

Monpa, Tawang

Approximately 8,000 members of the Tawang Monpa tribe live in the secluded and mysterious state of Arunachal Pradesh in north-east India. They are one of the largest Monpa groups in India and, due to their proximity to the large town of Tawang, one of the most influential. Tawang is strategically located a short distance from the meeting of the borders of the three nations of India, China and Bhutan. Many major festivals and Buddhist ceremonies are held in Tawang, and visitors come from all parts of the state to participate.

In recent years Arunachal Pradesh has opened to foreign tourism, and visitors from all around the world come to Tawang, though only in small numbers at the present time. One local tourist brochure proclaims, 'Moored high up in the mountain ranges of the Himalayas, at 3,500

metres [11,500 feet] above sea level is Tawang—the beautiful land of the Monpas. With sobriquets like "The Hidden Paradise" or "Land of the Dawn-lit Mountains", this land evokes images of awesome mountain views, remote hamlets, quaint and sleepy villages, magical gompas, tranquil lakes and a lot more.'¹

The Tawang Monpa are named after their town, which in turn is named after the Tawang Monastery located there. This group, which has been granted status as a Scheduled Tribe in India, call themselves Brahmi Monpa,² while their language is called Monkit. The Tawang Monpa are different from other Monpa groups in terms of both language and culture. Despite these differences, most researchers lazily

presume that the various groups who call themselves 'Monpa' must all be the same. This is far from true, as the generic term 'Monpa' is used to designate people living in the lower areas of the Himalayas, rather than to indicate a cohesive ethnolinguistic or historic group.

The diet of the Tawang Monpa is varied. They eat and drink 'pulses, fish, meat, vegetables and *bung chung* (local beer brewed from maize, rice, millet, wheat or buckwheat). . . . They consume milk

products like *churpi*, ghee and butter. They eat beef, pork, mutton and the meat of fowl and yak. They also eat venison and the flesh of wild boar.

The fruits consumed are oranges, peaches, pomegranates, apples and sugarcane.'³

The 1981 census returned 99.94 per cent of Tawang Monpa as Buddhists, as well as four individuals who claimed to be Hindu. Tawang is the spiritual centre of the area and home to several important monasteries, including the Tawang

Monastery, where many festivities and traditional dances are held every year. Other important Buddhist landmarks include the 460-year-old Urgelling Monastery, which was the birthplace of the sixth Dalai Lama; the Rigylling Monastery; and the more distant Taktsang Monastery. Together these institutions house more than 1,000 monks, 700 of which reside at Tawang Monastery alone.

In the past few years a few Tawang Monpa individuals, mostly young people, have believed in Jesus Christ. They immediately faced strong pressure from their families and communities to renounce their new faith. Some did, but others counted the cost and continue to follow Christ as Lord. The Christians who brought the gospel to Tawang have been persecuted.⁴



Population:
7,350 (2000)
8,550 (2010)
10,000 (2020)
Countries: India
Buddhism: Tibetan
Christians: 10

Overview of the Tawang Monpa

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

Population Sources:
6,503 in India (1981 census)

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

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 99%

Practising Buddhists: 90%

Christians: 0.1%

Scripture: none

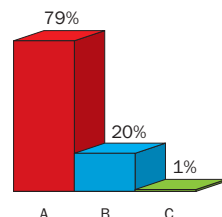
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: MOB06

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