

Monpa, Lishpa

More than 2,000 Lishpa Monpa people inhabit hilly terrain near the Dirang administrative centre in the West Kameng District of Arunachal Pradesh in north-east India. 'They are distributed in three villages—Lish, Lish Gompache and Lish Gompalok. Their habitat is surrounded by dense pine forests. It has a cool and salubrious climate with moderate to heavy rainfall.'¹¹ Their main village of Lish is located just three kilometres (two mi.) away from Dirang town.

The Lishpa Monpa, who actually call themselves 'Kishpi' in their own language, are considered the most different of all the Monpa groups in India. One source states, 'The Lishpas differ from the rest of the Monpas with regard to language, origin and culture.'¹² Their distinctiveness is no doubt due to the fact that they claim to have come from Tibet,

before migrating down into today's India. Other Monpa groups say they migrated from Bhutan and areas to the west.

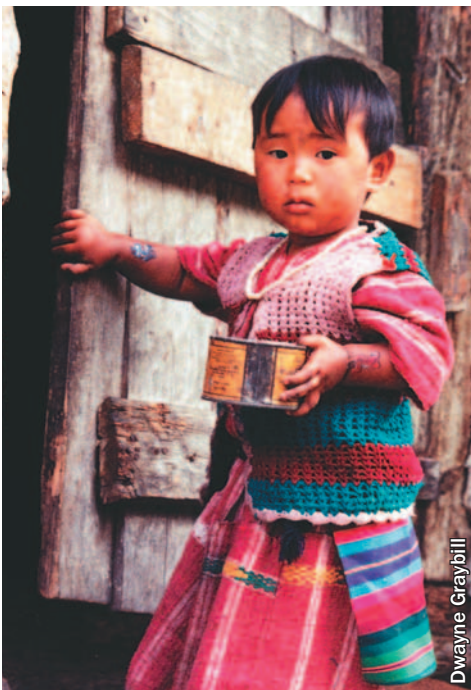
The renowned contemporary linguist George van Driem has said, 'Lishpa is a small group whose language, on the basis of available reports, belongs to the Kho-Bwa cluster. However, the Lishpa pass themselves off as "Monpa", a title to which the Lishpa are arguably entitled in view of the vague meaning of the term "Mon" and the large number of groups in Arunachal Pradesh, Bhutan and adjacent portions of Tibet who are designated by it. However, the Lishpa are linguistically quite distinct from the large East Bodish population group in Kameng District which goes primarily by the name of "Monpa" and amongst whom the Lishpa settlements are dispersed.'¹³

The 1971 census in India recorded 100 per cent of Lishpa Monpa people as Buddhists. The 1981 census returned 99.94 per cent of them as followers of Buddhism, in addition to one individual who declared he or she was a Hindu. It's possible that individual may have ticked the wrong box on the census questionnaire!¹⁴

Despite this almost complete profession of Buddhism, the Lishpa Monpas practise a curious mixture of traditional Tibetan Buddhism combined with shamanism and witchcraft. One source notes, 'The Lishpa profess a form of Lamaistic Buddhism, which has been mixed up with some local beliefs and practices. The lama imparts religious teaching among them. The Lishpa practice witchcraft and sorcery and are engaged in curing diseases.'¹⁵ Another publication states, 'Their shamanistic

priests are called *frimpa*. . . . A witch-doctor or shaman is called *bonpu*. Besides Lord Buddha and his different incarnations, the Lishpas have a traditional community deity known as Phu or Lishpu (the hill deity). . . . The Lishpas also send their sons to different monasteries in India to acquire a training in Lamaism.'¹⁶

There has never been a single known Christian among the Lishpa Monpa. Outreach to them has proven difficult. The Monpa are bound in extreme spiritual darkness. Prospective missionaries to them should be trained in spiritual warfare. A group of Naga evangelists who moved to Arunachal Pradesh to reach the Monpa in 2001 faced tremendous demonic opposition and intimidation.



Dwayne Graybill



Population:
2,060 (2000)
2,400 (2010)
2,800 (2020)
Countries: India
Buddhism: Tibetan
Christians: none known

Overview of the Lishpa Monpa

Other Names: Monba, Moinba, Monpa, Menba, Lish, Lishpa, Lish Monpa, Kishpi

Population Sources:
1,567 in India (1981 census)

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

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 100%

Practising Buddhists: 85%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: none

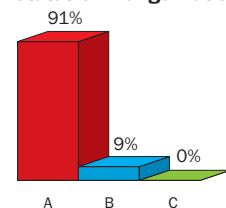
Jesul film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: MOB05

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