered potent. Two persons throw the pine-dust now and then in the torches which raises the blaze. The *lama* chants spell all the time and throws pine-dust in the tierces inside each house. These activities are believed to frighten and drive the evil spirits away from the village. After their visit, in the last house on the lower side of the village, bonfire is lit in which the lama throws a big *torma* called *torgya*. It is believed that the evil spirits will not be able to cross the spot where the *torgya* is burnt and thus fail in their attempts to re-enter the village. So the villagers will have a peaceful and happy life, free from diseases, death, hunger and all sorts of calamities. The following day is observed as a holiday, when they abstain from activities like hunting, fishing and cultivation lest any living being is injured or killed. This ceremony is a survival of the rite of banishment of evil spirits practiced in their old religion but with some

modification along the Buddhist lines. Similar ceremonies are still in vogue among their neighboring communities-the Akas, Mijis and Khowas.

### Choiker

The Sherdukpen observe the *Choiker*<sup>37</sup> ceremony in the fourth month. It is their only agricultural ceremony performed for the protection of the crop against hailstorm and pest. It is called *Choiker* (*choi*-sacred text; *kor*-ritual circumambulation) i.e the ceremony in which the sacred texts are carried in ritual circumambulation. The villagers arrange in the temple the services on the recitation of *Lhapsang* and *Bun* texts. On the last day of the ceremony, the lamas and the laity circumambulate the village once clockwise passing through the adjoining fields in a procession and carrying the sacred texts on their back. The texts are generally carried by the boys and girls. The procession is led by two dancers called *Kiengpas*, who dance with erotic and other movement. The *kiengpas* are two young men, who are bare-bodied but for their underpants and they put on wooden monkey masks and wooden replicas of the phallus. Their costumes and movements are believed to frighten away the evil spirits, who thus are unable to harass the members of the procession.

### Yanglin

The *Yanglin* ceremony falls in the ninth month.<sup>38</sup> Each Sherdukpen family arranges on an auspicious day, selected in consultation with a lama, the service of *Nor-la-nam-sum*, the collective name of three divinities called *Norjunma*, *Jambhala* and *Namthese*. These three are the divinities of wealth and so they are worshipped for good fortune. The lama recites the *Yanglin Pecha* text and performs the associated rite with offerings of agricultural produces, food-stuffs and other articles. The ceremony is wound up with *chokor* rite. The offerings of *tormas*, barley, country wine, etc. are placed in the upper shelf of a wooden cupboard. In the lower shelf are placed models of three *Khangjangs* or celestial palaces of these three divinities. These are made of butter, gold, silver or other metals. The agricultural produces and other valuables are also kept in the lower shelf. This cupboard is kept closed

till the date of this ceremony in the following year. On that day the articles of offering, placed in the upper shelf in the year before, are eaten by the members of the family. Some of these are fed to the domestic animals as it is believed that the eating of these articles offered in this ceremony ensures protection against calamities like disease and death. The offerings of agricultural produces and the model palaces, if made of butter, are replaced by new ones after a few years on the advice of the lama. These articles, when replaced by new ones, are also eaten by the members of the family.

### Tonuwang

The last of the annual public rites is *Tonuwang*<sup>39</sup> which is observed on the twenty-fifth of the tenth month to celebrate the anniversary of the death of *Tsongkhapa*, founder of the *Gelugpa* sect. It is essentially a *Gelugpa* ceremony. The well-to-do families arrange a service in their family chapels on the recitation of the *Droiechoh*, *Manlha*, *Dokesang* or *Gyetong* text. They offer as many butter-lamps as they can afford. The service is wound up with the *Chiokor* rite. This ceremony is performed in the village temple also. Those who cannot afford to arrange this ceremony in their houses, attend the ceremony in the temple.

Some rituals<sup>40</sup> are observed by the Sherdukpens for the protection of homes and people. These are:

- (a) *Chhe Khloba*:  
The Lama reads several volumes of religious books for two or three days. *Tarmus* are not prepared to observe the ceremony.
- (b) *Kangsu Chhongba or Yangling*:  
This ceremony is observed by worshipping the home deity known as *Chhesum*. *Tarmus* are prepared. It is believed that if this deity is not worshipped at least once a month by the members of a household, they will not acquire immunity from the diseases.

(c) *Lapsang Chhngba*

This ceremony is observed in the same way as *Rek Lapsang*. The only difference is that it is observed within the precincts of the house.

## THE ROLE AND BASIS OF ETHICS

In Buddhism, moral virtue is the foundation of the spiritual path,<sup>41</sup> though a fixed attachment to ethical precepts and vows is seen as a hindering ' . Virtue generates freedom from remorse, and this leads on through gladness and joy to dedicative calm, insight and liberation. While this model of ethics as part of a 'path' predominates, it is modified in some *Mahayana* schools.

The overcoming of *dukkha*, both in oneself and others, is Buddhism's central preoccupation, towards which ethical action contributes. Buddhism says that, if one wants to attain prosperity, amicable social relationships or a good reputation, self-confidence or calm and joy, a good rebirth or progress towards *Nibbana*, then act in such and such a way: for this is how such things are fostered. If one behaves otherwise, then one will suffer in this and subsequent lives, as a natural (*karmic*) result of unwholesome actions. It is in the nature of things that behaving ethically reduces suffering and increases happiness, for oneself and those one interacts with. A moral life is not a burdensome duty or set of 'oughts' but an uplifting source of happiness, in which the sacrifice of lesser pleasures facilitates the experiencing of more enriching and satisfying ones.

Having no real 'oughts' , Buddhist ethics has levels of practice suiting different levels of commitment, rather than one set of universal obligations. Most importantly, monks and nuns make undertakings ruling out actions, such as sexual intercourse, which are acceptable for a layperson.

As a Buddhist comes to understand the extent of *dukkha* in his own life, a natural development is concern about others' suffering, and a deep

compassion. Indeed, the importance of 'comparing oneself with others' is stressed: 'Since the self of others is dear to each one, let him who loves himself not harm another.' The key basis for ethical action is the reflection that it is inappropriate to inflict on other beings what you yourself find unpleasant. They are just like oneself in desiring pleasure and disliking pain, so there is no good reason to add to the common lot of suffering. Moreover, the benefit of self and others are intertwined, so that concern to lessen one's own suffering goes hand-in-hand with lessening that of others. Helping other helps oneself (through karmic results and developing good qualities of mind), and helping oneself (by purifying one's character) enables one to help others better.

One implication of 'impermanence' is that people should always be respected as capable of change-for-the-better. The *Suttas* contain a famous example of this, when the Buddha visited the haunt of the murderous bandit *Angulimala*, seeing that he needed only a little exhortation to change his ways, became a monk, and soon attain *Nibbana*. Whatever a person is like on the surface, the depths of mind is seen as 'brightly shining' and pure. This depth, purity, known in the *Mahayana* as the *Tathagata-garbha* or the Buddha-nature, represents the potential for ultimate transformation, and as such is a basis for respecting all beings.

The changes involved in the round of rebirths are also ethically relevant. Any suffering one now witnesses will have been undergone by oneself in some past life, and all beings will have been good to one at some time. Such considerations stimulate compassion, and positive regard for others, irrespective of their present roles, character and nature. Compassion is also appropriate towards someone who, being so evil as to have no apparent good points, will in future lives undergo great suffering as a karmic result of their actions.

The teaching on not-self, that no permanent self or I exist within a person, does not itself support a positive regard for persons as unique entities, as do

Christian teachings. Rather, it supports ethics by undermining the very source of lack of respect, selfishness. This is done by undercutting the notion that 'I' am a substantial, self-identical entity, one that should be gratified and be able to brush aside others if they get in 'my' way. It does not deny that each person has an individual history and character, but it emphasizes that these are compounds of universal factors. In particular, it means that 'your' suffering and 'my' suffering are not inherently different. They are just suffering, so the barrier which generally keeps us within our own 'self-interest' should be dissolved, or widened in its scope till it includes all beings. The non-self teaching also emphasizes that we are not as in control of ourselves as we would like to think: this adds a leavening of humility and a sense of humour to our attitude to the weaknesses of ourselves and others.

Besides such arguments for ethical action, Buddhism also encourages it through the popular *Jataka* stories, on former lives and actions of Gotama.

### Giving

The primary ethical activity which a Buddhist learns to develop is giving,<sup>42</sup> *dana*, which forms a basis for further moral and spiritual development. The key focus of giving is the monastic *Sangha*, which depends on the laity for such items as alms-food, robes, medicine, and accommodation. The monks and nuns, by teaching and example, return a greater gift, for 'The gift of *Dhamma* excels all gifts'. Such acts of mutual giving thus form a key feature of the lay-monastic relationship: 'Thus, monks, this holy life is lived in mutual dependence, for ferrying across the flood (of *samsara*), for the utter ending of *dukkha*'. The *Sangha*, moreover, is a potent 'field of merit', so gifts 'planted' in it are seen as providing a good harvest of 'merit' for the donors. As alms bestow long life, good appearance, happiness and strength on the recipient, then these, in a human or heavenly rebirth, are said to be the karmic results of alms-giving. On the other hand, being stingy is said to lead to being poor. Generosity is not

only practiced towards the *Sangha*, but is a pervading value of Buddhist societies.

One fairly common practice is to contribute to the costs of printing Buddhist books for free distribution. Buddhists are also keen to give their assistance, goods and money at an ordination, funeral, festival or illness, so as to make 'merit', and share it with others. Communities are bound together in acts of communal 'merit-making and obligations are fulfilled by contributing to a ceremony sponsored by someone who has previously helped one in this way. Some ceremonies can be expensive, and so a rich person may also help sponsor the ordination of a poorer person's son.

While any act of giving is seen as generating 'merit', this becomes more abundant as the motive becomes purer. Giving may initially be performed for the sake of material karmic results, but the joy and contentment that giving brings is then likely to provide the motive. The constant practice of giving also aids spiritual development by reducing possessiveness, cultivating an open-hearted and sensitive attitude towards others, and expressing non-attachment and renunciation, reflected in the practice of 'giving up' home and family life to become a monk or nun. Giving is also the first of the *Bodhisattva* 'perfections', according to all traditions. In Sherdukpen area givings are made of grain, vegetables, cloths, wood, cash, etc during prayer and offerings. Earlier the Sherdukpen trader used to provide *dana* to the sustenance of the *gompa*.

### Keeping the precepts

On a basis of developing *dana*, the Buddhist cultivates *sila* ('virtue')<sup>43</sup> by observing ethical precepts, the most common of which are the 'five virtues' (*panca-silan*). The five abstentions are form: (i) 'harming living beings', (ii) 'taking what is not given', (iii) 'misconduct concerning sense -pleasure', (iv) 'false speech', and (v) 'unmindful states due to alcoholic drinks or drugs'. Each precept is a 'rule of training'- as is each item of the monastic code - which is a promise or vow to oneself. They are not 'commandments' from without, thought their difference from these, in practice, can exaggerated. In societies

where Buddhism is the dominant religion, they become expected norms for people to seek to live by. Moreover, while the 'taking' of the precepts, by ritually chanting them, can be done by a layperson at any time, they are frequently 'taken' by chanting them after a monk, who fulfils the role of 'administering' them. In such a context, the resolve to keep the precepts has a greater psychological impact, and thus generates more 'merit'. Closely related to keeping the precepts are 'right livelihood'.

Emphasis is sometimes laid on the need for a 'Middle Way' in keeping the precepts, avoiding the extremes of laxity and rigid. In any case, Buddhism does not encourage the developing of strong guilt feelings if a precept is broken. The role of 'conscience' is performed mainly by mindfulness, which makes a person aware of his actions and motives

For an action to break a precept and incur 'demerit', it must be done with intention; this is not the case, for example, if one accidentally treads on an insect. Greater 'demerit' accrues, moreover, as the force of will behind an action increases; for this leaves a greater karmic 'trace' on the mind. Several things follow from this. Firstly, a state of diminished responsibility, due to madness or inflamed passion, reduces the karmic seriousness of an unwholesome action. Secondly, it is worse to pre-dedicate an action. Thirdly, it is worse to do a wrong action if one does not regard it as wrong; for them it will be done in a deluded state without restraint or hesitation. Thus killing a human or animal without compunction is worse than doing so with trepidation. Finally, it is worse to kill a large animal than a small one, for the former involves a more sustained effort. The gravity of an action also depends on the perversity of the intention. To harm a virtuous person, or a respect-worthy one such as a parent, is developed form of life. While humans are seen as superior to animals, this is only a matter of degree; humans should show their superiority by using their freedom of choice to treat animals well, not by maltreating them.



### The first precept

The first precept<sup>44</sup>, regarded as the most important, is the resolution not to kill or injure any human, animal, bird, fish or insect. While this has not meant that most Buddhist have been pacifists, pacifism has been the ideal. It is emphasized that war is inconclusive and futile. 'The slayer gets a slayer in his turn, the conqueror gets one who conquers him'. Most lay Buddhists have been prepared to break the first precept in self- defense, though, and many have helped defend the community.

While Buddhism has no real objection to contraception, abortion is seen as breaking the first precept, as it cuts off a 'precious human rebirth', seen as beginning at conception. The bad *karma* from an abortion is said to vary according to the size of the fetus, and most Buddhist would accept abortion to save the mother's life. Suicide again wastes a 'precious human rebirth', and the suffering instigating it is seen as probably set to continue unabated and intensified into the next, perhaps sub-human, rebirth. The case of someone compassionately 'giving' life to help others is different, though. The *Jataka* stories contain an number of examples of the *Bodhisattva* giving up his life to save another being.

While it is relatively easy to avoid killing humans, other forms of life can cause more problems in practice. There is generally a preference for removing pests to a safe distance and releasing them, though certain deadly and vicious snakes would be killed without hesitation. When Buddhists do kill pests, they may try to counteract the bad karmic results of doing so.

In the *Mahayana*, the *Lankavatara Sutra* denies that the Buddha allowed 'blameless' meat for monks, and argues against meat-eating : all beings have been relatives in a past life; meat stinks' eating it hinders meditation and leads to bad health, arrogance and rebirth as a carnivorous animal or low- class human; if no meat is eaten, killing for consumption will cease.

Most lands of Northern Buddhism including the Sherdukpens area have a harsh, cold climate, so that vegetarianism is seen as impractical. In general, large animals are killed for food, in preference to killing many small ones for the same amount of meat. Nevertheless, Tibetans are noted for their kindness to animals; scruples are had even about eating honey, for this is seen as entailing both theft from and murder of bees. Though *lama* in this area takes meat but the animal has to be killed by others.<sup>45</sup>

### The other precepts

The second precept is seen as ruling out any act of theft, but also fraud, cheating, borrowing without the intention to return, and taking more than is one's due. Often, gambling is also included. The precept clearly has relevance for the production and use of wealth.<sup>46</sup> The ideal here is that one's wealth should be made in a moral way, which does not cheat or harm others; it should be used to give ease and pleasure to oneself, to share with others, and to make 'merit' with; and it should not be the object of one's greed and longing. Miserliness and over-spending are both extremes to be avoided. If someone is well-off, this is generally seen as being aided by past 'merit', and the rich person is seen as having a greater opportunity to make 'merit' by giving liberally to the *Sangha* and the community. Combined with the idea that poverty tends to encourage theft and civil discontent, this means that the Buddhist ideal is a society free from an imbalance of poverty and riches.

The third precept primarily concerns avoiding causing suffering by one's sexual behavior. This includes any enforced intercourse, intercourse with those married or engaged to another or under the protection of relatives, incest and adultery. What counts as 'adultery' varies according to the marriage patterns of different cultures, and Buddhism has been flexible in adapting to these. While monogamy is the preferred and predominant pattern, it has also tolerated polygamy, and sometimes polyandry. Pre-marital sex has been regarded as a breach of the precept in some cultures, but not in other; flirting with a married woman may also be seen as a breach. Homosexual activity is

seen as breaking the precept, and one born a homosexual is seen as breaking the precept, and one born a homosexual is seen as unable to experience certain deep meditative states. Other socially taboo forms of sexuality have been as breaking the precept, doubtless due to the guilt feelings that they entail. Obsessive sexual activities also come within the precept, as do other sense-indulgences such as gorging oneself with food.

The first three precepts concern physical actions, and keeping them is the 'right action' factor of the Eightfold Path. The fourth precept, while it only specifically refers to 'false speech', is equivalent to all aspects of the Path-factor of 'right speech'. This precept is generally seen as the second most important one; for it is said that a person who has no shame at intentional lying is capable of any evil action. Any form of lying or deception, either for one's own benefit or that of another, is seen as a breach of the precept, though a small 'white lie' is, for example, much less serious than lying in a court of law. Lying is to be avoided not only because it often harms others, but because it goes against the Buddhist value of seeking the truth and seeing things 'as they really are'. The more a person deceives others, the more he is likely to deceive himself; thus his delusion and spiritual ignorance increase.

The fifth precept is not listed under the Path-factors of right action or right speech, but keeping it aids 'right mindfulness'. In intoxicated states lacking mental clarity or calm, one is also more likely to break all the other precepts. Certainly the wish to avoid life's sufferings by indulging in a false happiness is best avoided. In following this precept, some seek to avoid any intoxicating, or mind-altering substances, while others regard intoxication, and not the taking of a little drink, as a breach of the precept.

### THE POSITIVE IMPLICATIONS OF THE PRECEPTS

While each precept is expressed in negative wording, as an abstention, one who keeps these 'rules of training' increasingly comes to express positive virtues. As the roots of unskillful action are weakened, the natural depth-purity of the mind can manifest itself. Each precept thus has a positive counterpart,

respectively: (i) kindness and compassion; (ii) generosity and renunciation; (iii) 'joyous satisfaction with one's own wife', contentment and fewness-of-wishes; (iv) loving truth by searching it out, recognizing falsity, and attaining precision of thought; and (v) mindfulness and awareness.

The Northern traditions continue the older practice of using the terms *upasaka* or *upasika* (in translation) for anyone who observes the five precepts and takes the three refuges.<sup>47</sup>

Loving-kindness (*metta*) and compassion (*karuna*) are seen as part of the Path-factor of 'right directed thought', and as outgrowths from generosity, aids to deepening virtue, and factors undercutting the attachment to 'I'. They are also the first two of the four 'immeasurable' or 'divine abiding' (*brahmvihara*'s): qualities which, when developed to a high degree in meditation, are said to make the mind 'immeasurable' and like the mind of the loving god Brahma. Loving-kindness is the heart-felt aspiration for the happiness of beings, and is the antidote to hatred and fear. Compassion is the aspiration that beings be free from suffering, and is the antidote to cruelty. Sympathetic joy (*mudita*) is joy at the joy of others, and is the antidote to jealousy and discontent. Equanimity (*upekkha*) is an even-minded serenity towards beings, which balances concern for others with a realization that suffering is an inevitable part of being alive. It is the antidote the partiality and attachment. Loving-kindness is stressed in such verses as, 'Conquer anger by loving-kindness: conquer evil by good; conquer the stingy by giving; conquer the liar by truth'.

Compassion, as the root-motivation of the *Bodhisattva*, is much emphasized. In Northern Buddhism, the taking of the *Bodhisattva* vows, often done after taking the precepts, is a solemn commitment which expresses the compassionate urge to aid all beings. This is to be done by constant practice of the 'perfections': generosity, virtue, patience, vigour, meditation and wisdom.

The ideal of caring for animals is nicely expressed in a *Jataka* story, which tells of the *Bodhisatta* as a hermit who brought water to wild animals during a drought; as he was so intent on doing this, he had not time to get himself food, but the animals gathered it for him. Buddhism also has a tradition of providing veterinary care. In this, a badly afflicted animal would not normally be 'put out of its misery', but be cared for. Killing it would be seen as not much different from killing an afflicted human.

### Care for the dying and the dead

Compassionate help for others is no less important in death than in life, according to Buddhism. As death approaches, it is the duty of relatives and friends to help a person have a 'good death'; for in a rebirth perspective, death is the most important and problematical 'life-crisis'. The ideal is to die in a calm, aware state, joyfully recollecting previous good deeds, rather than regretting them, so that the best possible rebirth is obtained, within the limits set by previous *karma*.

In Northern Buddhism, a dying and recently dead person will have the *Bar-do Thos-grol*<sup>48</sup> (commonly known as 'The Tibetan Book of the Dead') read to him. This is to guide him through the experiences of the forty-nine days between lives, so as to help him overcome lingering attachment to his body and family, or even gain liberating insight. At the time of death, all people are said to experience the blissful brightly-shining Clear Light to emptiness, thusness or pure Mind. An advanced *yogin* may be able to attain enlightenment at the time. Most people, though, turn away in incomprehension, and go on travel at will, has powers such as telepathy, and meets the 'Innate Spirit' – representing his conscience – which outlines the details of his past life's *karma*. Visions of the various rebirth realms and of a series of heavenly Buddhas and Bodhisattvas ensure. One who does not understand the nature of this vision is drawn forward to a new rebirth, according to his *karma*. One with understanding, however, may accelerate his development on the *Bodhisattva*-path, or may be able to gain rebirth in a Pure Land. After a death,

the corpse is usually cremated. Sometimes, though, it is dismembered so that vultures can benefit by eating it.

## ETHICS OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP

The Buddha not only founded his own religious communities but also spoke out about the broader social and political condition of his time. According to the early texts, he often denounced the injustice of the caste systems and the *Sangha* was open to persons of all caste. The attitude of compassionate concern for those in needs was modeled by the Buddha himself in dealing with people outside and inside the *Sangha*.<sup>49</sup>

Buddhist ethics also include guidelines for good social relationships, through how these have been adopted in practice various considerably from culture to culture. An important text in this area is the *Sigalovada Sutta*, described by Asoka as the code of discipline for the laity, paralling that for monks and nuns. In it, the Buddha comes across, *Sigala*, worshipping the six directions in accordance with his father's dying wish. He advises that there is a better way to serve the six directions by proper actions towards six types of persons, so as to produce harmony in the web of relationships centered on an individual. A person should minister to his parents as the 'eastern quarter', his teachers to the 'south', his wife to the 'west', his friends to the 'north', servants and employee 'below' and monks and Brahmins 'above'. In return, each of these should 'act in sympathy with' the person in various ways.

### Care for women

As regards marriage, Buddhism's monastic emphasis means that it does not regard this as 'sacred', but as a contract of partnership. A marriage service is not conducted by monks, though these may be asked to bless a couple at or after their marriage. In connection with this, it is said that a husband and wife, if matched in trustful confidence, virtue, generosity and wisdom, will be reborn together if they wish.

While Buddhism has no objection to divorce, as such, social pressures mean that this is not common among Buddhists. Unlike some societies, the single women (spinster, divorced or widowed) are a respected one. In Sherdukpen Buddhism, laws relating to the grounds for divorce and the division of property and children have been relatively equal with regard to the husband and wife.<sup>50</sup>

In agriculture, there is little differentiation of jobs along sexual lines, though men tend to do the heavier work and to take the more important decisions. No attention is paid if a man does a 'woman's' job, or vice-versa: a woman may plough and a man be midwife. Among Sherdukpens, women have enjoyed considerable equality regarding sexual freedom, property rights and acting on their own behalf. They often head a household, and are active in trade, if less directly active in politics.<sup>51</sup>

While Buddhism sees all people as having had past lives as males and as females, female rebirth is seen as to some extent less favourable. This is because a woman undergoes certain sufferings that a man is free from: having to leave her family for her husband's; menstruation; pregnancy; childbirth; and having to wait upon a man. The first and last points are not prescriptive, but just describe current practice in ancient India. Both men and women are seen as having their characteristic strengths and weaknesses, thus it is said to be impossible for a female (while being a female) to be either a Buddha or a Mara. The Buddha's equal concern for both sexes, though, is made clear in a passage where he says that he would not die until the monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen were well trained. The early texts refer to many *Arahat* nuns, a number of whom gave important teachings. The *Therigatha* ('Verses of the Elder Nuns') records teachings and experiences of over a hundred. While the *Mahayana* never had the concept of a female Buddha, it gradually came to emphasize sexual equality, partly through saying that 'maleness' and 'femaleness' are 'empty' of inherent reality. The 'Perfection of Wisdom' was personified as a female Bodhisattva and, figuratively, as 'the mother of all the



Buddhas'; Tantric Buddhism also introduced many female holy beings associated with wisdom.

### THE SANGHA

This deals with the 'conventional' *Sangha* of monks and nuns and also with certain types of married clerics.<sup>52</sup> The 'fourfold' *Sangha* consists of all monks, nuns, *upasakas* and *upasikas*, any of whom may also belong to the revered 'Holy' *Sangha*. The Pali terms translated as 'monk' and 'nun' are *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni*, literally 'almsman' and 'almswoman'. The original mendicancy of these, still current to varying extents, symbolized aid to humility, and also ensured that they did not become isolated from the laity. The often close lay-monastic relationship makes *bhikkhus* undertakings are not in principle taken for life, and in that they take no vow of obedience. The Buddha valued self-reliance, and left the *Sangha* as community of individuals sharing a life under the guidance of *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*. The job of its members is to strive for their own spiritual development, and use their knowledge and experience of *Dhamma* to guide others, when asked: not to act as an intermediary between God and humankind, or officiate at life-cycle rites. Nevertheless, in practice they have come to serve the laity in several priests like ways.

### THE ROLE OF MONASTICISM<sup>53</sup>

A layperson can distract himself from the realities of life and personal weaknesses with such things as entertainments, pastimes, drink and sex. The simple monastic life, however, is designed to have few distractions, so that there is less opportunity to ignore greed, hatred and delusion, and thus more opportunity to work at diminishing them and to guide others in doing so. Most monks and nuns seek to do this, though a few do take to monastic life as a lazy way of making a living.

The Buddha felt that the life of a householder was somewhat spiritually cramping, such that it was difficult for a layperson to perfect the 'holy-life'. As the monastic life of one 'gone forth from home into homelessness' lacks many



of the attachments and limiting involvements found in lay life, it is seen as having fewer obstacles to, and more opportunities for, persistent and consistent spiritual practice. The early texts do refer to many lay stream-enterers, more than 1,000 eight- precept lay Non-returners, and a few lay *Arahats*. Indeed, while the conditions of lay life pose more obstacles, those who make the effort in spite of them can attain good spiritual progress. Nevertheless, most Buddhist schools see monasticism as a superior way of life, one that all should respect and aspire to join in this or some future life.

In the predominantly *mantrayana* tradition of Northern Buddhism, a *bLama* is generally a monk or nun of long standing or special charisma, but a layperson accomplished in meditation or tantric rituals may also be such a revered teacher. In the *rNying-ma* school, lay *bLamas* are particularly common; they live apart from their local temple, but gather there for certain rituals. Some schools also allow experienced monks to temporarily suspend their undertaking of sexual abstinence to perform tantric rites involving sexual yoga. Lay *bLamas* are broadly considered to belong to the conventional *Sangha*, as are other figures as non-ordained meditator-hermits or professional scripture readers.

### PATTERNS OF ORDINATION

The Buddha discouraged monks from disrobing, and originally ordination was taken with the intention that it would be for life. However, the monastic status has never been irrevocable. In most Buddhist lands, a person is expected to be a monk/ priest or nun for life. In practice about 50 per cent join, often several times during life. While the continuity of monastic life is kept up by a core of permanent monks, the system makes for a close lay- monastic relationship and a good level of lay religious knowledge and experience. Temporary monkhood is often seen as 'maturing' a young man prior to marriage, and as a way for old people to make 'merit' for the next life.

Ordination of the Sherdukpen is a voluntary one unlike the Monpas where family with three sons or more are required to admit one as a novice.

preferably second son to be a Buddhist monk in the Tawang monastery.<sup>54</sup> The Sherdukpen number as novice in Tawang monastery was very less from the very beginning. The parents engage a senior lama of the monastery as tutor (*gergan*). If the boy has a relative among the resident lamas of the monastery, then he may also act as the *gergan*. The parents get the boy's head shaved, dress him in the monk's attire and take him to the *gergan*. They offer the *gergan* a ceremonial scarf and fee or kind according to their capacity.

The *gergan* takes the boy, the following morning, to the *dukhang*, present him to the assembly and conveys the desire of the boy and his parents for ordination to the monastic order. The *gergan* offers a ceremonial scarf to the abbot seeking his approval for the ordination. The abbot bestows the boy a religious name. He is enrolled in the register of the monastery by the new name and henceforth is known by it. The novice (*genen*), from that day, draws the monthly allowance of thirteen *bres* of cereal from the *niertsang*. If the inmates cannot manage with this monthly allowance, they have to get the additional quantity from the parents or by conducting sacerdotal services for the laity. The *genen* keeps the ten precepts.

The *genen* lives with the *gergan*. Each of the residential building is occupied by a *gergan* teacher and his disciples and these are called *shah*. The *gergan* teaches the *genen* in the dormitory, first the alphabet from a book called *Kakha* and then the elementary simple religious texts such as the *Tsonlep*, *Doduipa*, etc. The parents and relatives occasional visit, and offer presents to the *gergan* according to their means.

When several *genens* have completed the first course, an auspicious day is selected to promote them to the next stage called *getsul*. On that day, the candidates are presented by their *gergans* to the *abbot* in the *labrang*. The candidates lay an entertainment for the *abbot*. Each offers him a ceremonial scarf and pays him in cash according to his means. The *abbot* reads out from the text called *Getsul* as he performs the connected rites. All the candidates become *getsul* from that day. The *getsul* keeps thirty-six precepts. He continues his study in the sacred texts and in the mode of various rituals in the

dormitory as well as in the *dukhang*. This course in religious texts and mode of rituals is called *Ngak*. The *Do* or *Sutra* is not taught in this monastery. So in the past, some of the monks used to go to Tibet to get themselves qualified in *Do*.

When the *getsuls* attain the age of 21 years, they are given the highest ordination called *gelong*. All go in a batch to the abbot in the *labrang* on an auspicious day, and offer him a feast, and ceremonial scarfs and cash. The abbot reads out from religious texts and performs appropriate rites and the pupils now turn into fully ordained monk (*gelong*). A *gelong* observe the two hundred and fifty-three disciplinary rules detailed in the Buddhist cannon become eligible to conduct the rituals independently. The monastic order includes all the members of the order are called *dapa*. In the past, some used to go to the famous monasteries like *Drepung*, *Galden*, *Sera* and *Tashihunpo* for advanced studies and to come back, establish or join a *gonpa* generally in one's own area and to live and conduct ritual services there.

Monks who had been good students are called *pechawa*, and the less bright and the diligent *barshar*. The *abbot* selects from the *pechawa* monks, on seniority, the caretakers of the various temples under the control of the monastery. A caretaker has to be attached to three temples consecutively for a total period of nine years, three years to each. He returns to the monastery after that, and according to seniority, is promoted to the monastic office of the *umdze* for three years. The *umdze* organizes the religious services in the assembly hall and enhanced allowance of twenty-six *bres* of grain a month. The *umdze* is promoted at the end of his tenure to the higher office of the *lopon*. It also is for three years. As a *lopon* also he gets twenty-six *bres*. He initiates all ritual function in the assembly hall and looks after the management of the monastery during the absence of the abbot. The Abbot stands at the head of the monastic hierarchy and gets thirty-nine *bres*. He has the supreme control of the management of the monastery and the he presides over all monastic functions

At present in the Sherdukpen area number of novice/lama are twenty two in Rupa Gompa, eight in Shergaon Gompa and more than one hundred in Chilipam Gompa.<sup>55</sup> Among these four Sherdukpens are in Rupa Gompa, one each in Nepal, Dehradun, Mysore, Bomdila and Chilipam. The lama in Chilipam is full pledged one. Among the Sherdukpens there are two types of lama, *Ngakpa*, one who can , marry and *Gelung*, one who cannot marry.

## DRESS

The lamas normally put on trousers and cover it as double breasted, sleeveless vest with collars (*senju*) reaching below the knee and tightened at the waist with a girdle (*chudang*).<sup>56</sup> A double-breasted gown with full sleeves and collars (*alifudung*) is also sometimes worn. During the time of administering domestic rites, they put on trousers, a *senju* and an *alifudung* or in the place of the last item a collarless, double-breasted gown with full sleeves (*chupa*) reaching below the knee and fastened round the waist with the girdle. In the temple celebrations , they do not put on trousers but a *senju*, a *chupa* and a shawl, one over the other in that order. The shawl is thrown over the left shoulder and passed under the right arm leaving it bare. In some of the ritual celebrations, they have put on a hat, which is of red of *Nyingmapa*. These garments are made of home-spun woolen cloth of maroon colour. The trousers and *alifudung* may also be made of *endi* silk, which they produce from the plains of Assam.

## NUN

The concept of nunnery is not unknown in the *Mahayana* Buddhist area of the state. Here it may be mentioned that in the Tawang area there existed a few nunneries locally known as *anegompa* which were constructed after the Tawang monastery sometime in 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>57</sup> Till now the *anegompa* exist today in different place of district Tawang. The ordination of women however not a forcible one rather it was a voluntary one. Coming to the Sherdukpen area we do not have any *anegompa* before *independence* though

one can come across a *anegompa* at Rupa at present which was constructed recently but the concept of nun (*ane*) was prevalent in the area.

### THE MONASTIC CODE OF DISCIPLINE

*Sangha* life is regulated by the *Vinaya*, meaning 'that by which one is led out (from suffering)'.<sup>58</sup> The main components of this section of scriptures are a code of training-rules for *bhikkhus*, one for *bhikkhunis*, and ordinances for the smooth running of communal life and ceremonies. Each code is known as a *patimokkha* and is contained in the *Sutta-vibhanga*. This also describes the supposed situation which led the Buddha to promulgate each rule, and mitigating circumstances which nullify or reduce the usual consequences of digression from it. The regulations for communal life, known as *kamma-vacanas*, are contained in the *Khandhaka*.

The *patimokkha* gradually evolved during the Buddha's life and for perhaps a century after. According to one etymology, '*patimokkha*' means a 'bond': something which is 'against scattering' of spiritual states and the purity of the *Sangha*. In some ways, the code can be likened to one of professional conduct.

The *patimokkha* is chanted at the observance days at the full and new moons. Originally, this ceremony was for public acknowledgement of any digression from a rule, but this soon came to be made privately by one monk to another prior to the ceremony. At this, the code is chanted by a leading monk, often now in an abbreviated form, and the silence of the others is taken as a sign that their conduct is pure, with any digressions acknowledged. In this way the ceremony serves as a vital liturgical expression of the communal purity of a particular local *Sangha*. Accordingly, every monk present within the formally established boundary (*sima*) of a monastery must attend each such ceremony, unless he is ill, when he must send notice of his purity.

The early monastic fraternities developed different versions of the original *patimokkha* of perhaps 150 rules, though these codes agreed in substance



and most of the details. There are still in use, the *Mula- Sarvastivadin* code of 258 rules for monks is used in Northern Buddhism.

The rules are arranged in categories according to degrees of gravity. The first relates to *parajika* actions, which 'entail defeat' in monastic life and permanent dismissal. For monks, these are strong breaches of four of the ten precepts: intentional sexual intercourse of any kind; theft of an object having some value; murder of a human being; and false claims, made to the laity, of having attained states a possible way of attracting more alms. As serious karmic consequences are seen to follow from a monk breaking these rules, it is held to be better to become a layperson, who can at least indulge in sexual intercourse, than live a monk who is in danger of breaking the rule against this. The importance of celibacy is that sexual activity expresses quite strong attachment, and uses energy which could otherwise be used more fruitfully. For nuns, there are four extra *parajika* offences: (with sensual intent) touching a man or going to a rendezvous with him; not making known that another nun has broken a *parajika* rule; and persistently imitating a monk suspended for bad behavior. The remaining rules explained here are those of the monks' *patimokkha*.

The second category of rules covers those requiring a formal meeting of the *Sangha* to deal with digressions from them. A digresser is put on probation, being treated as the most junior monk and excluded from official *Sangha* affairs for as many days as he has concealed the digression, plus six more. There are thirteen such rules for monks. Five concern actions of a sensual nature other than intercourse. Two relate to monastic residences, which should not be too large, nor should building involve clearing away trees, which would harm living beings. Two deal with false accusations of an offence involving 'defeat'; monk who is persistently difficult to admonish about his misdeeds, and the final one deals with a monk who 'corrupts families' by giving small gifts in the hope of receiving abundant alms in return.

The third category includes two rules excluding a monk from sitting alone with a woman in certain secluded places. This was both to protect the *Sangha's* reputation, and to avoid unnecessary temptation from monks.

The fourth category, of thirty rules, deals with actions requiring expiation (by acknowledgement) and forfeiture of an article. Allowable possessions should only be possessed in a certain small quantity, except for a short period, and should not be exchanged unless worn out. Money should not be received; handled or used in transactions (this does not prevent the acceptance and use of money by a monastery's lay stewards).

Digressions from the fifth category of rules require only expiation. The ninety-two rules included here (ninety for the Northern and Eastern codes) deal with such matters as :

- i) harming living beings by directly killing them, digging the ground or destroying plants or trees;
- ii) sleeping in the same dwelling as a woman, or sitting in a private place with one;
- iii) various forms of wrong speech, unfriendly behavior towards a fellow monk, and true claims to the laity of having attained higher states;
- iv) eating after noon, drinking alcohol, and consuming food or drink (except water) that has not been formally offered;
- v) unseemly, frivolous behaviour, and going to see an army fighting or on parade;
- vi) sleeping in the same place as a layman for more than three nights, or using a high, luxurious bed;
- vii) disparaging the lesser rules as vexing, pretended ignorance of a rule, or knowingly concealing a monk's digression from one for the first seventeen rules.

The seventh category of rules requires only acknowledgement for digressions. Four rules are found here, such as a monk not accepting food from a nun who is not a relation (as nuns found it more difficult to get alms, and so should not be accepted to share their food with monks).

The seventh categories of rules are also followed by novices, and have no penalty attached to them. These guidelines- seventy-five in the *Theravadin* code- seek to ensure that the monks are graceful and dignified in the way that they wear their robes, walk, move and collect and eat alms-food. Such a clam deportment is much valued by the laity.

The final set of seven rules outline procedures for resolving legal questions on digressions. They mainly outline types of verdict, such as innocent, non-culpable due to insanity, and a majority verdict.

After the *patimokkha* code was closed, sub-categories of the rules were developed to cover acts not quite amounting to full digressions, but counted, in decreasing order of gravity, as 'grave digressions', 'digressions is wrongdoing'. Or as 'digressions of improper speech'.

Besides the penalties referred to above, and order can impose ones such as censuring or suspension. Suspension is imposed for not accepting that a digression has been made, not making amends for it, or not giving up a wrong view on sensual behavior. It goes beyond probation in that, for example, the monks should not speak to the monk.

In areas of Tibetan culture the *dGe-lugs* school is generally stricter in adherence to *Vinaya* than others. Due to the central role that monasteries have played in society, though, even ex-monks find a place in them. While they cannot take part in monastic services, they often still wear monastic robes, and live within the monastic complex, perhaps holding a post in the monastery's administration.

### **ECONOMIC BASE OF THE MONASTIC LIFE<sup>59</sup>**

The original ideal of the *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni* was that of a person with a minimum of possessions living a simple life-style, supported by lay donations rather than by any gainful occupation. The formal list of monks, personal 'requisites', treated as his property, comprises an upper, lower- and over-robe, a belt, a bowl, a roazor, a needle, a water-strainer, a staff, and a tooth-



pick. In practice, a monk also has such articles as sandals, a towel, extra work robes, a shoulder bag, an umbrella, books, writing materials, a clock, and a picture of his teacher. There is a structural tension between the ascetic tendencies of the *Sangha* and the laity's desire to make more abundant 'merit' by giving to more abstemious and ascetic monks. Thus a town monk with a good reputation may be given fridge or even the use of a car. If he lives up to his reputation, though, he will use these with detachment (he cannot drive himself), and let other monks benefit from them.

The laity also donate other goods, and their labour: for example helping to build or repair a temple. Lay stewards usually deal with cash donations. Tibetan monks are also paid for their ritual services by the laity. State patronage has been a source of support for large temples in many countries, but this is now much rare.

Land has been given to the *Sangha* since the time of the Buddha, when it was used to erect simple monastic dwellings on. *Vinaya* rules forbidding monks to dig the earth were partly intended to prevent them from becoming self-supporting, and thus isolated from the laity. In time, accumulated land-donations meant that temples became landlords in a number of countries, especially where governments granted land.

Large monasteries have also engaged in commercial activities. In Northern Buddhism, the *Vinaya* specifically allows the use of surplus donations for lending at interest, if this is of benefit to the *Dharma* and *Sangha*. In pre-Communist Tibet, the monasteries were key economic institutions at the centre of a web of trading and donation relationships with the two other main sectors of Tibetan society: nomadic herdsman and agriculturalists. Individual monks invested in such things as herds and seed-grain, but most capital was received and administered at the level of the 'college', a sub-division of the monastery which inherited the possessions of its members. Its superintendent, monastic or lay, ensured its support by getting a good return from land worked by leaseholders or peasants attached to the monastery, from grazing, forest

and water rights, college herds, trade with China and India, bartering with herdsmen, and from loans and investments.

In Sherdukpen area the *gompa* receives donations, offerings, pilgrimage from plains. In Shergaon, share percentage of earning from plantation like apple goes to *gompa*. Traders and wealthy people also used contribute to the economic activities of the monastery. However, no land has been attached with any of the *Gompas* noticed in the area, like the celebrated Tawang monastery at Tawang.<sup>60</sup> Earlier, the traders having border trade with Tibet and Bhutan, crossing through Sherdukpen territory used to donate liberally towards the *Gompas*. Earlier Tawang monastery indirectly used to play a role in carrying trade and commerce in the area but we do not have any reference whether the *gompa* of Rupa and Shergaon used to take any trade activities.<sup>61</sup>

### STUDY AND MEDITATION<sup>62</sup>

Monastic life can be broadly divided into personal, communal and pastoral activities. The first includes observing the monastic code, meditation and study, all as means to spiritual development and the preservation of the *Dhamma* for the benefit of all. In practice, monks and nun have tended to emphasize either study or mediation. Such specialization seems to have existed to some extent even in early Buddhism.

In Northern Buddhism, the *dGe-lugs* school is noted for its emphasis on study, while others such as the *bKa'brgyud* emphasize meditation more. Monks of all schools, though, usually start by spending five years in study. This is followed by further study, by learning meditation and practicing it in a hermitage or simple by helping around the monastery.

The extensive scriptures have been lovingly studies by generations of monks and nuns, who have produced many commentaries and treatises based on them. The need to preserve and disseminate the teachings ahs spread literate culture to many lands, ensured a generally high degree of literacy among Buddhists, and been responsible for the invention of printing

and several written scripts. Buddhist monks and nuns have often been among the intellectual, cultural and artistic elite of their societies.

In Northern Buddhism, texts are collections of oblong strips of paper printed by wood-blocks. Traditional study was based on daily lectures on selected texts, followed by memorization and study of them. After the minimum five years, some monks would then spend at least seven years in a Tantric college in which mystical tantric texts would be studied and then used as a basis for meditations. The *dGe-lugs* have emphasized logic as a basic formative discipline, a student's doctrinal understanding being tested by public dialectical debates. Their full course of study could last up to twenty-five years, leading to the title of first or second class *dge-bshes* (pron. Geshe), or Doctor of Buddhology. Traditional study also included medicine astrology, astronomy, grammar, calligraphy, and religious painting. Since the destruction of many monasteries in Tibet by the Communist Chinese, traditional monastic learning has been continued by refugee monks in India and elsewhere.

### **Meditation**

Many monks, generally in old age, engage themselves in meditation. Meditation is of two types<sup>63</sup>, *tsam* and *rithroih*. *Tsam* is done in a temple in or near a village and where other monks also stay, and *rithroih* in a secluded hermitage on a hillock or in a sequestered cave far away from human habitation. In the former, an area is marked out with stones in the four corners, within which he sits in meditation. One person or more, chosen by him, may enter that area besides him to get him food and minister to his needs. *Rithroih* is obviously more difficult. Relatives, friends and acquaintances gladly undertake to feed him as this is believed to bring religious merit. Such pious people and leave the articles of food outside in a spot previously decided upon. The meditating monk collects them, cooks himself and eats when he feels like it. A monk in meditation lives mainly on rice, flour and tea flavoured with a good measure of butter. He has occasionally a curry of green leafy vegetables. Such a monk is known as *tsampa* and is held in high esteem.

In Northern Buddhism, many monasteries have caves or huts for intensive meditation or scholarship. Seclusion in such hermitages might be for a short period or, in the *bKa'brgyud* and *nNying-ma* schools, for perhaps three years, three months and three days. During this time the mediator is alone, with food and water being silently passed in through a small opening. Such seclusion is, of course, voluntary, and is only entered after an exhaustive preparation. It is used as a time to wholeheartedly develop meditation by drawing on both previous practice and innate mental resources.

Three places of compulsory meditation in Sherdukpen are performed for period of three to six months. Meditation was done in a place called *Lambakatng*, (meditation centre of *lama*) known as *Renche*. Earlier no mediation centre was existed. It was done in respective *gompas*.<sup>64</sup>

The teaching starts in earnest from the following day. After he has become conversant with the alphabets, he is taught spelling as well as the sacred symbols from the books called *Jonlap* and *Drusma*. When this is over, he is given lesson from the minor religious texts like *Dorchosh*, *Chukdor* and *Doduipa*. At this stage, the novice is in a position to carry on independently the reading and recitation of the liturgical books. He is then taught the major religious texts. The modes of the various ritual celebrations are learnt by observing as well as assisting his preceptor in his ritual actions. During the period of training, the novice dresses like the other boys. The training generally commences at about the age of seven or eight and it takes at least six years to complete provided the novice is intelligent.

Course of study used to be paintings, drawings, learning English and Hindi. Buddhist language was one of the important course of study in *gompa*.

## TANTRIC VISUALIZATIONS

In Northern Buddhism, visualizations are a central feature of Tantric meditations.<sup>65</sup> In order to be guided through the complex and powerful meditations, a tantric practitioner must find a suitable *bLama* to act as his

spiritual preceptor. Once he has found one with whom he has a personal affinity, he must prove his sincerity, purity and detachment before he will be accepted as a disciple; for his spiritual welfare will then be the responsibility of the *bLama*. In return, the disciple should implicitly obey all his *bLama*'s instructions as a patient obeys the instructions of his doctor. He should also serve and have great devotion for his *bLama*.

After the practitioner has carried out a number of arduous preliminaries, to purify himself, his *bLama* will initiate him into the *Mantrayana*, as he will also do to each new level of practice within it. An initiation is regarded as having several functions. Firstly, it helps remove spiritual power from the *bLama*, seen as an 'empowerment' to practice in a certain way. Thirdly, it permits access to a body of written teachings and the oral instructions needed to understand and practice them properly. Lastly, it authorizes the practitioner to address himself in a particular way to a certain holy being or deity. At the initiation, the *bLama* selects a mantra and 'chosen deity' (*Tib.yi-dam*) appropriate to the practitioner's character type, and introduces him to the *mandala*, or sacred diagram, of the *yi-dam*. The nature and role mantra, *yi-dam* and *mandala* are as follows.<sup>66</sup>

## MANTRAS

Mantras are sacred words of power, mostly meaningless syllables or strings of syllables, which give an arrangement of sound of great potency

### The *yi-dam*

A *yi-dam* is a particular holy being who is in harmony with the practitioner's nature, and who will act as his tutelary deity.

### Mandalas

A *mandala* or '(sacred) circle' is a device developed in India between the seventh and twelfth centuries, possibly being derived from the *kasina-mandala*. Its basic function is to portray the luminous world, or Pure Land, of a

specific holy being, with other holy beings particularly associated with it arrayed about it.

### Mudras

Tantric rites may involve the use of ritual gestures which, like the gestures made by the hands of Buddha-images, are known as *mudra's* or 'signs'; as has been seen, these are also used in devotion. On Buddha- images, they are the 'signs' which characterize particular heavenly Buddhas.

Thus in the preceding pages the Buddhist practices of the Sherdukpens have been discussed. As we have seen there practices are a combination of Buddhist practices and some non-Buddhist practices. However, after the conversion of the people to *Mahayana* Buddhism Buddhist practices became popular in the Sjerdukoen society.

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60. Dutta, S. and Tripathy, B., *Buddhism in Arunachal Pradesh*, pp.238-244.
61. Ibid
62. Farber Don, op.cit, pp.118-125.
63. Sarkar, Niranjana, op.cit, p.74-79
64. Vide interview with Dother Khrieme and Yeshe Lama on 02/03/09

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# RELATIONS OF THE SHERDUKPENS

## INTRODUCTION

The establishment of Sherdukpen administration at Rupa inaugurated a new era in the history of the Sherdukpens. As per the oral tradition, a son of Tibetan king *Japtung Bura* whose mother was an Assamese princess started the Sherdukpen administration.<sup>1</sup> We do not get clear idea of Sherdukpen migration to their present settlement. It is not clearly known whether Sherdukpens came to the area in 8<sup>th</sup> century or before because as per Buddhist tradition in 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. *Guru Padmasambhav* popularised Buddhism among the Sherdukpens.<sup>2</sup> If the tradition is believed, the Sherdukpens would have come to their present settlement sometime before 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. However, there is no literary or archaeological source about the Sherdukpens of early period. Sherdukpen came across with various tribes and communities in their neighborhood as well as had relation with the Ahom rulers of Assam and the British. These relations may be political, social or economical which are important part and parcel of the history of the Sherdukpen. This chapter takes into account Sherdukpen relation (mainly political) with the plains of Assam, Ahoms and the British.

## SHERDUKPEN – ASSAM RELATION

Traditionally Sherdukpen relation with plains of Assam relation started from the time of rule of *Japtung Bura* who happened to be the grandson of an Ahom king about whom we donot get any idea in the *Buranjis* of Ahom period.<sup>3</sup> However, as per a tradition<sup>4</sup> *Japtung Bura* one day went out hunting to the southern area from Rupa and shot a pig with his arrow though his arrow did not miss the target, the pig was not seriously wounded, and as such it started running to further south followed by *Japtung*. In the process they went to the foothill area and the pig took its shelter under the barn of a family. When *Japtung* began to bring it out of the barn, the head of the family came

out and asked why he was disturbing his domestic pig. *Japtung* said he had shot the animal in the jungle and it was a wild pig but the owner of the house proved it to his domestic one. This was followed by courtesy greeting and welcome to the stranger. In the formal talk that followed, the owner of the house told *Japtung* that his maternal uncle was the king of that kingdom. Accordingly *Japtung* went to the king's palace and introduced himself as the son king Shrongtsangampo of Tibet. The king could recognise the man as his nephew and extended hearty welcome to him. As a gift to the nephew, the king, offered *Japtung* a vast area of land in Orang-Dekhiajuli area in Assam. Infact all the land between river Dansiri and Gabru (Belsiri) and its revenue was ceded by the king to his nephew.<sup>5</sup> In spite of this vast area of land *Japtung* and his people refused to come down from hills. But for utilization of the land, arrangement was made with the Assamese people of the area so that the Assamese people would cultivate the land and the Sherdukpen would come down during harvesting period and collect their share every year. Accordingly the Sherdukpen started coming down to Assam at the advent of winter sometime in November and used to collect their shares. Such an affair used to take a week or so. Courtesy demanded by the Assamese people to welcome this sojourn the of the guest in different family. Their initial stay with the Assamese family was later on extended to a month or even more. During this period, a number of Sherdukpen used to settle at Doimara during winter period for collection of their taxes, as well as to take part in Doimara fair. This process developed a family relationship between the Assamese people with the Sherdukpens.<sup>6</sup>

The Sherdukpen contact with Assamese, as we have seen, started with their staying with them or near by to them, sometime eating with the Assamese people also. Here it has to be mentioned that when the Sherdukpen came into contact with the Assamese society it seemed that they were almost in the food gathering stage. When they settled at Rupa, the *Chaos* used to gather fruits, roots, leaves and shoots from the jungle and the Sherdukpen king himself used to go on hunting and fishing with the help of the *Chaos*. Thus the contact of the Sherdukpen with an advanced society would have brought cultural interaction between both the communities. This cultural interaction can

be noticed in various aspects of Sherdukpen lives with reference to religion, culture, agriculture, food habits, dress, house pattern, etc.

Before the Sherdukpens adopted *Mahayana* Buddhism, the Sherdukpens believed in shamanistic animist or *bon* cult as prevailing in pre-Buddhist Tibet.<sup>7</sup> At that time, Assamese people in the foot hills area were *Hindus saktas* following the shamanistic path since there was no much difference between the two faith except in details of rituals and ritualistic sacrifices, they might have accepted certain such rituals, particularly that of sacrificing animals in propitiation of some deities. Before their embrace of Buddhism, there was no restriction among the Sherdukpens in killing animals for all purposes. Most probably the Sherdukpens were influenced by the *Hindus sakta* of Assam and that is why they established a temple in Assam near Orang in Sonitpur district in the land donated to them by Assam king i.e *Japtang's* maternal uncles.<sup>8</sup> It is again in all probability here in this temple, they began to sacrifice a bull annually in specific occasion. This system continued till today except in their abstention from slaughtering the animal after their embracement Buddhism. Surprisingly, even today they release a bull in *Khiksaba* festival in the name of *Orang deo* (The deity of *Orang*).<sup>9</sup>

Another major things resulted from this relation is the emergence of a religious festival celebrated by the Sherdukpen with ritualistic participation of the Assamese people. This festival is known as *Khiksaba*.<sup>10</sup> The date and other things related to festival are fixed after proper information to the Assamese people. Accordingly on the appointed day, a number of Assamese people come to the Sherdukpen village Rupa carrying bettle nut, religious and ritualistic items. What is important is the *Erica* nuts and bettle leaves the Assamese would carry are not procured from market rather these are specifically preserved without plucking a single knot from *erica* plants in other words the nuts of those particular plants are not touched and preserved for the festivals. Similarly the bettle leaves of a particular plants are preserved for the purpose. These items are so essential that the people of Rupa cannot go ahead with the initiation of the festival before the Assamese people arrive. The moment the Assamese people arrive there is

jubilation among the villagers and announcement is made of their arrival. In Assamese society *Erica* nut and bettle leaf has attained some religious sanctity-no religious function is possible without *tamul pan* particularly offered in *sarai* (a brass metal pot with a stand below and a lead of conical shape). It is interesting to note that in the last day of the *Khiksaba* festival the Sherdukpen ladies attain the function with a *sarai* packed with *tamul pan* and other offers. Another interesting thing to be observed on that day is the dress of the Sherdukpen ladies, though the cloths are of Sherdukpen traditional pattern these are made of Assamese cloth called *eri* cloth.<sup>11</sup> This definite influence of Assamese culture on the Sherdukpen seems to have set a trend among the neighbouring tribes like the Monpas, the Akas, the Nyishis, etc. who have also accepted *eri* cloth as symbol of aristocracy and sanctity specially when this cloth is used in some religious function.

The disposal of the death body of the Sherdukpen appeared to have been influenced by the Assamese culture. It is known that the Sherdukpen death body was originally poured in a cave, the dead body of a *Thong* was not touched by the sons and daughters and other close relatives. It was the function of the *Chao* attached to that *Thong* family to wash the dead body, perform some other rituals and then carry the dead body entered in a gunny bag or tied securely with rope, etc. Then the *Chaos* used to put the death body in sitting position inside the cave and came back closing the cave mouth with rock slab. It was under the influence of the Assamese society that the Sherdukpen gradually started cremating their dead body.<sup>12</sup> Not only that the early tradition of *Thongs* avoiding to touch the dead bodies of ones father, mother, brother etc. has been changed, they not only touch, wash the dead body but also become pall bearer and attend the cremation ground.

Some sort of changes can be marked among the Sherdukpens in the field of agriculture and food habit which seems to be influenced by the plains of Assam. Most of the tribes under north bank of Brahmaputra apply the slash and burn method in which tilling of the land is done with the help of hoe, bamboo stick or some wooden implements. However, the Sherdukpens not only performed *jhum* cultivation but also used to practised terrace cultivation. What is interesting is that the Sherdukpens use

bullock drawn plough in their agricultural field.<sup>13</sup> That the Sherdukpens have learnt the use bullock-drawn plough for tilling land can be ascertained from their method of tilling land strewn with boulders- while ploughing the field with boulder, the bullocks cannot be guided from the behind to avoid the boulder by the plough. So there is provision of two person for the same plough- one in the front to tackle the bullock for avoiding a bolder as and when necessary and the other behind holding the handle of the plough so that the land portion between the boulders could be tilled. The use of bullock drawn plough was definitely influenced by agricultural practices in the plains of Assam.

### **SHERDUKPEN -AHOM RELATIONS**

The Ahoms ruled Assam from 1228 to 1826 A.D. for more than six hundred years.<sup>14</sup> With the expansion of Ahom territory, the Ahoms came across with various frontier tribes of north eastern frontier (present Arunachal Pradesh) in the east north and west of the Ahom kingdom. Considering the vastness of border area, expenditure of soldiers to man the vast border, continuous attack of the muslims of Bengal on the Ahom kingdom from the west during 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century and for various reasons, the Ahom rulers by and large followed a policy of conciliation towards the hill tribes of north east India.<sup>15</sup> This policy of conciliation was sometime backed by the display of force when occasion demanded it and when it could be employed efficiently. Throughout the history of the Ahoms, the rulers did never envisage the plan of complete subjugation and annexation of their territory to the Ahom kingdom and to take part in their internal administration. Because of their immunity from caste prejudices, the Ahoms could have successful dealings with the frontier tribes. In fact the Ahoms regulated their tribal policy in a very realistic and judicious manner.<sup>16</sup>

The policy of conciliation was reflected in an innovative system, known as *posa* system<sup>17</sup> which was extended to various frontier tribes. The *Buranjis* both in Ahom and Assamese language do mention about the beginning of *posa* system in early 17<sup>th</sup> century by the Ahom king Pratap Singha.<sup>18</sup> This system was a stroke of Ahom's diplomacy through which Ahom cultivated their relation with the tribes in a relatively peaceful manner. Though the origin of *posa* is not clearly known it was introduced for

various reasons as mentioned above. During the period most of the hill tribes were deficient in certain necessities of life and labourers (working hands). Sometimes the war like tribes used to raid in the plain which were mainly resorted to fill up their deficiencies. The *posa* system introduced by Pratap Singha was extended to frontier communities of Arunachal like Hillmiris, Nyishis, Akas, Monpas and Sherdukpens.<sup>19</sup> This *posa* was given in kind. The powerful tribal chief in the frontier area were identified by the Ahom government who could collect *posa* from the assigned villages in the plains of Assam. This *posa* was collected once in a year during the period of December to March. The *posa* articles consist of few kilogram of salt, iron implements, food grains, coarse cloth, etc. which were provided by the concerned villagers. Those communities who didn't get the right of *posa* like the Adis or Nagas (Nocte and Wanchu) were provided with agricultural land in the plains and given the permission to collect fish from the *beels* of plain area. Some other tribes like the Mishmis who depended solely for their livelihood upon their trading activities with the plains the Ahom offered them trade facilities on condition of good behavior and payment of annual tributes.

Scholars widely differ in their opinion on the nature of the *posa* itself. S.K. Bhuyan<sup>20</sup> states "on the extremity of the plains of two banks of the rivers lies the snowy hill ranges inhabited by people who have still retain their primitive ways of living and whose alliance with the government at Gargaon (Capital of Ahom) was procured by a system of black mail and long standing agreement of friendship". H.K. Barpujari, however, opines "the conciliatory policy of granting right might be a mutual compromise between conscious weakness and barbarian cunning and the levying of the *posa* differ little from the Maratha *chauth* or payment of the denegeld".<sup>21</sup> Following this most of the European writer in 19<sup>th</sup> century denominated *posa* as black mail. In this aspect J.N. Sarkar writes "as the main objective of the system was to purchase immunity of the weak person and the rich plain from the plundering raids of the hill men it amounted to black mail."<sup>22</sup> However, from a critical and closer examination of the details of the *posa* system it would be difficult to accept the views given by the earlier scholars. During the Ahom rule it was neither a black mail nor had any resemblance with the *Chaut* of the Maratha. Infact the *posa* system was based on certain well defined principles.



The Sherdukpens known as *Charduar Bhutias* in the *Buranjis* were given the right of *posa* by the Ahom king Pratap Singha.<sup>23</sup> The independence of Bhutias of *Charduar* from the Bhutanese government of Punakha must have facilitated the Ahom government to accord different sorts of treatment to these Bhutias. Another reason may be that these Bhutias of *Charduar* claimed to be independent of Tawang *Raja*, a tributary of Lhasa. Lakshmi Devi, in her work Ahom-Tribal Relations believes that Pratap Singha introduced the *posa* system to these Bhutias apparently with a view to keep uniformity of the relation of all the tribes on this frontier (Aka, Nyishi and Miri) with the Ahom government.<sup>24</sup> However, it is to be mentioned that the Ahoms did not face any problem from the Sherdukpens during their rule may be because Sherdukpen were related with the Ahoms as per tradition.

The chief of the Sherdukpen tribes with whom the *posa* was granted had to come down once in a year and render his submission (*pal seva*) to the Ahom ruler. Further the chief while coming for *pal seva* had to bring with him from his own area certain articles as present to the king. The Monpas and Sherdukpens (Bhutias) paid the tribute to the Ahom king in terms of horses, yak tails, gold dust, musk and blankets.<sup>25</sup> The Ahom kings on their part made settlement of a class of Assamese *paikes* called *bahatias* in the foot hill areas who were obliged to give services to the respective hill tribes. Each hill tribe enjoying the privilege was allowed to receive certain articles in the form of *posa* from the *bahatias* assigned to them. In return for their services to the hill masters, the Ahom government granted a concessional rate of assessment to the *Bahatias*. Each *got* of *bahatias*, (unit of three *paikes* paid to the government an amount of Rs. 3 instead of usual Rs.9).<sup>26</sup>

From the above it becomes apparent that the grant was usufructuary one and presumably at the pleasure of the Ahom ruler. So the right was not permanent and the tribal chief in lieu of the feudal rights granted to them over particular areas had to pay obeissance and tribute in kind. Both the parties – the tribal chiefs and the Ahom ruler were obliged equally and responsible to execute the terms and condition of the deal to maintain peace and order in the frontier. The hill people were allowed to visit and collect

*posa* between the month of November to May because in this period the harvest season in the plain was over, the road became passable after the rainy season and the plains man and women could weave cloths after the harvesting season to make it ready along with other items of the *posa* to hand over to the *posa* holders.

## **SHERDUKPEN- BRITISH RELATIONS**

The British came to northeast India for the first time in 1765 to Goalpara.<sup>27</sup> The captain Welsh expedition of 1792 started a new era in the history of the British in the area.<sup>28</sup> By the invitation of Ahom king Gadhadar Singh the British government dispatched a military expedition under captain Welsh to help the Ahom king to contain Moamarias, a religious group who started a rebellion in Assam in later part of 18<sup>th</sup> century. The expedition successfully did the job and signed a commercial treaty with the Ahom king by which trade activities was monopolized by the British in Assam.<sup>29</sup> However, the British didn't have any intention at that time to annex any portion of Assam and went back to Calcutta. The Burmese attack on Assam and the beginning of Burmese rule in Assam in 1821 brought Anglo-Burmese conflict. As a result in 1824 Anglo-Burmese war started which came to end with the treaty of *Yandaboo* signed February 24 1826.<sup>30</sup> With the treaty of *Yandaboo*, the Ahom rule in Assam came to an end and British started ruling Assam. The Ahom king became a puppet in the hands of the British. It is to be mentioned here that the lower Assam was annexed by the British in 1826 and upper Assam in 1838 to the British kingdom in India subsequently. The British rule in Assam was started by one British official David Scott who had an imperialistic design. Scott wanted to extend the British empire with the policy of force in various parts of the hills of Assam.<sup>31</sup>

At the outside of British administration of Assam, as we have discussed earlier, the Sherdukpen used to claim a tribute or payment from the plains which they collected annually. The British government like the Ahoms introduced various policies to deal with the tribes of northeast frontier. These policies are policy of conciliation, backed by policy of force, policy of trade and commerce, administrative policy, etc.<sup>32</sup> Realising the futility of containing the war like tribes in the frontier, the British government from the very

beginning adopted the *posa* system of the Ahoms though in modified version. The British introduced cash payment in *posa* in place of kind and started a new system for identification of the tribal chiefs i.e. having a *hatchita*.<sup>33</sup> This *posa* was given in lieu of the tribes' earlier rights provided by the Ahoms. The British literature particularly the political proceedings from 1826 to the time of independence of India refers to *posa* which was extended to various communities in the frontier hills such as the Adis, Hillmiris, Nyishis, Akas, Monpas and Sherdukpens (sometime these two communities are referred as extra Bhutanese Bhutias in British records).<sup>34</sup> The amount of *posa* however varied from one tribe to another. The *posa* may be enhanced or lessened as per the behaviour of the communities toward the British government.

During the British period<sup>35</sup> various tribes of the state received *posa* of different amount. For example, the Adis were given a *posa* of Rs. 3312 per annum which was distributed among the powerful Adi chiefs. The Hillmiris used to collect a *posa* of Rs. 851-3-9 and 12 mound of salt annually. The Aka chiefs were getting Rs. 668 in aggregate as *posa*. The Nyishis a powerful tribe however, got the maximum *posa* of more than Rs. 4129-15-0 with 24 mound of salt. The Monpa chiefs i.e. the *Sat rajas* of *Karaipar duar* were however getting a maximum *posa* of Rs. 5000 annually. Even the Monpa chief of Tengbang were allowed an annual sum of Rs. 145-13-6 as commutation of *posa* to their cash. It may be mentioned here that the terms stipends, allowances and pensions were used by the British authority for commutation of *posa* indiscriminately. In this new system the *paik* factor was eliminated and *posa* became an agreement between two contracting parties i.e. the colonial state and the *posa* holders in which the state took the responsibility initially in kind and subsequently in cash to pay them. The commuted *posa* payment in cash to the *posa* holder were made either in the district town in a *posa* durbar organized for the purpose or in annual trade fairs of the foothills at Sadiya and Udalguri.

The Sherdukpens were also provided *posa* by the British government. In February 1826 the *posa* as given by the Ahom was extended to the Sherdukpen by the British.<sup>36</sup> However, the *posa* was commuted in 1836. An arrangement was made with the Sherdukpens by captain Matthie in virtue of which the Darrang authority resumed

the right of direct collection of taxes from the plain which was earlier collected by the Sherdukpens. By this agreement the *Charduar Bhiutais* were paid Rs. 2526-7 as compensation on that account.<sup>37</sup> The Atickson treaty refers that the treaty was signed by six *rajas* of Rupa of whom one called the *Durjee raja* was superior over the others and one *raja* of Shergaon who was at that time succeeded to the office of his deceased father Tangjug.<sup>38</sup> From 1826 to 1838 the Sherdukpen-British relation was quite normal and no untoward incidents happened. However, the year 1839 brought the Sherdukpen into conflict with the British.<sup>39</sup> This was because of the murder of one Madhu Saikia, the faithful *pathgiri* of Orung who was working under the British. The British official suspected that the Sherdukpens had a hand in the murder of Madhu Saikia. As a result in 1839 the payment of *posa* was stopped to the Sherdukpens. Expressing utmost regret at the displeasure of the government, the *Durjee raja* on behalf of the Bhutias of *Rupari gaon* categorically denied that his tribe had any connection with or control over the supposed murdered of late *pathgiri*. Justice and equity demanded, he added that the whole tribe should not be penalized for the crimes of a few. Influenced by this argument, Gordon agreed to come to terms on condition on their renouncing all claims like the *Sat rajas* of *Kuriapar* over the *duar* in lieu of a payment of Rs. 1740 in cash “ I have always considered it derogatory to our government” remarked Gordon in defence of his measure.<sup>40</sup>

“ yielding to such demands, but the customs several of hills tribes drawing their supply from the plains and receiving a share of the revenue having long been sanction, I am therefore, induced to advocate the system of granting an allowance to the chiefs in lieu of the black mail.....thereby, purchase their good will and forbearance towards the subject of the government which will materially tend to happiness, security and prosperity of the later and eventually to the civilization of these rude and barbarous tribes”<sup>41</sup>

Reluctantly, the Chiefs agreed pledging a solemn oath to abide by the terms and to assist the government in the event of any incursion into the plains. To put a stop to the wondering habits of the Bhutias under the pretend of purchasing or begging grains etc. Gordon set up huts at Orung, Loharbari and Balipara.<sup>42</sup> He never felt to point out to

the frontier tribe like the Sherdukpen the advantage of trading with the plains in the hope of reviving the trade with China by a route which have been closed for many years. The higher authorities in Calcutta were also convinced of the necessities of continuing the policy of appeasement of course in an altered form for without it they could hardly expect the goodwill of the hill men towards the people of the plains so indispensable for the peace and security of the extensive frontier.

The *Durjee raja* together with the other *rajas* pleaded innocent most earnestly and pledged themselves to act of to the terms of the British which was executed in 1844. As per the treaty the *posa* was reduced to Rs. 1740 from the original Rs. 2526-7. Thus the *posa* was renewed in 1844. In the treaty of 1844 the treaty was signed by the seven *rajas* named *Durjee raja*, *Tangjong raja*, *Dukpa raja*, *Joypoo raja*, *Changkangdoo raja*, *Sauja raja* and *Boung Bhungdoo raja*.<sup>43</sup> These *posa* was to be distributed in fixed proportion. From 1844 to 1851 the Sherdukpens followed the terms of treaty in letter and spirit and became friendly ally of British. As a result in 1852 considering the faithfulness of the Sherdukpens, the old amount of *posa* of Rs. 2526-7 was restored without stipulation as to its distribution.<sup>44</sup> The report of Assam by A.J.M. Mills in 1854 refers to the *rajas* of *Ruparai gaon* and *Shergaon* who have good relations with the British authority in the Darrang frontiers and continued to enjoy the *posa*.<sup>45</sup> It is not clearly known why *posa* was extended to the Sherdukpens who were unlike their war like neighbour tribes like Akas and Nyishis. Infact throughout the history of the British, the Sherdukpens have never given any trouble to the British authorities in the Darrang frontier. It is also a fact that being a peace loving people the Sherdukpen was not aggressive. The *posa* most probably was extended by the British to the Sherdukpens because of their active participation in border trade which was conducted by the British with Tibet in 19<sup>th</sup> century or may be because of the strategic location of the Sherdukpen area for reaching the border of Tibet.

The boundary problem between the Darrang area under the British administration and the Sherdukpen area was not clearly marked which resulted sometimes in misunderstandings.<sup>46</sup> To solve this problem the boundary line of *Charduar Bhutias* was laid down in 1872-73. This boundary started from Rowta river on the west

to the Ghabroo river on the east. By this boundary, the traditional claims of Sherdukpens on lands in the plains of Assam were rejected.<sup>47</sup> At a meeting with the deputy commissioner of Darrang held in 1876 the Sherdukpen chiefs expressed their satisfaction with this decision.<sup>48</sup> It may be referred in this context that the British government of Bengal introduced the Inner Line Regulation in 1873 which was the brainchild of the British official Sir Arthur Hobhouse.<sup>49</sup> By this Inner Line system, the tribal territories of northeast frontiers were separated from the plains of Assam. The Inner Line Regulation was introduced in Darrang in 1875 and thus the area of the Sherdukpen was kept inside the Inner Line as proposed. From the year of 1876, the Sherdukpens used to come down to Doimara regularly every cold season to trade and for them the Inner Line Regulation has been kept in abeyance.<sup>50</sup>

The Sherdukpen used to collect the original *posa* of Rs. 2526-7 in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early part of 20<sup>th</sup> century as revealed from various political reports on the Darrang district. In 1900 the *Charduar Bhutias Sat rajas* came into Tezpur on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February and were paid their *posa* allowance of 2526-7 in cash, 53 bottle of Rum and 7 pieces of scarlet broad cloth. They in return presented the government with three blankets, a Bhutia bag and a yak tail.<sup>51</sup> In 1902 The *Sat rajas* came into Tezpur on 8<sup>th</sup> February and were paid their *posa* in cash with other presents in the presence of officiating commissioner Assam valley district and in return the *Sat rajas* also presented a few gifts.<sup>52</sup> The *Sat rajas* told that out of the *posa* (2526-7) received by them, only a sum of Rs. 300 was given in kind to the *Deva Dharma Rajas* of Bhutan.<sup>53</sup> We do not know clearly why are the Sherdukpens were providing Rs, 300 to the *raja* of Bhutan in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1904 the chief commissioner of Assam toured the district of Darrang and collected some information about the recipient of *posa* by the *Sat rajas* of *Charduar*.<sup>54</sup> According to his report at that time *Durjee raja* was already killed by the *Kapachor* leader Tagi, an Aka chief. Even when British official Mr. Willaims paid a visit to the Sherdukpen temporary village at Doimora in January 1884 he also mentioned that at that time *Durjee raja* was no more and his son Kandoo Gajang had a great influence among the people and he and an old man Dandu were that time the principle *rajas* of the *Ruprai* group.<sup>55</sup> From the information it is clear that the Akas used to create

a lot of problems for the Sherdukpens by their continuous raids in late 19<sup>th</sup> century which continued till 1940.

The Anglo-Adi war of 1911 was a turning point in the history of modern Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>56</sup> It is to be mentioned here that upto 1912 the British government in Assam adopted a policy of non-interference in the affairs of the tribes of northeast frontier (Arunachal) for various reasons but as circumstances demanded the British government changed his policy and in 1913 started direct administration in the north east frontier but with loose political control by establishment of frontier administration in various parts of the state.<sup>57</sup> In fact the recommendation of general Bower who was the British commander in Anglo-Adi war for division of frontier tract into three sections was taken into consideration by the British government. As a result there were central and eastern section(looking after the administration of tribes like Mishmis, Adi, Khamti, Shingpho, etc), Lakhimpur section (looking after the administration of communities residing near Subansiri like Nyishi, Hillmiris, etc a) and western section(looking after the administration of Monpas, Sherdukpen, Akas, Mijis, etc).<sup>58</sup> In all the section political officers were appointed. Captain G.A. Neville(1913-28) became the first political officer of the western section of north east frontier who was later on followed by Mr. R.C.R. Cumming (1928-30), Mr. H.F.B. Borbidghe(1930-31), N.L. Bor(1932-34), Captain G. S. Lightfoot(1934-42) and I. Ali(1943-47).<sup>59</sup> By the Government of India Act of 1914, the frontier tract administration started in the three sections with new nomenclature. The central and eastern section became the Sadiya Frontier tract, Lakhimpur section became Lakhimpur Frontier Tract and western section became Balipara Frontier Tract.<sup>60</sup>

Captain G. A. Neville, the political officer of the Balipara Frontier Tract was told by the British authority in Calcutta in 1913 to advance into Tawang through the area of Aka, Mijis and other tribes in the north in order to see (i) the route and to find out the ways and means to furthering an increasing the existing trade, (ii) to collect information about the inhabitants and (iii) to ascertain the nature and extend of Tibetan rule and influence in their region.<sup>61</sup> The party left the base camp on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1913 and reached Rupa via Jamiri on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1914. Before marching to Tawang, captain

Neville report provides a lot of information about various communities in western part of the state including the Sherdukpens. While staying at Rupa he came to know that the Sherdukpen of Rupa and Shergaon were ruled jointly by council of 20 headmen, seven of whom were hereditary and called *Sat rajas*.<sup>62</sup> Neville however, had greatly intrigued by their claim to *posa* in 1914-15 captain Neville wrote in his annual reports

“The Rupa and Shergaon Monpas, (a misnomer, they were actually Sherdukpen) received Rs. 2526-7-0 this was originally paid to them in lieu of goods obtain by black mailing the plains people. It is hard to conceived why this two vary insignificant villages should received so large a sum specially as they are very timid people and quite incapable of ever causing much trouble in the frontier”<sup>63</sup>

Neville also reported about the Aka and the Mijis raids on the Sherdukpens and neighbouring Monpa communities. He suggested to the British government for some mechanism to save the Sherdukpens from raids of the Akas, Mijis and the Monpas. Even he took initiative in talking to the chiefs of the Akas and Mijis to refrain from raids on the Sherdukpens and neighbouring Darrang Monpas. It is to be mentioned here that Sherdukpen themselves were subjected to harassment by the Akas and Miji raids as early as 1885 as mentioned by Alexander Mckanzie.<sup>64</sup>

During 1934-35<sup>65</sup> the Sherdukpens had some trouble with Changzu, the head of Tawang *Dzong* who was claiming a third part of the annual *posa* received by the Sherdukpen from the British government. Infact before the coming of the British, the Sherdukpens by an established convention used to pay a token tribute to Tawang *Dzong* once in every three years possibly in the hope of getting some measure s of protection against the inroads of *Lowas* (communities like Aka, Mijis, etc). Here it is to be mentioned that the Sherdukpen used to pay every three years to the local authority of Tawang, 18 pieces of *endi* cloth, 20 seers of rice and 40 seers of paddy. The Tawang Monpa officials made return of gifts of coats, hats, shoes, blankets and necklaces.<sup>66</sup> But it did not stop the marauders from carrying raids. The Tawang *dzong* was clearly incapable of giving any protection to then against the inroads of the Mijis. So when one third of the *posa* was demanded there were some problems between the Sherdukpen



and the authority of Tawang *Dzong*. But after the death of Changzu the next year no further demand of a part of their *posa* was made.<sup>67</sup> In 1938, Captain Lightfoot sent an British expedition to Nakhu and several other villages of the Bichom valley where the chief of Nakhu , Kujjalong and other raiders were warned not to take tribute from any one (including Sherdukpens) and near by Monpas) as it was forbidden by the government.<sup>68</sup> But inspite of the warning the Mijis continued to oppress the Sherdukpens as a result a temporary outpost was established at Rupa in 1939<sup>69</sup> and thereafter periodical patrols of Assam rifles were sent to Rupa and Shergaon to prevent the Mijis from troubling this people and also to arrest any Aka found trying to realize tribute from them.

The Mijis, however notwithstanding the warning raided the Sherdukepn villages to exact payment of tribute but unfortunately for them their attempt was not successful. The Mijis chiefs (powerful six chiefs) received annually one bullock, one load each of salt and *jabrang* spice, 2 goats and a *cowerie* waist band. In addition 3 cows, 1 goat, one large and one small piece of *endi* cloth and one *dao* were paid every fifth year.<sup>70</sup> The payment was for the Mijis chiefs alone, there followers however, used to raid the houses of well to do man and take away whatever they could lay their hands on. Even two Mijis Chief tried to realize tribute from Shergaon and Rupa villages but being detected were heavily fined by the Political officer,<sup>71</sup> Captain Lightfoot in 1939-40. In view of all this it was felt that some effective step should be taken for stopping this raids and realizing of taxes. Accordingly, the political officer called a *Mel* (meeting) at Kudum in 1940 which was attended by the Sherdukepn, Monpas, Mijis and Akas. The meeting was presided over by the Political officer and after prolong discussion the Mijis agreed to stop taking tribute from the Sherdukpen.<sup>72</sup>

In 1940-41 a quarrel took place between the people of Rupa and Shergaon in consequence of the death of a leading king of Rupa an, able ruler but had been succeeded by inefficient rulers who were unable to control their villages.<sup>73</sup> However, the quarrel was settled peacefully with a help of Tibetan interpreter, a government official. At that stage it was decided by the British authority to take some more effective step to stop depredation by the Mijis and Akas and accordingly a permanent Assam Rifle

outpost was established at Rupa in 1941 to protect the Sherdukpens from black mail and raid by their neighbour.<sup>74</sup> Paying of taxes (house tax) to the British by the Sherdukpen started in 1945-46. After independence with the shifting of the headquarter from *Charduar* to Bomdila in February 1953 the importance of Rupa from the point of administration diminished as all the official establishment started moving to the new head quarter at Bomdila.

The tour diary of political officer from 1943 to 1947 provide an exhaustive information about the tribute the Sherdukpens used to provide to Akas, Mijs, Tawang monastery and Tallongjung of Kalaktang and the tribute the Sherdukpen used to collect from nearby Monpa tribes, Buguns, etc., which are very significant to understand Sherdukpen's relation with their neighbour.

### **TRIBUTE PAID BY THE SHERDUKPEN TO THE AKAS**

The tour diary of political officer<sup>75</sup> provides information that it is only the Ghutso of the Kutsun and Kovatsun clans of the Tenga valley who are known to be recipients of tribute from the *Senjithongji* and the *Eugun*. They used to receive an annual as well as a quinquennial tribute from the *Senjithongji* and a quinquennial tribute from all the Bugun (Khowa) villages until 1939. As far as it is known the *Ghuso* did not have to pass on any of the tribute they had received to their easterly or any other neighbours.

The tribute they used to receive from the *Senjithongji* is a very ancient one, and if the version<sup>76</sup> of the letter is to be believed it is of pre-historic origin. Briefly their version is that Gyaptan, who was the founder of *Thongthui*, came originally from *Ki* in Tibet and established his first village at BUT on the Digien, at the eastern Monba country. While at But, Gyapten met Neymachongdi, the chief of the Ghuso, on his way to visit the Lamai country. They made friends and parted. Gyaptan did not like the site of But and later on shifting his village from But to Namkhu (near Kudan) and then to Rahung and then to Hulbru (Cholabruh) to the village of Neymachongdi and to Jamiri, finally settled at *Thongthui*. A few years after the Gutso chief Neymachongdi paid a visit to renew his friendship with Gyapten. The *Ghutso* chief grew jealous of him having seen Gyapten

prospered out of the trade he had with the plains. Gyapten was shrewd enough to win over the Ghutso chief by making him a present of a full grown bullock, a large *endi* cloth and a sheep and promised to pay this every five years. Neymachongdi was pleased and in return Gyapten also received some dried fish, dried venison, potatoes and taroes from Neymachongdi.

After about three generations of Gyaptan when *Thongthui* grew into a very large village, a quarrel rose between the *Thongji* and the *Monda* of Thembang, over the question of Thembang kidnapping a few of the betrothed *Thongji* girls to boys. A state of war existed between the tribes for nearly three years and three battles were fought. The first on the Bomdila, the second near Namkhu on the Digien, and the third and the decisive one at Thembang, in which Thembang was thoroughly beaten. In this war, the Ghuso, the Bugun, and the Lamai of the Dinam valley, who are known as *Melaya nlego*, were the allies of the *Thongji*. In spite of being defeated, Thembang insisted on continuing intermarriage with *Thongji*, had eventually they arrived at a compromise. They planted two branches of a tree on the top of the Bomdila opposite to each other, with the wrong ends on the ground, and they agreed that if the two branches grew up to kiss each other, marital relationship between the two tribes would continue. On an after-thought the victorious *Thongji* realized that the arrangement was not satisfactory as there was the possibility of the two branches growing up, with all the rain and sunshine they would get on the top of the Bomdila. So they cancelled that arrangement and insisted to set up two stone pillars on the path of the Bomdila, about a mile and a half above the present post at Rupa, and they agreed that intermarriage would continue between them only if the pillars would grow up to kiss each other, which of course never did and there is therefore no more intermarriage between the two tribes. The two pillars still exist and can be seen on the way to Bomdila. In this war the Ghutso, the *Lama* and the Bugun lost many of their men and so they demanded compensation for their loss. The *Thongjis* agreed and paid off in course of three years for loss of all rank and file belonged to lower clans at the rate of three head of cattle and an *endi* cloth for each killed and for, loss of the members of the upper clans it was agreed that the *Thongji* would pay as follows every five years.<sup>77</sup>

For each adult killed, one bullock, one large *endi* cloth and *dao*, for each grown up boy and one small bull, one small *endi* cloth and *dao*, and for each young boy, one heifer and *dao*. This tribute was arranged to be paid both collectively by the village and also individually by the *Thongs*. Each house of *Thong* was allotted to one or more *Ghuso*, *Lamai* or Bugan chiefs. The details of the tribute paid to the different chiefs are furnished on a table form later on. It was enormous and being unable to pay alone, the *Senjithongji* sought the help of the southern Monba who readily agreed to pay a part of it as they were their good neighbours and friends.

It was also agreed<sup>78</sup> that the *Senjithongji* would send dancing parties every five years to the houses of the recipient of tribute and in return they would be paid a *mithan* by each recipient and free feeding during their stay. This practice was kept up, though not at regular intervals of five years, but whenever it was convenient to send out a party, until 1939. *Mithan* thus collected were exchanged for cattle with Bhutan through the southern Monba, only to pay back the *Ghuso* or the *Lamai*, by way of tribute. In theory one *mithan* is given to the dancing party, one to the leader of the party, and the rest divided among the villagers, but in practice all *mithan* collected by the dancing parties, go back to the *Ghuso* or the *Lamai* in form of cattle and the dancers did not make anything out of it.

It is obvious that the original five yearly tribute, paid by the *Senjithongji* to the *Ghuso*, the *Lamai* and the Bugun, was assessed on certain principles and it was fixed amount. But in course of time the *Ghuso* and the *Lamai* chiefs started visiting them more frequently and imposed on them an annual tribute as well. More and more concession was sought in the name of trade and not only did the chiefs, but their underlings too began extorting from them any and everything for which they took fancy.

## **METHOD OF PAYMENT OF TRIBUTE BY THE SENJITHONGJI**

When the *Senji* were separated from the *Thongji* it was arranged that the payment of the quinquennial tribute to the *Ghuso*, the *Lamai* and the Bugun<sup>79</sup> would be shared between the *Thongji* and the *Senji* in proportion of 2 to 1. In other word if *Ghuso* or *Lamai* chief received tribute from the *Thongji* for two terms, he would receive the same tribute from the *Senji* in the third term. But in matter of annual tribute both the villages had to pay each chief annually.

For the purpose of collection of the annual and quinquennial tribute, the *Thongji* (both *Thong* and *Chhao*) divided themselves into four equal groups, each called a *Sikas* and the *Senji* into two *Sikas*, with the elderly *Thong* at the head of *Sikak*. On their return from Doimara at the end of the winter, each *Sikak* had to contribute a fixed amount in goods to the common pool, which was stored at the village *Gompa*. When the recipients came they were paid out of the common pool. In this way each recipient was paid collectively by the village, but in addition, the recipients used to collect tribute from individual *Thong*.<sup>80</sup>

**Table No.12.** Tribute paid by the *Thongji* and *Senji* each separately to the *Ghuso* and the *Lamai* annually.

	Names of recipients	Cattle	Sheep	Endi cloth	Cotton cloth	Salt in Bre	Jabrang in Bre	Iron tripods	Bags	fowls
1	Jonaiushushow	3	3	3		5	10	10	12	25
	<i>Chuso-kawatsun</i>									
2	Nevildushushow	1	1	3		4	4	4	4	4
3	Dongcha	1	1			4	4			4

4	Achu	1	1			4	4			4
5	Shani	1	1			4	4			4
6	Meghraj-i-now received by Dongcha	1	1			10	20	4	14	8
7	Lombi	2	1	7	1	10	20	5	15	12
8	Lemim	3	3	12	1	10	20	8	18	12
	Lemai- melayanlego.									
9	Logyang of Biruja	1	1	12		8	60			
10	Tsering of Nizong	1	1	11		7	55			
11	Nilyu of Nizong	1	1	2		2	10			
12	Labia of kelong	1	1	2		2	10			
		17	16	52	2	146	297	31	63	73

Source: Political Report, 1945

### TRIBUTE RECEIVED BY THE SENJITHONGJI OR SHERDUKPEN<sup>81</sup>

The inhabitant of the village of *Senthui* (Shergaon) and *Thongthui* (Rupa) known as the *Senjithongji* or Sherdukpens also used to receive tribute from weal neighbours. Although the two villagers are situated at a distance of two days' journey from each other, very close relationship are being maintained between them, and they are said to be subject to join council of seven *rajas* or chiefs of either village. Originally there was only one village at *Thongthui* (Rupa) and the right to collect or the obligation to pay any tribute was the concern of the *Thongji*. But later when a section of the *Thongji* had migrated to *Senthui* and established themselves there as the *Senji*, some adjustments in the matter of receipt and payment of tribute become necessary. By mutual

agreement, since then, two-third of the tribute have been collected or paid by the *Thongji* and remaining one-third by the *Senji*.

Until recently they received a five yearly tribute from the southern Monba, viz., the villagers of Phudung, Domkho, Murshung, Sanglam and the group of the villages in the Kalaktang area, and in their turn they had to pay the *Ghuso* and the *Lamai* both annually and quinquennially. The Bugun (Khowa) of (Bredunwa) Senchong and Sachida also used to get a five-yearly tribute from the *Senjithongji*.

At best the *Senjithongji* may be described as a distributing agency of tribute to the *Ghuso*, the *Lamai*, and the Bugun, rather than recipients of it, because whatever they receive from the southern Monba by way of tribute, they had to part with it, in their turn, paying the *Ghuso* and the *Lamai* and to some extent to the Bugun, and not infrequently they were required to supplement it by paying a large share of the tribute themselves. Let us first discuss the position of the *Senjithongji* as recipients of tribute.

They used to collect a quinquennial tribute from the southern Monba for affording them protection against any aggression of the troublesome *Ghuso* and the *Lamai* of the Dinam valley, with whom they maintained friendly relations by paying an annual as well as five-yearly tribute.<sup>82</sup> In the beginning, for the purpose of collecting tribute, the southern Monba were divided into three groups, viz. (i) the Kalaktang group containing the eight villages in that area, (ii) Domkho group containing the villages of Domkho, Murshing and Sanglam and (iii ) Phudung, by itself, because of its complete lack of any relationships either with the northern or the southern Monba. Each group was assessed to a fixed tribute which was raised collectively, by each village, paying its share in proportion its size. The village in turn would assess each house according to its size and income. The tribute was paid entirely in kind, mainly livestock, details of which are furnished in the appendix.

Two chiefs, one from *Thongthui* and the other from *Senthui* would visit Kalaktang, Domkho and Phudung every five years, sending word ahead of their visit so that the tribute could be raised and kept ready for payment.<sup>83</sup> The two chiefs would receive their shares separately and in return present the prayers with a basket of dried fish each. The tribute collected by each chief was shared between the *Thong* (upper or the chief's clan) and the *Chao* (lower clan) in their respective villages, the *Thong* getting a lightly bigger share than a *Chao*. The practice of sharing the tribute between the *Thong* and the *Chao* was followed as they had to pay the *Ghuso* and the *Lamai*, both collectively, as the village as a unit, and also individually, each *Thong* and few selected *Chao*.

### **ADVENT OF THE TALUNG DZONGPONS AND THEIR INTERFERENCE WITH THE SENJITHONGJI**<sup>84</sup>

The *Senjithongji* used to collect tribute from the southern Monba long before the advent of the Talung *Dzongpons* in that area. But when the latter started levying tax on the southern Monba, the *Senjithongji* were allowed to collect only half of their quinquennial tribute and ordered not to visit Kalaktang. Instead, the dues of the Kalaktang group would be collected by the *bapus* (Rajas) of Domkho and Murshing and paid to them at Domkho along with their own share of the tribute. It is said that even half of the original tribute, which had been allowed to be collected by Talung *Dzongpons*, was considerably reduced in course of time, and two years ago when it was paid, it stood as follows:<sup>85</sup>

Kalaktang and Domkho groups paid collectively the *Thongji*, 20 head of cattle and 8 sheep, and the *Senji*, 6 head of cattle and 12 sheep. Though the *Senjithongji* ceased paying tribute to *Ghuso*, the *Lamai*, and the Bugun since 1940, they collected their share of the tribute from the southern Monba, when it fell due two years ago. When questioned, the *Senjithongji* tried to justify it on the ground that they had already paid their dues to the *Ghuso* and to the others, and the southern Monba were in arrears. It is to be seen if they can persuade the Monba to pay this tribute when it will fall due in 1947-48. It is admitted that neither the *Ghuso*, nor the *Lamai* ever visited the southern



Monba for tribute, although the *Senjithongji* were constantly harassed and subjected to many privations, by their ever increasing demand of tribute, without any regard, whatever, to the original assessment. In a way the *Senjithongji* fulfilled their obligations towards the southern Monba by affording them protection against any aggression of the *Ghuso* or the *Lamai*, although this entailed great hardships on themselves.

### **TRIBUTE PAID BY PHUDUNG<sup>86</sup>**

The village of Phudung lies immediately to the south of Manda La, in the valley of the Phudung Chu. It is a medium sized village, consisting of three branches, viz., Phudung, Bamrok, and Khelang, containing between them 52 houses. The inhabitants though Monbas and Buddhists of a sort and speak a tongue similar to that of the northern Monba, do not admit of any relationship, whatever, with any of their neighbours. In spite of their village being situated on the main Dirang *Dzong*-Amratulla-Udalgiri road, and although subject to the Talung *Dzongpons*, they hardly go to Amratulla or Udalgiri. They come to Doimara which they call Richong via Domkho and *Senthui*, during the winter months, to exchange chilies and Jabrang (*Zanthoxylum*, Alatum a kind of spice for making curry for paddy), salt and *endi* cloths with the *Senjithongji*, and also to carry loads for the latter on payment in kind in the form of grain and salt. They never go beyond Doimara.

From a brief conversation with the village elders, the political officer, the Phudung Monpas gathered that they used to pay an annual tribute of 90 *bres* of *Jabrang* and eight legs of dried venison vegetables to the village of Thembang. They have stopped this for the last two years as they say that our Government (British) disapproves payment or taking of tribute. They also used to pay separately to the *Senjis* (Shergaon) and *Thongjis* an annual tribute in sheep and a five yearly tribute in cattle. They stopped these as well, as the *Senjithongji* no longer pay any tribute to the *Lamai*. It seems, although not admitted, that payment of tribute to the *Senjithongji* was a charge for protection the latter afforded them against any possible aggression of the *Lamai*. It may be of interest to note that the people of Phudung do not go beyond Doimara or foothills.

They exchange their chilies and *Jabrang* for rice and paddy with *Senjithongji* at Doimara and also collect some paddy and rice by carrying loads for the latter on their return. Incidentally Doimara is called *Richong* by the Monba and the *Senjithongji*.

**Table No. 13.** Tribute received by the *Senjithongji* except Phudung<sup>87</sup>

<b>Recipient</b>	<b>Period</b>	<b>Items</b>		
(a) <i>Thongji</i>	Five yearly	20 cattle and 8 sheep.		
(b) <i>Senji</i>		6 cattle and 12 sheep.		
(c) <i>Thongji</i>		<b>By Phuddung.</b>		
	Annually	5 Sheeps.		
	Five yearly	1 cattle		
		5 Sheep		
		1 iron tripod		
		1 yak		
(d) <i>Senji</i>		Same as above		
<p><i>Senjithongji</i> received jointly every five years the following tribute-</p>				
	<b>Cattle</b>	<b>Sheep</b>	<b>Iron tripod</b>	<b>yak</b>
	27	25	1	1
<b>Annually</b>	X	10	X	X
<b>Total</b>	27	35	1	1

Source: *A Political Report of 1945*

**Table No. 14:** Tribute paid by the *Senjithongji* jointly to the *Ghuso*, the *Lamai*, the Baguns of Bredunwa (*Senchon*) and Sachida and Monbas of every five years.<sup>88</sup>

SI.No	Name of recipient	Cattle	Sheep	Endicloth	Cotton cloth	Da	Tripod	Salt <i>Bre</i>	Fowl	Silver bangles
	Ghusa									
1	Jonai and Sankandu	3	1	1	2	1			8	
2	Lemum	3	1	13		1			8	
3	Lombi	3	1	1	2	1			4	
4	Meghraj	3	1	11		1			4	
5	Nevil	3	1	1		1			4	
6	Shani	1	1	1		1			2	
7	Achu	1	1			1			4	
	<i>Lamai.</i>									
8	Longyang of Biruja	1	1	1		1		1		
9	Lombi of Nizong	3	1	1		1		2		
10	Tsering of Nizong	3	1	1		1		6		
11	Tanjing	1	1	1		1		1		
12	Labia	1	1	1		1		1		
	<i>Bagun</i>									
13	Bredunwa	3	1	2	2	1	1		4	1
14	Sachida	3	1	2	1	1	1		4	1

15	Monbas of Konia	3	1	2	2	1	1		4	1
	<b>Total</b>	35	15	39	8	15	3	11	46	3

Source: *Political Report, 1945*

Thus, as we have seen in the preceding pages, the Sherdukpen had socio-political relation with the plain people of Assam, which is reflected in their indigenous faiths, beliefs system, indigenous festivals, agriculture, etc. However, they had political relation with Ahoms rulers of Assam and by virtues of which they were entitled to collect *posa* from the Ahom. The Ahom-Sherdukpen relation was extremely a peaceful one. The British literature refers to a peaceful relation of the British with Sherdukpen, who were given the right the collect *posa* and other facilities by the Government. The Akas and the Mijis used to create disturbance in the villages of Rupa by their surprise raid and that's why they were provided with the same rate of taxes by the Sherdukpens. The *dzong* of Talungdzong also used to collect same taxes from the Sherdukpen in the name of helping them against the Akas and Mijis. It is interesting to note that the Monpas of Kalaktang, Monpas of Phudung and the near by Monpas used to provide taxes to the Sherdukpen. Therefore, the relation of Sherdukpens with their neighbour found an important chapter in their history.

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# CONCLUSION

As we have discussed in the preceding chapters, the Sherdukpens are one of the minor and little known *Mahayana* Buddhist tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Living in a small pocket of district West Kameng, the Sherdukpen has preserved their heritage in the form of Neolithic tools, megalithic monuments, nicely decorated monasteries, *stupas*, Buddhist arts and crafts, their traditional socio-cultural, economic and political and judicial institutions. They have successfully retained their identity through the ages. Though they are followers of *Mahayana* Buddhism their socio-cultural and religious life are influenced to some extent by few non-Buddhist elements. Infact the study of Sherdukpens is significant one to understand not only the Buddhist heritage of Arunachal but also Buddhist heritage of India as a whole. At the same time it provides information about Arunachal's cultural contact with Tibet and Bhutan in the medieval period.

The first chapter introduces the subject by providing an idea of ecology, early archaeological remains, settlement pattern of the people. It also discusses the scope, significance, statement of the problem and objectives of the thesis, source and methodology utilised for writing the thesis. Review of literature has been undertaken to understand the problem in a better perspective.

The socio-cultural organisations of the Sherdukpen are discussed in chapter two. The origin and migration of the tribes as per literary, archaeological remains and oral tradition is presented as a prelude to the study of socio-cultural institutions. As gleaned from various sources, the Sherdukpens have migrated to their present settlement from Tibet most probably before 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. as we know that *Guru Padmasambhav* popularised *Mahayana* Buddhism among the Sherdukpen in 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. It is also believed that they came to their present settlement by crossing the hills of Bhutan. The socio-cultural life of the people is discussed with references to their settlement pattern, house pattern, family structure, study of clan, social division, forms of marriage, dress

and ornaments, foods and drinks, recreational and leisure activities, etc. As known from literature, the concept of *Sat raja* existed in the society who belonged to *Thong* clans and considered as superior clan in the society. The society is divided into two well defined classes, *Thong* and *Chhao*, each of which is further sub-divided into a number of socially equal exogamous clans like Khrimey, Mousobi, Wangja, Thongdok, Karma, Thungon, Yangfan, Thongchi and Lama Guru among *Thong*, and Singhaji, Dinglow, Megeji, Mijiji and Monoji among *Chhao*. There existed some sort of social division in the society. However, there is no restriction on interdining or social mixing among them otherwise. Like some non-Buddhist tribe of Arunachal such as Adi, Aka, etc, the Sherdukpen had also a social institution in the form of dormitory system which however does not exist today. Monogamy is the prevalent form of marriage. The marriage, are of various types like parallel and cross-cousin marriage, elopement marriage, marriage by service, marriage by exchange, marriage by capture, levirate form of marriage, sororate marriage and widow-marriage. The women used to enjoy respectable position in the society with respect to their socio-cultural rites and rituals. However, they not allowed to attend the proceeding of the traditional political institution. The dress and ornaments betray the influence of Bhutan and Tibet. Unlike Monpa and Khamptis, the Sherdukpen do not have script of their own. However, the people have rich oral traditions. The people have number of pantomimes where colourful masks are used during the dances.

The chapter three has discussed the traditional economic base of the Sherdukpens. Their economy was centred around *jhum* cultivation supplemented by hunting and fishing and rearing of animals. Various forest products and handicrafts like carpentry, cane, and bamboo industry, smithy, grain grinding, liquor distilling, metal work, mask making, scroll painting, etc. used to sustain their economy. The Sherdukpen were known traders and from the time of Ahom period in Assam (15<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> Century) the Sherdukpen used to trade with the plains people of Assam in various markets of Charduar areas among which the Doimora fair was the most important one. During the time of winter, the Sherdukpens used to come down to the foothills at Doimora for months together to carry out their small quantity of trade and at the same time to escape the bitter winter in their hills. During the British period, Sherdukpen used to participate in the border trade which was conducted from the foothills of Assam to Tibet

through the Sherdukpen areas. Rupa and Shergaon were important trade centres in this regard. The Sherdukpen also had trade with Bhutan and neighbouring tribes such as Mijis, Akas and Monpas though in a small scale. The British archival documents refer to coming of the Sherdukpen to the trade fair of Doimora and Udalguri in the last part of 19<sup>th</sup> and early part of 20<sup>th</sup> Century with their merchandise goods.

The traditional political and legal institutions has been discussed in chapter four. Here it may be mentioned the Tawang monastery had no right to rule the Sherdukpen area like the Monpas, the neighbouring Buddhist community. As we have seen the *Sat rajas* used to administer the Sherdukpen village. However, later on the local traditional political institution known as *Jung* was started among the people of Shergaon and Jigaon, while the people of Rupa call as *Jung Bhu-bla* or *Bhu-Bla*. The member of the village council of elder is headed by one or two *Thik Abo Asu* who is selected among the *Abo Asu* (Gaon Bura). The head of the village council is called *Bakho Asu* who is selected by the *Abo asu* (Gaon Bura). Besides, the village council consists of other members called *Khumi*. The traditional council consists of *Abo Asu (Gaon Bura)*, *Jungme Baso* (village council members), the *Kachang* or *Chowkidar*. The functions of the village council are administrative, development and Judicial. The Sherdukpen have well organised traditional laws which deal with all aspects of their life. Oath and ordeal system became an important part of their political administration of the village. Some of the oath and ordeal system are offering scarf in the name of the deity (Buddha), sacrifice of chicken and pouring of blood, hot water method, black and white stone method and *Tarebappa* method etc. In the administration of justice, the role of Buddhist monks is minimal. After the introduction of Panchayat Raj Regulation in the area also, traditional political and judicial administration is continuing side by side.

The religion of Sherdukpen as discussed in chapter five is a curious blend of *Mahayana* Buddhism and *Bon* religion. Though the people follow *Mahayana* Buddhism, *Bon* cult has influenced them a lot. The *Bon* cult is an ancient religion of Tibet before Buddhism became popularised there. The *Bon* cult is in the form of spirit worship, sacrifice as rituals and having a number of non-Buddhist rituals were very popular in Sherdukpen villages. Even some *Bon* gods and goddess are worshipped in the

Buddhist monastery of the Sherdukpen area which throws light on syncretisation of Buddhism and *Bon* religion in this area. The *Bon* priest, *Jiji* used to conduct *Bon* rituals which are extra-Buddhist in nature like *Dingposungba*, *Rnekneiuhap*, *Pottenba/Piyotemba*, *Potsebha*, *Poksansamba*, *Thungshit Ja Chuongba*, *Phakchot*, *Pudosungba*, *Rinchatshakpo* and *Yangsrijom*. The *Mahayana* Buddhism has influenced the day to day life of the Sherdukpen to a great extent in the field of socio-cultural and religious life. Traditional arts and crafts are also influenced by Buddhism. A number of monastery (*Gompa*), Stupa (*Chorten*) and minor religious Buddhist structures can be seen in all the Sherdukpen villages. The art, architecture and mural paintings of monasteries at Rupa, Shergaon are important heritage of the Sherdukpens. Most of the monasteries belong to *Nyingmapa* sect of Buddhism where *Guru Padmasambhav* is worshipped as the most important god of the people. It is not clearly known when *Mahayana* Buddhism was introduced in the area. However, as per tradition *Padmasambhav* was instrumental in sowing the seeds of Buddhism in the area in 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. which was later on sustained by number of Buddhist missionary from Tibet and Tawang area in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century. The people also observe a number of Buddhist dances likes *Ajilamu* Dance (*Lamu Dsham*), Yak Dance (*Yak-Suba*), Deer Dance (*Jik-Suba*), *Sangothong- Thow* Dance, *Keng* Dance, *Ashojung-Yon* Dance and *Thung-Thung* Karma Dance and festivals like *Kro-Chekor*, *Chhekar*, *Losar*, Wang, Jonkhlon, Rek Lapsang Chhongba, Photenya, Saka Dawa and Tendel Senchu.

The Buddhist practices of the people are discussed in chapter six with reference to devotion, rituals, ethics, practices and meditation. Devotion is shown to Buddhist images in *Gompa*, *Stupa* and *Chosem*. The Buddhist images worshipped are *Padmasambhav*, *Avalokiteshwara*, *Manjusiri*, *Tara*, *Buddha*, etc. *Mane* is constructed for showing respect to devotion to religion. The rituals starting from birth to death reveal the influence of Buddhism. There are other rituals which are practiced for good health, prosperity, for good agriculture etc. The *Sangha*, the role of monasticism, patterns of ordination, monastic code of discipline is an integral part of Buddhist practices. The study and mediation, roles of monks in communal life, relation with the laity is also discussed. Besides, form of meditation as practised by the monks and the laity have been analysed to have better understanding of their religious practices.

In the chapter seven, an important aspect of Sherdukpen life that is their relation with various communities is discussed. As per the Ahom historical record and oral tradition, the Sherdukpen used to cultivate friendly relation with the Ahoms who ruled Assam from 13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. Even the Sherdukpen used to collect taxes from the Kacharis who lived near their southern boundary at Doimora. During the British period, the Sherdukpen were provided *posa* by the British government in the form of cash which amounted to Rs. 2,526 annually. The *Sat rajas* used to get the *posa*. However, a few part of the *posa* was given by the Sherdukpen to the authority of Tawang monastery. The Sherdukpen British relation was highly satisfactory except a few isolated incidents. Beside, the incident that strained the relation in 1839 in consequence of the murder of Madhhu Saikia a British subject, in a Charduar village by the Sherdukpen, there is no mention of any conflict of Sherdukpen with the British throughout British period. After the demarcation of Inner Line in district Darrang in 1875, traders from the plain were also debarred to enter the Sherdukpen area for collection of timber rubber and other forest resources. The Sherdukpen also helped the British in the border trade with the Tibet through their territory. However, their relation with their neighbours such as Aka and Mijis was not satisfactory. Infact, Akas and Mijis use to raid the Sherdukpen village forcibly collect taxes from the people. The Howa, another neighbouring community, had however good relation with the Sherdukpen and worked in their filed as labourers. The Sherdukpen relation with nearby Monpa community like Phudung, Domkho, Murshung, Sanglam and in the Kalaktang was also friendly one but Sherdukpen used to collect taxes from them. The British government realising the problems of continuous Akas and Mijis raids on the Sherdukpen area, established a unit of Assam Riffle at Rupa during 1941 A.D.

Thus, the research work has taken into account a study of a small Buddhist community of Arunachal which refers to cultural contact of India with Bhutan and Tibet in a historical perspective. As we have seen the Sherdukpens society was influenced by some non –Buddhist element which refers to their migration to their area before the beginning of Buddhism in 8<sup>th</sup> century or so. Till now they are following their traditional socio-cultural, political and religious institutions. It is hoped that future works on various

Buddhist communities of Arunachal would throw a new light to understand Buddhism in Arunachal and their interaction with non-Buddhist communities in better perspective.



## GLOSSARY

Abbot	:	Head of monastic hierarchy.
Achung Jering	:	Mediator in marriage negotiations.
Ajilamu	:	A dance drama of the Sherdukpen.
Ane Gompa	:	Tibetan monastery of the Nuns.
Ara	:	Distilled liquor.
Bachichlong	:	A black sticky substance, prepared out of pine-resin mixed with charcoal dust, for painting lips and making geometrical designs on chicks.
Bakhi	:	A bamboo structure, four or five feet above the hearth, over which are kept food grains and meat for drying.
Barshar	:	The less bright and diligent monk.
Barso/ Burso	:	Active member of village council of Sherdukpen.
Bidir	:	Brass bucket
Bodhisattva	:	Person who seeks the wisdom and liberation of a Buddha. In <i>Mahayana</i> one who seeks Buddhahood in order to deliver others from suffering.
Bogre	:	Traditional cloak,
Bon	:	Religion of Tibet that has indigenous and Buddhist element.
Buliyang	:	Traditional village council of the Apatani.
Buranjis	:	Medieval historical literature of <i>Ahom</i> rulers of Assam.

Chanadorjee	:	Vajrapani, the Buddhist god
Chaos	:	Common class in Sherdukpen society.
Charduar Bhutias	:	Bhutias residing in Charduar area or the Sherdukpens.
Chenrezi	:	Avalokitesvara, the Buddhist God.
Chhekar	:	A Buddhist festival of the Sherdukpen.
Chorten	:	Tibetan <i>Stupa</i> .
Chosom	:	Place for worship of Buddha & other Buddhist deities inside the Sherdukpens house.
Chi Luba	:	Honey
Chitpa gutung	:	Sherdukpen cap made from yak's hair.
Chuk	:	Fishing net
Dalai Lama	:	Dalai means "Ocean" implying the Dalai Lawa's wisdom is as deep as the ocean; title of the head of the Geluk School of Tibetan Buddhism; Spiritual and temporary leader of Tibetan people.
Dangten	:	Chorten containing personal possessions of the departed.
Daon	:	An attractive woven traditional Sherdukpen bag.
Dharini	:	"That which sustains", ritual formulas used to sustain religion life, in meditation or to invoke deities.
Darsing	:	Tallest pole with prayer flags of the Sherdukpens.
Dhogeheh	:	Nyingmapa meditation practice focusing on the essential pure and free nature of mind.
Dhyana	:	Meditation, meditative states of consciousness.

Duar	:	Mountain pass, through which people of North East Frontier (Arunachal) used to have trade with Assam.
Dukhang	:	Assembly prayer hall of Tibetan monastery.
Durjee Raja	:	Head of the Sath Rajas of the Sherdukpen.
Drolma	:	Goddess Tara, the Buddhist Goddess.
Eksdop	:	Finger ring.
Gaon Bura	:	Head man of the village.
Gelog	:	Highest ordination of Tibetan monk.
Gelung	:	Nyinmapa Lama, who cannot marry
Geluk	:	Order of Virtue', school of Tibetan Buddhism', the school of the Dalai Lama.
Genen	:	Novice Monk.
Gergan	:	A senior Lama of the Tibetan Monastery.
Getsul	:	Next stage of Genens in the hierarchy of Tibetan monks.
Gokang	:	Entrance hall of a Tibetan Monastery.
Gompa	:	Buddhist Monastery of Tibetan, Mahayana Buddhist monasteries of the Sherdukpens and Monpas.
Gurdam gutung	:	Normal type of Sherdukpen cap made out of woolen.
Guru	:	Spiritual teacher in Sanskrit.
Guthing gunu	:	Earing.
Handu	:	Knife( <i>dao</i> ).
Hing Skam	:	Wooden plate.

Hinayana	:	Small or lesser Journey, course or vehicle”, a pejorative term used by <i>Mahayana</i> to denote all forms of early Buddhism that did not accept <i>Mahayana</i> teaching.
Hongche	:	A Local plant from the fiber of which Sherdukpens weave cloth and bags.
Hop	:	Fish trap basket made of bamboo.
Jabrang	:	A spice used for preparing food.
Jataka	:	Birth stories, collection of tales about the previous lives of Gautama Buddha.
Jiji	:	Indigenous Priest (Non-Buddhist) of Sherdukpen.
Jhee	:	Arrow sheath.
Jhen yam	:	Shed for goat.
Jho	:	Granary.
Jong	:	Spear.
Jungme	:	Members of Sherdukpen village council.
Juruk	:	Traditional pin made of silver.
Kachang	:	<i>Dak</i> runner associated with Shertukpen council.
Kakaling	:	A gate with a domed roof elaborately painted with convention designs and picture of Buddha.
Karuna	:	Compassion.
Kebang	:	Traditional village council of the Adi.
Keng dance	:	A non- Buddhist dance of the Sherdukpen.
Khata	:	A scarf made of silk.

Khik	:	Necklaces of bead
Khlom Chok	:	Jug
Kotakis	:	Ambassador of the <i>Ahom</i> Kings.
Kudung	:	A cenotaph enshrining the earthly remains of the departed.
Kuriapar duar	:	A <i>duar</i> in the east of Darrang, Assam.
Kuthang	:	Painted religious scrolls.
Lama	:	Tibetan Buddhist monk.
Li	:	Bow
Lopon Rimpoche	:	Padmasambhav.
Losar	:	New Year festival of the Monpas and Sherdukpen.
Lhagang	:	Village Gompa of the Sherdukpen.
Lhakhan	:	Buddhist Temple.
Lungtoh	:	Smaller Pole with prayer flags.
Luing Puing	:	An upright stick with strips of paper or cloth, noticed on a pile of stones on the summit of mountain passes.
Mahayana	:	Great vehicle, great course of great journey; name of one of the major divisions of Buddhism where in persons strive to become a Buddha rather than an arhat.
Ma Kaptung	:	Bamboo mug
Maitreya	:	Bodhisattva who will be the next human Buddha.
Mandala	:	Diagram or picture, often circular, used in

meditative practice, Tantric diagram used for visualization of a Buddha's qualities and realm.

Mane	:	A shrine in the shape of a narrow wall into which tablets bearing sacred inscriptions are hanged into small shelves out into the wall.
Mangmajon	:	Village council of the Monpa.
Manjusri	:	Bodhisattva associated with wisdom.
Mantra	:	Ritual formula, verse used to invoke a deity or to gain protection, sound used for focus in mediation.
Mantrayana	:	School of Buddhism.
Melley	:	Traditional village council of the Aka.
Meta	:	Loving – Kindness.
Moksa	:	Liberation.
Mudita	:	Sympathetic Joy.
Mudra	:	Ritual gestures.
Nele	:	Village council of the Nyishi.
Ngakpa	:	<i>Nyingmapa</i> Lama who can marry.
Nik	:	Arrow
Norjinma	:	A local Goddess of Assam, identified as goddess of Wealth and prosperity.
Nyingmapa	:	The old Tibetan Buddhist School.
Nyujuk khan phu	:	Fishing spear.
Pam	:	A small settlement.
Pamkingyam	:	Sherdukpen traditional house.
Pechawa	:	Monks who are good students.

Phans	:	Prayer flags of the Sherdukpen.
Phok	:	Local Wine of Sherdukpen
Posa	:	A sort of tribute used to be provided by the Ahom kings of Assam and later on by the British to a few tribal chiefs of the North East Frontier Tract.
Ringbo	:	A full-sleeved traditional jacket.
Rupagya	:	Earlier known as people of Rupa by the Kacharis.
Sangbum	:	A small structure of stone about 6 feet high constructed in front of temples and houses for ritual performance.
Sangha	:	Buddhist organization.
Sachkhar	:	Water- mill.
Saka Dawa	:	Buddha.
Sape	:	A piece of cloth wrapped by men diagonally about the upper part of their bodies.
Sangha	:	'Community', orders of men and women monastic, all Buddhist persons, lay and monastic.
Sengjithongjis	:	Early name of Shergaon village by the plains people .
Senthui	:	Early name of Rupa village by the plains people.
Shergya	:	Earlier known as people of Sergaon by the Kacharis.
Singko	:	Women dress, lose, collarless and sleeveless shirts made of <i>eri</i> cloth which cover the body from shoulders to knees.
Spu Yam	:	Cow shed built near Sherdukpen house.
Tarebappa	:	An ordeal system traditionally practiced by the

		Sherdukpen.
Tarmus/ Torma	:	Conical figures prepared out of wheat flour with the top coloured red, with are used during worship.
Tashi Yong	:	A ritualistic multi-layer alter made out of bamboo with decorative items is carried by women.
Theravada	:	Way or teaching of the elders early Buddhist School that become the major form in Buddhism in Sri Lanka and southeast Asia.
Thring	:	A traditional bangles of Sherdukpen
Thik Akhao	:	Traditional village headmen of the Sherdukpen village council.
Thing	:	A traditional Sherdukpen Box.
Thongs	:	Aristocratic class in Sherdukpen society.
Togya	:	A grand festival of the Monpas and Sherdukpen.
Tsorgen	:	Chief of the Monpa village council.
Wang	:	A Buddhist festival of the Sherdukpen
Yanlo	:	Group of lower social status in Sherdukpen society.
Yi-dam	:	A tutelary deity.
Yoga- tanta	:	Tantric practice involving visualization of oneself as a Tantric deity.



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**A STUDY ON SOCIETY, ECONOMY, POLITY AND  
CULTURE OF THE SHERDUKPENS OF  
ARUNACHAL PRADESH (Till 1947 A.D.)**

**THESIS**

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By

*Nani Tamang Jose*

**Supervisor**

*Prof. Byomakesh Tripathy*

**Professor**



**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
RAJIV GANDHI UNIVERSITY  
RONO HILLS-DOIMUKH (ITANAGAR)  
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# CONCLUSION

As we have discussed in the preceding chapters, the Sherdukpens are one of the minor and little known *Mahayana* Buddhist tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Living in a small pocket of district West Kameng, the Sherdukpen has preserved their heritage in the form of Neolithic tools, megalithic monuments, nicely decorated monasteries, *stupas*, Buddhist arts and crafts, their traditional socio-cultural, economic and political and judicial institutions. They have successfully retained their identity through the ages. Though they are followers of *Mahayana* Buddhism their socio-cultural and religious life are influenced to some extent by few non-Buddhist elements. Infact the study of Sherdukpens is significant one to understand not only the Buddhist heritage of Arunachal but also Buddhist heritage of India as a whole. At the same time it provides information about Arunachal's cultural contact with Tibet and Bhutan in the medieval period.

The first chapter introduces the subject by providing an idea of ecology, early archaeological remains, settlement pattern of the people. It also discusses the scope, significance, statement of the problem and objectives of the thesis, source and methodology utilised for writing the thesis. Review of literature has been undertaken to understand the problem in a better perspective.

The socio-cultural organisations of the Sherdukpen are discussed in chapter two. The origin and migration of the tribes as per literary, archaeological remains and oral tradition is presented as a prelude to the study of socio-cultural institutions. As gleaned from various sources, the Sherdukpens have migrated to their present settlement from Tibet most probably before 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. as we know that *Guru Padmasambhav* popularised *Mahayana* Buddhism among the Sherdukpen in 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. It is also believed that they came to their present settlement by crossing the hills of Bhutan. The socio-cultural life of the people is discussed with references to their settlement pattern, house pattern, family structure, study of clan, social division, forms of marriage, dress

and ornaments, foods and drinks, recreational and leisure activities, etc. As known from literature, the concept of *Sat raja* existed in the society who belonged to *Thong* clans and considered as superior clan in the society. The society is divided into two well defined classes, *Thong* and *Chhao*, each of which is further sub-divided into a number of socially equal exogamous clans like Khrimey, Mousobi, Wangja, Thongdok, Karma, Thungon, Yangfan, Thongchi and Lama Guru among *Thong*, and Singhaji, Dinglow, Megeji, Mijiji and Monoji among *Chhao*. There existed some sort of social division in the society. However, there is no restriction on interdining or social mixing among them otherwise. Like some non-Buddhist tribe of Arunachal such as Adi, Aka, etc, the Sherdukpen had also a social institution in the form of dormitory system which however does not exist today. Monogamy is the prevalent form of marriage. The marriage, are of various types like parallel and cross-cousin marriage, elopement marriage, marriage by service, marriage by exchange, marriage by capture, levirate form of marriage, sororate marriage and widow-marriage. The women used to enjoy respectable position in the society with respect to their socio-cultural rites and rituals. However, they not allowed to attend the proceeding of the traditional political institution. The dress and ornaments betray the influence of Bhutan and Tibet. Unlike Monpa and Khamptis, the Sherdukpen do not have script of their own. However, the people have rich oral traditions. The people have number of pantomimes where colourful masks are used during the dances.

The chapter three has discussed the traditional economic base of the Sherdukpens. Their economy was centred around *jhum* cultivation supplemented by hunting and fishing and rearing of animals. Various forest products and handicrafts like carpentry, cane, and bamboo industry, smithy, grain grinding, liquor distilling, metal work, mask making, scroll painting, etc. used to sustain their economy. The Sherdukpen were known traders and from the time of Ahom period in Assam (15<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> Century) the Sherdukpen used to trade with the plains people of Assam in various markets of Charduar areas among which the Doimora fair was the most important one. During the time of winter, the Sherdukpens used to come down to the foothills at Doimora for months together to carry out their small quantity of trade and at the same time to escape the bitter winter in their hills. During the British period, Sherdukpen used to participate in the border trade which was conducted from the foothills of Assam to Tibet

through the Sherdukpen areas. Rupa and Shergaon were important trade centres in this regard. The Sherdukpen also had trade with Bhutan and neighbouring tribes such as Mijis, Akas and Monpas though in a small scale. The British archival documents refer to coming of the Sherdukpen to the trade fair of Doimora and Udalguri in the last part of 19<sup>th</sup> and early part of 20<sup>th</sup> Century with their merchandise goods.

The traditional political and legal institutions has been discussed in chapter four. Here it may be mentioned the Tawang monastery had no right to rule the Sherdukpen area like the Monpas, the neighbouring Buddhist community. As we have seen the *Sat rajas* used to administer the Sherdukpen village. However, later on the local traditional political institution known as *Jung* was started among the people of Shergaon and Jigaon, while the people of Rupa call as *Jung Bhu-bla* or *Bhu-Bla*. The member of the village council of elder is headed by one or two *Thik Abo Asu* who is selected among the *Abo Asu* (Gaon Bura). The head of the village council is called *Bakho Asu* who is selected by the *Abo asu* (Gaon Bura). Besides, the village council consists of other members called *Khumi*. The traditional council consists of *Abo Asu (Gaon Bura)*, *Jungme Baso* (village council members), the *Kachang* or *Chowkidar*. The functions of the village council are administrative, development and Judicial. The Sherdukpen have well organised traditional laws which deal with all aspects of their life. Oath and ordeal system became an important part of their political administration of the village. Some of the oath and ordeal system are offering scarf in the name of the deity (Buddha), sacrifice of chicken and pouring of blood, hot water method, black and white stone method and *Tarebappa* method etc. In the administration of justice, the role of Buddhist monks is minimal. After the introduction of Panchayat Raj Regulation in the area also, traditional political and judicial administration is continuing side by side.

The religion of Sherdukpen as discussed in chapter five is a curious blend of *Mahayana* Buddhism and *Bon* religion. Though the people follow *Mahayana* Buddhism, *Bon* cult has influenced them a lot. The *Bon* cult is an ancient religion of Tibet before Buddhism became popularised there. The *Bon* cult is in the form of spirit worship, sacrifice as rituals and having a number of non-Buddhist rituals were very popular in Sherdukpen villages. Even some *Bon* gods and goddess are worshipped in the

Buddhist monastery of the Sherdukpen area which throws light on syncretisation of Buddhism and *Bon* religion in this area. The *Bon* priest, *Jiji* used to conduct *Bon* rituals which are extra-Buddhist in nature like *Dingposungba*, *Rnekneiuhap*, *Pottenba/Piyotemba*, *Potsebha*, *Poksansamba*, *Thungshit Ja Chuongba*, *Phakchot*, *Pudosungba*, *Rinchatshakpo* and *Yangsrijom*. The *Mahayana* Buddhism has influenced the day to day life of the Sherdukpen to a great extent in the field of socio-cultural and religious life. Traditional arts and crafts are also influenced by Buddhism. A number of monastery (*Gompa*), Stupa (*Chorten*) and minor religious Buddhist structures can be seen in all the Sherdukpen villages. The art, architecture and mural paintings of monasteries at Rupa, Shergaon are important heritage of the Sherdukpens. Most of the monasteries belong to *Nyingmapa* sect of Buddhism where *Guru Padmasambhav* is worshipped as the most important god of the people. It is not clearly known when *Mahayana* Buddhism was introduced in the area. However, as per tradition *Padmasambhav* was instrumental in sowing the seeds of Buddhism in the area in 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. which was later on sustained by number of Buddhist missionary from Tibet and Tawang area in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century. The people also observe a number of Buddhist dances likes *Ajilamu* Dance (*Lamu Dsham*), Yak Dance (*Yak-Suba*), Deer Dance (*Jik-Suba*), *Sangothong- Thow* Dance, *Keng* Dance, *Ashojung-Yon* Dance and *Thung-Thung* Karma Dance and festivals like *Kro-Chekor*, *Chhekar*, *Losar*, Wang, Jonkhlon, Rek Lapsang Chhongba, Photenya, Saka Dawa and Tendel Senchu.

The Buddhist practices of the people are discussed in chapter six with reference to devotion, rituals, ethics, practices and meditation. Devotion is shown to Buddhist images in *Gompa*, *Stupa* and *Chosem*. The Buddhist images worshipped are *Padmasambhav*, *Avalokiteshwara*, *Manjusiri*, *Tara*, *Buddha*, etc. *Mane* is constructed for showing respect to devotion to religion. The rituals starting from birth to death reveal the influence of Buddhism. There are other rituals which are practiced for good health, prosperity, for good agriculture etc. The *Sangha*, the role of monasticism, patterns of ordination, monastic code of discipline is an integral part of Buddhist practices. The study and mediation, roles of monks in communal life, relation with the laity is also discussed. Besides, form of meditation as practised by the monks and the laity have been analysed to have better understanding of their religious practices.

In the chapter seven, an important aspect of Sherdukpen life that is their relation with various communities is discussed. As per the Ahom historical record and oral tradition, the Sherdukpen used to cultivate friendly relation with the Ahoms who ruled Assam from 13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. Even the Sherdukpen used to collect taxes from the Kacharis who lived near their southern boundary at Doimora. During the British period, the Sherdukpen were provided *posa* by the British government in the form of cash which amounted to Rs. 2,526 annually. The *Sat rajas* used to get the *posa*. However, a few part of the *posa* was given by the Sherdukpen to the authority of Tawang monastery. The Sherdukpen British relation was highly satisfactory except a few isolated incidents. Beside, the incident that strained the relation in 1839 in consequence of the murder of Madhhu Saikia a British subject, in a Charduar village by the Sherdukpen, there is no mention of any conflict of Sherdukpen with the British throughout British period. After the demarcation of Inner Line in district Darrang in 1875, traders from the plain were also debarred to enter the Sherdukpen area for collection of timber rubber and other forest resources. The Sherdukpen also helped the British in the border trade with the Tibet through their territory. However, their relation with their neighbours such as Aka and Mijis was not satisfactory. Infact, Akas and Mijis use to raid the Sherdukpen village forcibly collect taxes from the people. The Howa, another neighbouring community, had however good relation with the Sherdukpen and worked in their filed as labourers. The Sherdukpen relation with nearby Monpa community like Phudung, Domkho, Murshung, Sanglam and in the Kalaktang was also friendly one but Sherdukpen used to collect taxes from them. The British government realising the problems of continuous Akas and Mijis raids on the Sherdukpen area, established a unit of Assam Riffle at Rupa during 1941 A.D.

Thus, the research work has taken into account a study of a small Buddhist community of Arunachal which refers to cultural contact of India with Bhutan and Tibet in a historical perspective. As we have seen the Sherdukpens society was influenced by some non –Buddhist element which refers to their migration to their area before the beginning of Buddhism in 8<sup>th</sup> century or so. Till now they are following their traditional socio-cultural, political and religious institutions. It is hoped that future works on various

Buddhist communities of Arunachal would throw a new light to understand Buddhism in Arunachal and their interaction with non-Buddhist communities in better perspective.