

Monpa, But

The 1991 census in India recorded 675 members of the But Monpa tribe, up from 348 people in the 1981 census.¹ Almost all But Monpa inhabit the villages of Jeriagaon, Sellary, Khoitum, Ralung and Khoina in the Nafra Circle of West Kameng District of Arunachal Pradesh, north-east India. The But Monpa inhabit a hilly area 'surrounded by dense coniferous forests where the climate is cool and salubrious'.² The But Monpas call themselves Matchopa, Bootpa or Butpa.

This small tribe is one of six Monpa groups, each of which has been granted status as a Scheduled Tribe by the Indian government. The combined population of all Monpa in India is nearly 50,000.³ Two distinct Monpa groups also live in Tibet.

Almost all Christian researchers have refused to list these six groups separately. It is generally assumed that because all six tribes call themselves 'Monpa' they must be one group and

therefore do not need to be split down into these small components. This presumption is an error from an ethnolinguistic point of view. Others do not consider such numerically small groups worth mentioning. Our aim is to present all distinct people groups, regardless of size, as each is precious to the Saviour and the Bible states that every tribe, language and nation will have representatives worshipping around the throne of Jesus in heaven.

The term 'Monpa' is a generic one, used by the Tibetans to denote *mon* ('the low country') and *pa* ('belonging to'). The Monpa are, therefore, people 'belonging to the low country'. In reality, the various Monpa tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, including the

But, migrated into the region from diverse places at various times, 'differing with respect to their languages and many other cultural traits. . . . The languages of the Lish Monpas, Chug Monpas and But Monpas differ a lot from the rest of the Monpas, and closely resemble the languages of the Akas, Mijis and Sherdukpens.'⁴

The But Monpa are quite different from the other Monpa groups⁵ and could probably be

considered the least Buddhist of the various groups. K S Singh notes, 'Though they are listed under the greater Monpa group, except their dress they differ in all aspects (language, socio-cultural life and religion) from the other Monpa.'⁶ In another book, Singh states, 'Except for the But Monpa, the rest of [the Monpa groups] belong to the Lamaistic school of Tibetan

Buddhism. . . . It is interesting to note that the practice of pre-Buddhist shamanism still persists among them. However, the But Monpa have their own traditional faith, beliefs and festivals. Gradually they are being drawn into the greater fold of Buddhism.'⁷ Despite the above indication that the But Monpa are not strong Buddhists, the 1981 census recorded 97.7 per cent of them as Buddhists and 0.86 per cent as Hindus, while 1.44 per cent did not state their religion.⁸

There are no known Christians among the But Monpa tribe, and less than 20 among all the Monpa groups in India. They are one of the most unreached and needy Buddhist groups in the Himalayas.⁹



Dwayne Graybill



Population:
745 (2000)
870 (2010)
1,010 (2020)
Countries: India
Buddhism: Tibetan
Christians: none known

Overview of the But Monpa

Other Names: Monba, Moinba, Monpa, Menba, Matchopa, Bootpa, Butpa, Shingjee, Rahungjee, Khoitumjee, Khonujee, Nagnoo

Population Sources:

675 in India (1991 census)

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Himalayish, Mahakiranti, Kiranti, Eastern

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 97%

Practising Buddhists: 50%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: none

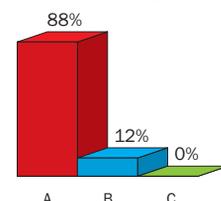
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcastng: none

ROPAL code: MOB01

Status of Evangelization



A = Have never heard the gospel
B = Have heard the gospel but have not become Christians
C = Are adherents to some form of Christianity