

Monpa, Dirang



Population:
 5,580 (2000)
 6,500 (2010)
 7,580 (2020)
Countries: India
Buddhism: Tibetan
Christians: 5

Overview of the Dirang Monpa

Other Names: Monba, Moinba, Monpa, Menba, Sangla

Population Sources:
 5,050 in India (1991 census)

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

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 99%

Practising Buddhists: 85%

Christians: 0.1%

Scripture: none

Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: MOB03

The Dirang Monpa have been granted status in India as a Scheduled Tribe. Their population in the 1981 census was 3,599 (1,742 males and 1,857 females). This increased to 5,050 in the 1991 census. One of the alternate names for the Dirang Monpa is Sangla, which suggests that they may be related to the large Tsangla ethnic group of Bhutan, China and India, which numbers more than 250,000 people. More research needs to be done to determine the relationship between the Dirang Monpa and Tsangla languages.

The Dirang Monpa live in the Dirang Circle in the West Kameng District of Arunachal Pradesh in north-east India. The Dirang Monpa claim that they were the first inhabitants of the Dirang area. Some of their elders say their forefathers originated in eastern Bhutan, before migrating to their present location in India.

The diet of the Dirang Monpa consists of 'cereals, fish, meat, vegetables and *chung* (local drink brewed from maize, rice, millet, wheat and buckwheat). Maize is the staple food item. . . . They eat beef, pork, mutton, fowls, yaks, *mithuns* and deer. The fruits consumed are apples, peaches, bananas, pomegranates and oranges.¹

Marriage in Dirang Monpa society is a simple procedure. A lama is hired to consult the horoscopes to determine the most auspicious time and day for a wedding to take place. Family members and friends gather at the bride's home. The lama simply places a white scarf, called a *katha*, around the necks of the bride and groom, blesses the couple, and they are married. A huge feast is held at which all the people, including children, often become intoxicated by

consuming copious amounts of strong rice whisky.

The lamas perform many other roles in the community as well, in keeping with the important role that Tibetan Buddhism plays in the daily lives of Dirang Monpa society. After a baby is delivered, the mother is not allowed to leave the room for seven days. She is considered in a state of spiritual and physical pollution and nobody can visit her. When the baby is three days old, a lama is invited to name the child. 'After saying a prayer, he prepares a horoscope

for the baby. The horoscope is consulted to choose a name for the child.²

Not only is the Buddhist lama present at birth, but he also officiates at funerals. When there is a death, 'the body is carried to a nearby river and thrown into the water after being cut into 108 pieces [Tibetan Buddhists consider 108 to be an auspicious number]. If a person dies in an

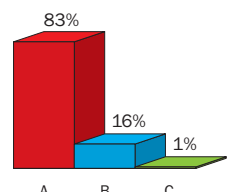
accident his or her body is buried. When a lama or an influential person dies, the body is cremated. . . . On the seventh day after the death a prayer is performed by the lama and a festoon is erected in front of the house of the deceased to satisfy the soul. On the ninth day, the last day of the mourning period, a feast is given.³

Tibetan Buddhism has a strong grip on the lives of the Dirang Monpa. At the time of the 1981 census, 99.69 per cent of the Dirang Monpa stated that they believed in Buddhism, 0.25 per cent were Hindus, and just one individual claimed to be a Christian.⁴ The previous Indian census, in 1971, had returned 100 per cent of the Dirang Monpa as Buddhists.



Dwayne Graybill

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