

Monpas of Bhutan: A Study of Tribal Survival and Development Responses

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Abstract: The Monpas¹⁾ of Bhutan are yet billed as primitive, unchanged, isolated, remote and little known even in Bhutan. They are a reminder as to why Tibetan called these as Monpas and Bhutan a Monyul²⁾. They still maintain their faith in Bon³⁾, rarely practiced belief now. These are the people who gave Bhutan their first civilization. Their occupational patterns as hunters, food gatherers, weavers and shifting cultivators represent the initial mode of human adjustment with the nature. This paper provides the background details regarding the Monpas, associated with economic and demographic changes and development responses. The present investigation is based mainly on primary information pertaining to general demographic background, land ownership pattern, occupational engagements, educational and other socio-economic attainments. Despite a long term neglect and development backlogs, the Monpas are undergoing socio-economic transformation with increasing exposure to the outside world.

Keywords: Bhutan, Monpas, Forest dwellers, Shifting cultivators, Bio-cultural diversity, Occupational mobility, Development backlogs

I. Introduction

Anthropologists invariably mention Bhutan as a treasure house of indigenous cultural conceptions and living practices. The ethnic diversity and richness of its multifarious culture is due to its situation at the junction of Indo-Tibetan, Indo-Malayan and Indo-Aryan civilizations. Bhutan is bounded on the west and east by two corridors which cut across the ethnic divisions; the valley of Chumbi of Tibet in the west and the Monyul corridor to the east which is now part of Arunachal Pradesh of India. Between these two corridors lie the principal Bhutanese valleys inhabited by a medley of peoples broadly classified by the language they speak (Aris, 1979). Various waves of immigrants mainly from Tibet in the north and India in the south make up the ethnic mosaic and variety of population in Bhutan. The location specific context of geography and its topographical extremes along with its long isolation are responsible for highly variable and extraordinary stock of human life in Bhutan. The ethno-history of Bhutan is therefore a complex subject that will require much effort to piece together (Ardussi, 2004).

Bhutan's ethnic landscape can most conveniently be simplified into the contrast between pastoralist

communities of alpine country and high passes of northern borderland and shifting cultivators of subtropical low lands. In between such an enormous elevation gradient, several aboriginal people are found living. Brokpas, Laps (the people of mountain passes), and Bjops (*yak* herders) are very important celebrated tribe of Tibetan stock in Bhutan in the north (Chand, 2000 & 2004). In the south, Nepalese settlers of Indo-Aryan stock are important segment of Bhutanese society. There are some other groups inhabiting the southern foothills like Totos, Taba and Dramtoeps regarded as aboriginals. Doya of Lotu-Kuchu of Dorokha region is a rare community which belongs to Kiranti language of the Tibeto-Burman branch. Driem (2004) and Dorji (2003) have used the term Lhops to refer these communities. The central section of Bhutan is divided into historical and linguistic lines into three regions, western, central and eastern region. There are marked variations from valley to valley and village to village as they are separated by high mountain passes over 3000m. These valleys are the economic and cultural heartlands of Bhutan. In the past, political power was localized and limited being central of the rice valleys of Paro, Punakha, Wangdue, Trongsa, Lhuntse and Trashigang. Bumthang

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and Trongsa valleys in the central region of Bhutan are considered to be the primary nucleus of Bhutanese ancestral population. The inhabitants of Kheng region are another important group known as Khengpas living in 35 villages out of a total of 91 villages of the Kheng region that comes under Zhemgang Dzongkhag⁴ (Rigden and Pelgen, 1999). Khengpas have a distinct Indo-Tibetan affinity. They were in trading contacts with Assam and Bengal provinces of India in the South and Tibet in the north (Chand, 2007).

The inhabitants of the six eastern districts viz, Lhuntese, Monger, Trashigang, Trashiyangse, Samdrup Jongkhar and Pemagatshel are commonly known as Sharchops or the easterners. They are similar to those of population of Arunachal Pradesh (India), northern Myanmar and northern Laos speaking a language of Tibeto-Burman group (Pommaret, 1997).

The random sketch of Bhutanese population as provided above is intended to place sufficiently the Monpas, the subject of this paper in the wider context of Bhutan's ethnic landscape.

II. The Mon Kingdom and the Black Mountain Forest of Bhutan

In the Tibetan dictionaries, the word Mon is defined as the general name for different nations and tribes living between Tibet and Indian plains who from remote antiquity have lived by hunting. Many scholars however take Monyul to mean a dark country and Bhutan as a Lho – mon-Khabzi (the southern Mon country of four approaches). “The term Monpa once came to mean little more than southern or western mountain dwelling non-Indian, non Tibetan barbarian”(Aris M, 1979). The pre-Buddhists Gesar saga also mentions of the Mon as a people. In fact Mons are the pre- Buddhists settlers of Bhutan besides Khen, Brokpas, Doyas, Birmis and Koch (Sinha, 2001). There are various clans of the race Monpa who occupy different parts of the Himalaya from Leh and Padam in Ladakh to Monchati in Lahul and Spiti to Tawang and Tuting areas in the Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. The evidence of Mon kingdom is found flourishing in lower Myanmar in the 7th century A.D. and adjoining Thailand (Chakravarti, 2003). The Monpas of Arunachal Pradesh and Mons of Ladakh and Irrawady valley of Myanmar were not so backward as compared to the Monpas of present day Bhutan. The

Mon tradition is so widely scattered that at one time, most of the Himalayan region comprised a Mon land with cultural similarities and perhaps some sort of a united political set up. The consensus of opinion among historians has been that the various non-Aryan groups are the indigenous population of the Indo-Gangetic valley, pushed away from the fertile plains by the immigrants (Chakravarti, 2003). Monpas are not ethnologically Tibetan in origin. There is also a belief that Mons are a wave of religious and cultural missionaries who moved from the plains to the Himalayan hills (Francke, 1975). One thing is clear that Mons held considerable influence in the Himalaya before the immigration of Tibetans and other races. They were strong adherents of nature worship and Bon religion, before the spread of Buddhism. The Tibetans who had newly adopted Buddhism used to hold the Mons and their old religion and traditions in lower esteem and sometime used the word Mon loosely to denote any people and any thing un-Buddhist in general way. Mon is after all a generic term vaguely denoting the Himalayan people in use among the Tibetans. They were different from not only Tibetans, Burmese proper, and the Hans but also the Indo-Aryans.

However the advent of Buddhism which replaced the earlier political empire as the one unifying force in the whole of Tibetan cultural world, the Monyul cultural heritage was lost and assimilated into the Buddhist faith. In Bhutan, they however used a term Monpa to a small community some time call them forest Monpa as they are found living in the Black Mountain Forest of Central Bhutan. Undoubtedly these Bhutanese Monpas are least known and no serious study of their unique survival in the ‘Land of Thunder Dragon’ began before the linguistic survey of Bhutan was undertaken. Monpas of Bhutan have survived as one self contained representative of Monyul and retained their individuality. They are a reminder as to why Tibetans called these as Monpas and Bhutan as Monyul. They remained unexplored except for a brief outline explaining them as an indigenous community to any people of Bhutan. Pommaret (1994) provided some detailed account of Monpas of south-central Bhutan as the entrance keepers of a hidden country. One important contribution about the biological diversity and the traditional management practices of Monpas and their forest is made by Giri (2004).

According to first progress report of Bhutanese gene-diversity project which attempts to trace the ancestry of the Bhutanese, the Black Mountain Monpas in the central Bhutan and the Lokpus or Doyas of southern Bhutan are two genetically distinct and oldest populations in Bhutan. These two are not only distinct from each other as revealed by the findings of the auto-somal STR (short tandem reports) analysis and the Y chromosomal analysis carried by the research team of Prof. Peter de Kniff from the Leiden University of the Netherlands (Choden, 2005).

The tract of the country to which the name of Black Mountain applied is unique in every sense. It gives first an impression of remoteness both in space and time. This great central ridge of the Bhutan Himalaya is a territory of huge black boulders of primitive rocks, misty and verdant forest and presents a succession of the most lofty and rugged ranges running from North West to South East direction, separated by narrow beds of roaring torrents. The Black Mountain sector exposes an early Palaeozoic succession of Tethyan sequence. It is one of the four isolated succession of Tethyan sequence that occur in Bhutan Himalaya, other three being Lingsi, Gurpola and north of Lunana Lake (Ganser, 1964). The Black Mountain also allows deeper penetration of the monsoon currents to the north of the country, and therefore the wet zone in the east extends as far as snow line, while in the west it stops in the valley (Coelho, 1971). The west Bhutan is dry, cold and devoid of much vegetation while the eastern Bhutan is most humid and receives high precipitation. The moist mountain forest of Black Mountain is so dense and dark that the traveler appears to be shut out on every side from the rest of the world. This character of extreme ruggedness and remoteness is hardly interrupted by the presence of human settlements. The name Black Mountain must have been given to such a place of geographical isolation and unmolested natural beauty. This mountain separates Sankosh from Manas watershed of Brahmaputra River. Extending southward from the highest peak of Bhutan Gangkar Punsum (7,564m), this range divides Bhutan into two distinct regions both geographically and ethnologically. The people to the east of these ranges were under the jurisdiction of the Trongsa Penlop while, on the west they are almost pure Tibetan origin and under the jurisdiction of the Thimphu *Dzongpon* (Chief

of the district in medieval Bhutan) and Paro Penlop (Chief of the province in medieval Bhutan), before the emergence of a unified Bhutan under the present rule in 1907 (White, 1971). Again to the east to the range, the people have greater affinity with the population of the Assam state of India with a smaller, darker stature, and to the west they remain more of Tibeto-Mongoloid features. The western boundary of Black Mountain is set by Wangdue Chhu (river) and the eastern boundary is marked by Mangdue Chhu.

Presently, the Black Mountain comes under Wangdue Dzonkhag of western Bhutan and Trongsa Dzonkhag of eastern Bhutan. The Palela (3,390m), a pass across the Black Mountain links these two Dzonkhags. The areas around the pass is the home of Laps, the people of mountain passes who move northward in the direction of Lunana in summer and come down to Rukubji and Chandibji valleys, towards Trongsa during winter time. These semi-nomadic shepherds spend some time along with their yaks in the Black Mountain. The lower valley parts and some favourable hill slopes are also inhabited by other Bhutanese population. However, the desolate and high slopes of Black Mountain are the home of Monpas who live at a considerable distance from other population groups.

They occupy Jangbi, Wangling and Phumzur villages under Lhangthel Gewog⁵ in Trongsa Dzonkhag (Fig. 1). In these three villages, they have 38 households with a total population of about 200. Nearest road head is Tongtongphai about 56 km from Trongsa. One can reach to Wangling and Jangbi, the nearest villages located on the left bank of Mangdue chhu after a 3 hrs walk from Tongtongphai. Phumzur is a 5hrs walk from Tongtongphai. The area is densely covered by the mixed deciduous vegetation. The Monpa village on other side of the Black mountain is located in Adha Gewog of Wangdi Dzonkhag. It is about one and half day journey from Taksha chhu which is 52 km from Wangdi phodrang along Chirang highway, Monpas occupy part of Rukha village which is locally known as Oalay and called themselves Oalaps. Though they are the descendants of Trongsa Monpas, yet they are not in direct touch with them. They are a small group of 12 households with 108 populations.

III. Conceptual framework and objectives

The Monpas residing in Mangdue and Wangdue valleys in central Bhutan are considered as the first inhabitants of their country by Bhutanese (Chakravarti, 2003). Some of these are very ancient survivals bearing little connections with the larger groups (Harsrat, 1980). Not only language but some of their social institutions peculiar to them and their dependence on forest linked them to the forest dwellers of north eastern Himalaya. The rehabilitation of these people by granting agricultural land and houses is on the priority of developmental initiatives taken by Royal Govt. Bhutan. It is in this sense that the present investigation undertakes one of the rarest tribal communities of Bhutan so as to make them as partners in the prosperity of the nation.

Let us begin with the hypothesis that “Monpas have developed a bio-cultural relationship with the forest which has helped them to survive and gave them security. It is their religion, their gods are there, they are born there, their food and medicine are in the forest and they finally die there.” One should therefore study and perceive them in this perspective and take cognizance of their traditional values and practices while formulating schemes for their development. It is in this background that the present investigation is aimed at the following two main objectives.

1. To collect first hand information about their demographic behavior, occupational engagements, educational attainment, living practices and resource utilization pattern.
2. To carry response studies and their participation so as to determine success and failures of the government programmes.

The present investigation is based mainly on primary information. The questionnaire contains 57 questions arranged into 6 sections. Data pertaining to general

demographic background, Land ownership pattern, socio economic amenities, occupational engagements, educational and other socio- economic attainments, attitude towards change, responses towards governmental programme and aspiration for future have been gathered through canvassing the questionnaire to each of household heads. The field work is conducted during January 2001. The data thus collected was tabulated using bi-variate counts and village level differences are primarily explained in order to study the changes occurred in their occupational structure. Regional differentiation is also addressed where ever felt necessary to compare Monpa residing on both sides of Black Mountain Forest.

IV. Demographic Behaviour

The present sample covers 35 households with a total of 283 Monpa population residing in both Trongsa and Wangduephodrang Dzongkhags. There are 23 sample households surveyed in Trongsa from 3 villages of Wangling, Jangbi and Phumzur. Village Jangbi has 6 households with a population of 45 comprising 22 females and 23 males. Wangling has 13 sample households with a population of 97 consisting of 46 males and 51 females. The most remote Monpa village under Trongsa Dzongkhag is Phumzur. Only 4 households were surveyed from this village with a population of 33 comprising 16 males and 17 females. There are 944.4 males per 1000 females in the Monpas villages of Trongsa (Table.1). In Oalay (Rukha), all 12 households with a total of 108 population consisting 55 females and 53 males are surveyed. The male female ratio in Oalay is 951.7 males per 1000 females.

The age wise distribution of population indicates the level of socio- economic achievements. The maximum concentration of population in the younger

Table 1 Village wise Distribution of Monpa Population under Trongsa and Wangduephodrang Dzongkhag, Jan.2001

SL. No.	Villages	No. of Households	Population			Male per thousand Female
			Male	Female	Total	
1.	Jangbi	6	23	22	45	1045.5
2.	Wangling	13	46	51	97	901.96
3.	Phumzur	4	16	17	33	941.17
	Total (Trongsa)	23	85	90	175	944.4
1.	Oalay (Wangdue)	12	53	55	108	963.6
	Grand Total	35	138	145	283	951.7

Source: Personal Field Investigation, January, 2001

Table 2 Age-wise Distribution of Monpa Population under Trongsa and Wangduephodrang Dzongkhag, Jan. 2001

Sl. No.	Villages	Below 7 years			8 to 14			15 to 29			30 to 45			46 to 59			60 & Above			Total population		
		M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
1.	Jangbi	2	3	5	5	3	8	7	7	14	4	2	6	3	5	8	2	2	4	23	22	45
2.	Wangling	6	7	13	9	8	17	14	16	30	11	11	22	3	4	7	3	5	8	46	51	97
3.	Phumzur	3	1	4	2	3	5	0	5	5	5	2	7	4	2	6	2	4	6	16	17	33
	Total (Trongsa)	11	11	22	16	14	30	21	28	39	20	15	35	10	11	21	7	11	18	85	90	175
1.	Oalay (Wangdue)	22	10	32	6	9	15	9	17	26	7	5	12	7	10	17	2	4	6	53	55	108
	Grand Total	33	21	54	22	23	45	30	45	65	27	20	47	17	21	38	9	15	24	138	145	283

Source: Personal Field Investigation, January, 2001

Table 3 Village-wise Household Size Distribution of Monpas under Trongsa & Wangduephodrang Dzongkhag, Jan. 2001

Sl. No.	Villages	2 to 4	4 to 6	6 to 8	8 to 10	10 to 12	Above 12 members	Total households	Average household size
1.	Jangbi	-	2	-	2	1	1	6	7.5
2.	Wangling	-	1	9	1	1	1	13	7.5
3.	Phumzur	-	-	1	2	1	-	4	8.25
	Total (Trongsa)	-	3	10	5	3	2	23	7.6
1.	Oalay (Wangdue)	2	1	1	4	-	4	12	9
	Grand Total	2	4	11	9	3	6	35	8.08

Source: Personal Field Investigation, January, 2001

Table 4 Educational Attainment of Monpas under Trongsa and Wangduephodrang Dzongkhag, Jan. 2001

Sl. No.	Villages	Below 7 yrs.	Illiterates	Monastic Education	School going children	Total population
1.	Jangbi	5	24	6	10	45
2.	Wangling	13	61	6	17	97
3.	Phumzur	4	22	-	7	33
	Total (Trongsa)	22	107	12	34	175
1.	Oalay (Wangdue)	32	73	3	-	108
	Grand Total	54	180	15	34	283

Source: Personal Field Investigation, January, 2001

age and decreasing trend towards higher age groups reflects the poor health of the people. The age groups are divided into 6 categories (Table 2). In all the Monpa villages of Trongsa and Wangdue, a maximum of 65 people (23%) are found concentrated in the age group of 15 to 29 years. followed by 54 persons (19%) in the age group of below 7 years. A minimum of 24 persons (8.5%) are found above 60 years. In the Monpa villages of Trongsa Dzongkhag, a maximum of 39 persons (22%) are in the younger age group of 15 to 29 years. It is followed closely by 35 (20%) persons in the age group of 30 to 45 years. The minimum of 18 persons (10%) are found above 60 years of age.

In Oalay, similar trend exists with the maximum of 26 people (24%) in the younger age group of 15 to 29 years and a minimum of 6 persons (5.6%) above 60 years (Table 2).

The family size is directly related to the stage of socio-economic transformation. Joint and large size families are found mostly in Monpa society. There are 6 household classes from 2 to 4 to above 12 members per

family (Table 3). Maximum of 11 households have a family size of 6 to 8 members followed by 9 families having 8 to 10 members and 6 families above 12 members. Village Oalay has largest family size with 4 households above 12 members followed by equal members of households (4) belonging to 8 to 10 and 2 households belonging to 2 to 4 members. Remaining 2 households in Oalay have 4 to 6 and 6 to 8 members. In Trongsa, a majority of 10 households have 6 to 8 members followed by 5 households having 8 to 10 members and 3 households each with 10 to 12 and 4 to 6 members. There are 2 households above 12 members. The average household size is 8.1 members per family, which ranges from 7.6 in the Monpas village of Trongsa Dzongkhag to 9 in Oalay village of Wangdue Dzongkhag.

The educational attainment of Monpas of both Trongsa and Wangduephodrang Dzongkhags is very minimal (Table 4). In total, there are only 15 persons who have attained monastic education and 34 persons are literate including school going children up to primary level. All 34 literates come from the Monpa villages of

Table 5 Occupational Structure of Monpas, Jan. 2001

Sl. No.	Villages	Farming	Weaving of bamboo products	Wage labour	Govt. Jobs	Total
1.	Jangbi	29	7	2	1	38
2.	Wangling	57	12	0	1	71
3.	Phumzur	22	9	0	0	31
	Total (Trongsa)	108	28	2	2	140
1.	Oalay(Wangdue)	57	5	3	1	66
	Grant Total	165	33	5	3	206

Source: Personal Field Investigation, January, 2001

Trongsa, out of which Jangbi has 10, Wangling 17 and Phumzur 7 literates. Out of 15 receiving monastic education, 12 persons come alone from Trongsa villages. Oalay has only 3 persons receiving monastic education without anyone going to school to attend the formal education. The formal education (evening class rooms to educate people of all age groups through a system introduced by the government) has started only in 1996 in Monpa villages of Trongsa. People of Oalay have yet to walk a long distance to attain the community school. Due to the far flanged location of village Oalay, the Oalaps have remained cut off from the basic facilities. Only three monks have joined Wangduephodrang Dzong (Fortress, seat of civil and religious power) from village Oalay. On the other hand, there are 6 monks each from Jangbi and Wangling villages in Trongsa, Tsirang and Gelephu Dzongs. One monk from Wangling is also studying in Rumtek monastery of Sikkim. Wangling village has maximum of 14 school going children followed by 10 from Jangbi and 7 from Phumzur. Interestingly, there are more females (17) going to school as compared to males (14). In overall terms, the literacy rate in the Monpa community appears to be very low 21 percent including both monastic and school going children. The population below 7 years of age is however excluded while calculating the literacy rates.

V. Occupational Structure

Traditionally, Monpas have been engaged in the weaving of bamboo and cane products as their primary occupation. They started practicing shifting cultivation later and to the settled agriculture very recently. This section deals mainly with the occupational engagement of Monpas, and their subsistence level. Majority of Monpas are found engaged in farming (80%), out of a total of 206 working population in all four villages of Monpas (Table 5). It is followed by weaving (16%) which is done mainly by skilled people. There are 5

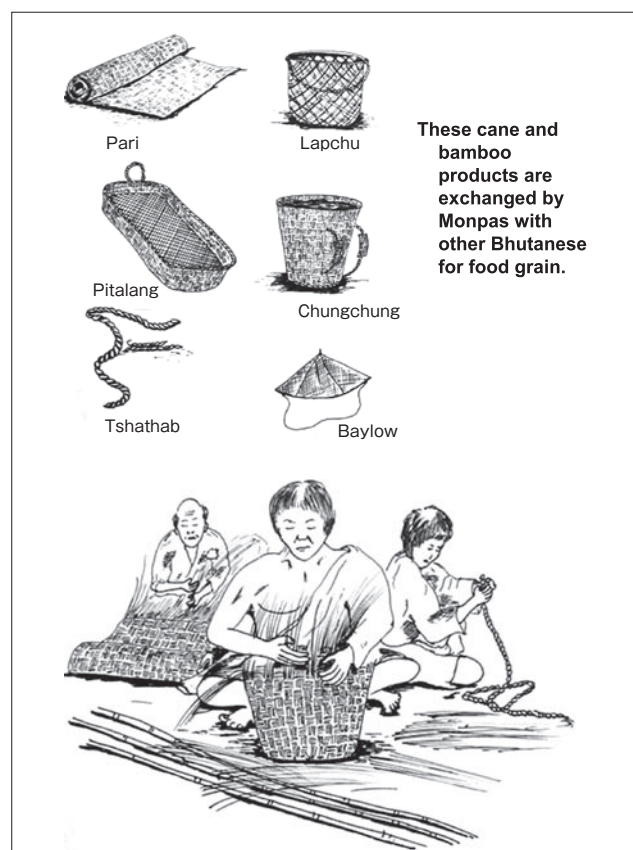


Fig. 2 Traditionally, Mopas had been engaged in weaving of bamboo and cane products
Source: Sketch by Sonam Dendup

Monpas (3%). whose livelihood is based mainly on daily labour. Like wise, there are 3 persons (1%) employed in government jobs. Out of these 3, one person from village Wangling is working as a peon and one person from Jangbi village as a non-formal teacher. The third is a school teacher from Village Oalay.

Cane and bamboo are the two most versatile plant materials available to the Monpas. The bamboo is used in a variety of purposes as building material, weaving material for making mats and pots for carrying water and storing milk. Young shoots of bamboo and cane is also used as vegetable. It is used as ropes and as an important fodder. Monpas of Trongsa are excellent weavers especially in making baskets, mats, winnowing etc. (Fig. 2). On the other hand, Monpas of Oalay village are now

leaving this tradition due to non availability of the raw material. There are only 6 households, 5 from Oalay and 1 from Trongsa who do not manufacture cane and bamboo products. Out of total 35 sample households 29 households (83%) are engaged in this practice. All households in Trongsa villages are engaged in weaving leaving behind only 1 household in Wangling.

Owing to the over exploitation of bamboo forests, Monpas are travelling more than 6 hours to obtain the raw materials. This is mainly responsible for the gradual disappearance of this practice in village Oalay. Monpas of Trongsa go to 19 different places to fetch bamboo and cane. People of Jangbi village go to Kumchen, Lamrang, Zangjan, Moktzhola, Ramdichu, Kubhen, Zaeling and Shingkhai forest areas, all located between 2 to 3 hours walking distances. The bamboo forest is closer to village Wangling within 1 to 1.5 hours walk. Some important bamboo forests near Wangling village are Duling, Culiphang, Tangkhala and Dungsum. The people of Phumzur village get bamboo from Kurtog, Zangjan, Ramdichu, Charpang, Lamrang, Lamrak, Thangda, Lamlang etc. All located below the walking distance of 4 hours.

Table 6 shows seven important bamboo products namely, Lapchu (hand basket), Pari (bamboo and cane mat), Tshew (basket for carrying fodder, fruits, shoots, etc.), Rao (bamboo fence), Chungchu (basket to carry household goods), Paeshi (a bamboo stick) and Tsathab (rope for tying animals). Tsathabs are produced in

maximum number (195) followed by Chungch (104), Lapchu (74), Tshew (48), Pari (19), Rao (18) and Paeshi (13). Other items include small containers, cane chair, milk containers, winnows and portable bags. At the time of survey, a total of 133 woven items were ready for the sale in the villages.

Agriculture is the main occupation of Monpas. wheat, maize, buckwheat, and mustard are mainly produced in Jangbi and Wangling. Some households in Oalay and Phumzur do grow paddy that depends on the monsoon rains. The land holding size classes are shown in Table 7. Majority of the households (49%) own agricultural land between 2 to 4 acres followed by 20%, 14%, 11%, and 6 percent households owning land above 10 acres, between 4 to 6, 6 to 8, and 8 to 10 acres. In Oalay, almost 75 percent of farmers have 2 to 4 acres of land. The topography greatly restricts the cultivation of crops as level land is scarce and environmental constraints are severe.

Agriculture is merely practiced at the subsistence level in the Monpa villages. Monpa habitat is a fragile region hammered by heavy rain fall and the rainy water flows on an undulating terrain and steep slopes causing heavy damage to land. The productivity of the agriculture is very low which is hardly enough to meet the annual requirement of the household. About 77 percent of the total sample households depend on market for grains. All households in village Phumzur are depending on market for their food requirements. In

Table 6 Important Bamboo and Cane Products in Monpa Villages under Trongsa and Wangduephodrang Dzongkhag, Jan. 2001

Sl. No.	Villages	Bamboo and Cane products							
		Lapchu	Pari	Tshew	Chungchu	Paeshi	Rao	Tsathab	Others
1.	Jangbi	30	4	14	25	5	0	40	70
2.	Wangling	19	8	14	55	8	0	40	17
3.	Phumzur	25	5	5	24	0	0	9	18
	Total (Trongsa)	74	17	33	104	13	0	89	105
1.	Oalay(Wangdue)	0	2	15	0	0	18	106	28
	Grand Total	74	19	48	104	13	18	195	133

Source: Personal Field Investigation, January, 2001

Table 7 Land holding size Distribution of Monpa Households, Jan. 2001

Sl. No.	Villages	:acre							Total
		Below 2	2 to 4	4 to 6	6 to 8	8 to 10	Above 10		
1.	Jangbi	0	0	1	2	1	2	6	
2.	Wangling	0	6	1	2	1	3	13	
3.	Phumzur	0	2	0	0	0	2	4	
	Total (Trongsa)	0	8	2	4	2	7	23	
1.	Oalay(Wangdue)	0	9	3	0	0	0	12	
	Grand Total	0	17	5	4	2	7	35	

Source: Personal Field Investigation, January, 2001

general, families with large land holdings mostly above 10 acres are only self sufficient in food production.

The role of the forest as the source of livelihood and sustenance for Monpas is very important in order to understand their bio-cultural diversity. Their consumptive dependence on forest was for shelter, food, fodder, cane-bamboo manufacturing, medicine, mulch and firewood. The large-scale destruction of forest and biological decline of the Monpas are interlinked closely. Though they are adapted to tin, plastic and aluminium utensils now, still, the collection of minor forest produces like wild betel or pan, cane and bamboo shoots, wild potatoes and resin engages about 31 percent working Monpas. Out of a total of 87 people engaged in the collection of minor forest produces, Cane and bamboo shoot collection is a major activity that occupies a maximum 35 percent people followed by collection of wild betel (32%), resin tapping (20%) and collection of wild potato (14%). The diversified forest base of Monpas for food and medicine has been eroded now. They were hunting animals and depending on plant families for food in the past. Their knowledge of the forest is also gradually fading away due to their shift to other modes of occupations (Table 8).

VI. Occupational Mobility

Occupational mobility among Monpas is almost negligible mainly due to low level of education. In total, there are only 8 persons in the entire sample who have

changed their occupation from agriculture to government jobs, priesthood, carpentry and labour. The first person entered in government job is a teacher from village Oaly who has now left the village and settled in Phuntsholing. Other two women from Oaly are married and settled in Pasakha. Out of those 5 persons who have changed their parental occupation in Trongsa Monpa villages, 2 are employed in government jobs one each from Jangbi and Wangling. One carpenter from Jangbi is now working in Thimphu. The changed category also includes 1 Gomchen (lay priest) and 1 labour from Wangling who were engaged in agriculture before.

Table 9 shows results of levels of occupational satisfaction among Monpas as obtained from sample respondents. The majority of households (60%) expressed their satisfaction towards their present occupation, while 37 percent households are dissatisfied with their present occupation. Exceptionally, One person from Oaly village is highly satisfied as he is the first teacher so far employed from Monpa community. Similarly all 4 sample households in Phumzur are satisfied with their occupation. While there are equal number of families in Jangbi on both counts. It is thus clear that increasing paucity of raw material of bamboo and cane products and a low yield for agriculture are two major reasons to compel Monpas to search for other jobs. However, they are still ignorant and remain cut off from the world outside.

The Monpas are no longer bee hunters or food

Table 8 People Engaged in the Collection of Minor Forest Produces in Monpa Villages, Jan. 2001

Sl. No	Villages	Minor Forest Produces				Total
		Wild Betel	Cane bamboo shoots	Wild Potatoes	Resin trapping	
1.	Jangbi	6	4	3	2	15
2.	Wangling	11	16	5	14	16
3.	Phumzur	2	7	1	1	11
	Total (Trongsa)	19	27	9	17	42
1.	Oaly(Wangdue)	9	3	3	0	15
	Grand total	28	30	12	17	57

Source: Personal Field Investigation, January, 2001

Table 9 Occupational Satisfaction among Monpas, Jan. 2001.

Sl. No	Villages	Highly satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Total
1.	Jangbi	0	3	3	6
2.	Wangling	0	7	6	13
3.	Phumzur	0	4	0	4
	Total (Trongsa)	0	14	9	23
1.	Oaly (Wangdue)	1	7	4	12
	Grand Total	1	21	13	35

Source: Personal Field Investigation, January, 2001

gatherers. They have undergone fast changes both in terms of economic and social behaviour. The Monpas of Trongsa being not very far from road point are witnessing changes very fast than that of Oalay village. It was observed that 14 households (40%) of Monpas have access to toilets and 31 households (89%) to safe drinking water. Increase in the agricultural land is one positive sign of occupational mobility among Monpas. There are 16 households (46%) which have made considerable expansion in their agricultural land. As a result, forest around the village is being depleted very fast. About 22 households (63%) have shown concern about the forest depletion in the monpa habitat. Similarly 10 households are affected by landslide in their agricultural land. In village Oalay, the irrigation facilities and use of HYVS (High Yield Variety Seeds) in agriculture are not practiced even today. Hence, all the 12 households in the village have not encroached upon new forest for agriculture. The shifting cultivation is not much in practice due to introduction of potato cultivation. On the other hand, the forest cover around Village Oalay is increasing as they have left shifting cultivation and settled permanently in village Oalay. Both the Monpas of Trongsa and Wangdue have now access to the safe drinking water. In Wangling, Jangbi and Oalay, all the households are provided with drinking water facilities while water facility is not yet provided to Phumzur. Some of the villages of Monpas now have closed toilets. All houses in Jangbi have toilets while only 8 households have these facilities in Wangling. In Phumzur, closed toilets are yet to be implemented. In Oalay, all the 12 households have no access to the closed toilets (Table 10).

VII. Development Plans

It is the right time that the attention is being paid by the Royal Government of Bhutan creating awareness for

the conservation of cane and bamboo forest. Monpas Selvwai Yoezer Tshokpa (MSYT) project was set up in April 2000 under the grant funded by UNDP (United Nation's Development Plan). The MSYT consists of local communities as the members headed by the Nakari (chairman) appointed among them from Jangbi village. They have their own accountant. Besides, there are 3 head Tshokpas (Committee members) each from village Jangbi, Phumzur and Wangling .

The objectives of MSYT project are as follows:

1. Create awareness on natural resource management.
2. Sustainable management of cane and bamboo in the Black Mountain National park.
3. Document existing stock of cane and bamboo in Black Mountain range.
4. To preserve and promote age old cane and bamboo handicraft skills.
5. To increase household income of Monpas by 20 percent.
6. To build capacity and confidence of Monpa community.

In order to achieve the above mentioned set goals and objectives, the following activities are being undertaken:

1. Hold community meetings with concerned Dzongkhag staff to plan project activities.
2. Organize capacity building workshops.
3. Establish cane and bamboo nursery.
4. Establish a trial cane and bamboo plantation.
5. Organize study tour for selected community members to India for exposure on Handicrafts production.
6. Conduct a training workshop on cane and bamboo handicraft to enhance the existing skill level and reduce raw material wastage factor.
7. Develop marketing linkages and establish product outlets.

Table 10 Important Changes Expressed by Monpa Sample House holds, Jan. 2001.

Sl. No.	Villages	Agricultural Expansion		Forest depletion		Landslide		Drinking water		Closed toilets	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
1.	Jangbi	6	-	5	1	-	6	6	-	6	-
2.	Wangling	9	4	10	3	10	3	13	-	8	5
3.	Phumzur	1	3	4	-	-	4	-	4	-	4
	Total (Trongsa)	16	7	19	4	10	13	19	4	14	9
1.	Oalay(Wangdue)	-	12	3	9	-	12	12	-	-	12
	Grand Total	16	19	22	13	10	25	31	4	14	21

Source: Personal Field Investigation, January, 2001

8. Establish community trust fund.
9. Conduct participatory research to document existing stock of cane and bamboo in Black Mountain range.
10. Manage the existing stock of cane and bamboo in Black Mountain National Park.
11. Expand cane and Bamboo plantation based on trial results.

MSYT is newly formed committee and the promoters of this project. The primary objectives of the committee is to manage natural resources in Black Mountain National Park (now renamed as Jigme Singye Wangchuk National Park) and to bring improvement in the living condition of Monpas by supporting activities that build local capacity as well as increase household income. During the interview with DFO (Dzongkhag Forest Officer, Trongsa Karma Tempa) he said, "this is the challenge taken up in the 21st century to uplift the socio economic conditions of this weaker section of society".

The MSYT committee comprises of a chair person, 3 secretaries (1 from each village), 5 committee members and 27 members. The committee has unanimously elected the members and is also proposing to recruit an accountant from the community for maintaining the book of accounts. The committee would be responsible for the implementation, promotion monitoring and evaluation of cane and bamboo management project in the Jigme Singye Wangchuk National Park. For the first time the Monpa community has planned to implement the project to protect environment and to bring about sustainable livelihood through community participation. The committee is dedicated to their association and committed to accomplish their goals. The beginning of the project has the plan to set up a nursery of 10 acres of land in every 3 villages. It is implemented only in Jangbi at present and slowly going to implement in other villages too. On evaluating the MSYT project, it is found that Monpas have different outlook towards this project. The MYST project is aimed to help uplift Monpas from their social and economic backwardness. "It is really a challenging task to bring Monpas in the mainstream of Bhutan". The response study is carried out to evaluate the attitude of Monpas about the MYST project. It reveals that there are 20 (57%) households hopeful about the increase in their income by selling their cane and

bamboo products, where as 16 respondent (46%) are of the opinion that they will get raw materials constantly and locally. About 11 households (31%) are hopeful to establish their contacts with outside world. A monpa troop was taken to Guwahati (India) by the officer in charge project in the January 2001. It was the first visit by any monpa to India. The second largest response from 17 respondents (49%) about the MYST project was that it will compensate cash income in order to pay taxes and school fee for their school going children. A group of 14 respondents (40%) were of the opinion that the project will help them to buy books and stationeries for their children, agriculture equipments, household goods, fertilizers etc.

The project was completed in mid 2003. The Monpas demonstrated good community participation through the project and involved in implementing cane and bamboo management plan. The project has helped them to enhance social and economic wellbeing by preserving and promoting their age old crafts. Only 47 households remain today in Bhutan The project has covered 40 of them in Jangbi, Wangling and Phumzur villages during the second phase of MYST project.

With the Nabzi-Korphu trail running through the heart of the Monpa villages, they earn money as porters. Extensive interviews with the Monpas revealed that distinct old ways are vanishing with the pace of progress (Dema, 2008a). The living condition of the Monpas have improved with the Tarayana Foundation, a non-profit organization that constructed 38 houses in Jangbi, Wangling and Phumzur villages of Langthel Gewog and renovated 3 houses by December 2008. Likewise 15 houses were constructed in Village Oalay (Dema, 2008b). Monpas are now more open to the outside world and turned to be more communicable. Due to Bhutan's recent move to democracy, the need and aspirations of people have risen and their socio-economic concerns have become intimate parts of the development programmes of newly established 'Democratic Constitutional Monarchy' of Bhutan.

VIII. Conclusion

In fact the Monpas are the pre-Buddhist settlers of Bhutan who from remote antiquity lived by hunting. They were in Bhutan before the immigration of Tibetans and other races. While the Monpas of Arunachal Pradesh

and other parts of the Indian Himalaya are being gradually absorbed in the National main stream, the Monpas of Bhutan are still thought to be able to get along themselves. They are turned into village bound craftsmen, peasants and labourers very late as they came into contacts of other population groups very late. However the rehabilitation of these people by granting land and houses is on priority of development initiatives by the Royal Government of Bhutan now. Monpas are now undergoing a process of transformation from a state of isolation and adherence to a traditional hunting and food gathering towards a multi-faceted socio-economic development programmes. Monpas are adapting gradually to the fast changing socio-economic conditions.

Now the Royal Government of Bhutan is aimed at assimilating Monpas into the main stream. The Monpa Selvwai Yoeser Tshokpa project has been successfully implemented into two phases since April 2000. It was the first developmental intervention by the Royal Government of Bhutan. The promises of the project are visible along with the participation of Non-Governmental Organizations like Tarayana in the socio-economic well being of Monpas. There is increased participation of Monpas in natural resource management particularly cane and bamboo. To sustain the project they have created a Revolving Fund where they contributed 2% of their sale into the project fund. This fund helps to sustain their activities and other community needs in times of crop failure, or when community rites and rituals are required. Tribal survival in the modern world would be possible and meaningful only when we allow them to grow with its own intrinsic worth. They want development and it has to converse with tribal sensibility about its meditation on the human presence.

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[Note]

- 1) In the medieval Tibetan tradition, Bhutan was known as the Southern *Mon* country, and the term *pa* stands for inhabitants. *Monpa* means therefore the original inhabitants of Bhutan.
- 2) *Monyul* is the land of the *Monpas*, a prehistoric name for Bhutan.
- 3) Animistic belief in which all things such as rocks, streams etc. have a living soul and therefore worshiped.
- 4) Dzongkhag is a district level administration unit in Bhutan.
- 5) Gewog is a block level administrative unit in Bhutan.

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