FOCUSING THE FRONTIERS: THE BORDERLAND, IDENTITY, PERCEPTIONS AND IMAGININGS OF MONPAS OF TAWANG IN INDIA-CHINA BORDER

International Strategic and Security Studies Programme
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES
Bengaluru, India

M. Mayilvaganan
Nasima Khatoon
Sourina Bej
NIAS ISSSP Report: RT02-2017

Report by: M. Mayilvaganan, Nasima Khatoon, Sourina Bej

© International Strategic and Security Studies Programme, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru – 560012, India

December 2017
FOCUSING THE FRONTIERS: THE BORDERLAND, IDENTITY, PERCEPTIONS AND IMAGININGS OF MONPAS OF TAWANG IN INDIA-CHINA BORDER

A round table discussion on “Focusing The Frontiers: The Borderland, Identity, Perceptions and Imaginings of Monpas of Tawang In India-China Border,” was organised by the International Strategic and Security Studies Programme (ISSSP) of the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) at the NIAS, Bengaluru, India on December 18, 2017. The conference is a part of a broader research study being undertaken in the Programme on understanding the frontier and frontier communities at India’s Northeast region that shares the international border line with neighbouring countries.

The one day conference delved on the geostrategic significance of Tawang, the emerging occurrences/trends since 2012 in the Tawang tract, the socio-cultural and economic condition of Monpas of Tawang, their perception on development and border.

Since nation’s border security and well being of border people is intrinsically linked to its national security, comprehending the state of affairs at the borderland and gauging their perception particularly that of the younger generation is critical. Any gap in the understanding of the State and the security forces on the frontier peoples’ interest and correspondingly, any alienation and disparity of these tribal communities from the mainstream may encumber security and strategic presence of Indian troops in this strategic borderland.

Given that the local bordering community is one of the prime stakeholders in the management and development of borderland, one of the most important challenges is the integration of the local communities in the border management and borderland development. Today in the changing geopolitical scenario and the digital age, only with the informed consent of the community any intended development work in the borderland will be viable. Tawang, often known as the home of Mon tribes, is one such frontier in Arunachal Pradesh that has shared historical, ethnic, cultural and religious affiliation with Tibet (Tibetan Buddhism) across the border.

Prof Rajaram Nagappa, Programme Head (ISSSP) welcomed the participants of the conference and underlined the need for more policy oriented inputs regarding the Monpa tribes and Tawang and development of the region in particular, which is apparently neglected for decades. Dr. M Mayilvaganan, Associate professor of ISSSP and principal investigator of the project reflected on the theme and notably outlined the need for comprehensive research study on Tawang border line and its inhabitant population as besides few anthropological studies not anything significant is available on the topic - in scarcity of existing literature.
Mr. Claude Arpi, Independent Researcher on Tibetan Studies, Puducherry

**How Tawang became part of India**

The 1914 Simla Accord defined the McMahon line as the boundary between British India and Tibet. By this treaty Tibet relinquished a part of its territory, including Tawang, to the British, but China did not recognize it and the Tibetan regarded the McMahon line as ‘invalid’. Notably, Tibet refused to surrender Tawang partly because of the importance of the Tawang Monastery. After this, several attempts were made by the British to assert sovereignty over Tawang.

The situation changed decisively in 1950, when Tibet lost its autonomy and became a part of the People’s Republic of China.

Major Ralengnao (Bob) Khathing, a Naga from Manipur, who joined the British Army during World War II and with his distinguished military background and exemplary diplomatic skills, was instrumental in winning over the locals and establishing Delhi’s control over Tawang. Incidentally, in consultation with the Himatsinghji Border Defence Committee, in January 1951, during his assignment as an Assistant Political Officer in the Kameng Frontier division of the Northeast Frontier Agency, he brought Tawang under Indian administration. The local Monpas were ‘delighted’ by the arrival of the Major Khating, and his discourse about Indian nation. The local people were given a sense of confidence that India as a state had never exploited its people unlike the Tibetan who understandably harassed the local Monpas. Particularly, the Tibetan administration coercively collected taxes, which the local tribes often could not pay. In this way, Major Khating conquered the hearts and minds of the local Monpas and Tawang without shedding a drop of blood or firing a bullet.

The operation was done without any reference to then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru as he was greatly concerned that, the taking over of Tawang would create trouble internationally. However, interestingly, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in consultation with K M Munshi and Rajendra Prasad decided upon the operation in December 1950 and ordered Jairamdas Daulatram to go ahead with the plan. Later, during 1962 war, Tawang fell briefly under Chinese control, but China voluntarily withdrew its troops at the end of the war and Tawang came under the Indian Administration again.
Dr. Jabin Jacob, Research Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi

Arunachal Pradesh in Sino-India Border Dispute: Contestations and Politics

The Chinese renaming of six places at Arunachal Pradesh and nearby areas seem to be their strategy to internationalize the dispute over Arunachal Pradesh with India. The reasons that the Chinese offer for this exercise are fairly numerous.

Interestingly, Chinese are becoming more media savvy. In case of Doklam, the Chinese ministry was proactive in its response. Usually in case of an incursion, the Chinese media keep quiet, whereas the Indian media is vocal. But in case of Doklam, Chinese media was extremely hyperventilated and Indian media was quiet. Probably, the Chinese are learning to play the game internationally. Media management or perception management is extremely important in any international affair exercise. It is a part of public diplomacy and it appears the Chinese are getting better at it.

The Indian side does not pay much attention to this big movement of Chinese politics as there was a sense in Delhi that Chinese has put out a set of reasons for international consumption. One is that, it’s a natural process in which China is trying to standardize and bring everything to a particular mark and therefore, they are standardizing in far areas like Arunachal Pradesh. India did not see this as threatening or perceived that it could have any major implications. This is because China considered the Indian Territory of Arunachal Pradesh as part of their South Tibet and it may not be more than a symbolism for them. As articulated by some Chinese scholar, this could be part of their effort in creating ‘leverage’ over India on boundary dispute. Considering the timing of the renaming policy by Chinese, it would be a mistake if it is linked with the Dalai Lama’s visit because for Chinese, these are the part of long term exercises. China has a law on renaming places according to certain standard and more renaming is expected in future. The implications of Chinese renaming exercises in Indian Territory would mean the dominance of China’s position in a boundary dispute.

India too has renamed many places in Arunachal Pradesh: particularly by the Indian Army posted there. For locals, whether Chinese renaming their place or India does not matter. They want their local names to exist. What is a major concern is that there is hardly any publication available in India in the public domain on Aksai Chin but a lot of publications are available in China. This way China continues to keep their claim alive on territory.
within India as part of their public imagination. Whereas, India had nearly forgotten how to keep the discourse alive in its public imagination on areas, that are contested or strategically important.

In the end, it’s important to understand how Chinese scholars operate vis-à-vis Indian scholars. Chinese universities have pumped lots of money to target scholars from border areas/universities by offering fellowships. Understandably, these scholars are from vast areas of studies and they focus on how India’s border communities operate. A similar exercise on which Indian universities access Chinese knowledge does not exist, so this is one of the area which India needs to learn from the Chinese. But when Chinese universities put money for this, it also reflects certain government commitments and indicates some larger plan, which India needs to be aware of. In India there are very few universities which work on particular areas of China like Xinjiang or Tibetan Autonomous Region. Unless, India focuses on these areas, Chinese will be at an advantageous position in comparison to India.

Mr. Matthew Akester, Independent Scholar on Modern Tibetan Studies, Dharamshala

**Tibet’s relation with Tawang (Ganden Potrang era)**

Tibetan world includes a vast mosaic of people who are united by common written language, culture and religious heritage. They have enormous differences in themselves, but they have a sense of belonging – collective identity; including common values and sensitivity.

The Monpas of Tawang belong to the Tibetan world, but they are different from the central Tibetan in terms of their language, clothes, and foods. However, due to irony of history, the Monpas are the only one of these peripheral Tibetan people, who actually came under the direct rule of the earlier medieval state in the modern period which make them quite an interesting exception. This idea of a Tibetan world must have coexistence of strong regional identity, with an equally strong affiliation to a broader region. This is something that India should be able to understand better than anyone else, because it has a strong collaboration with tradition of Indian culture and notion of where India belongs to, unlike Chinese, who have only much stronger sense of statehood and political authority.
Ganden Potrang is the former name of Tibetan state that was formed in mid-17\textsuperscript{th} century and survived up to the communist reign of 1950. Before the Ganden Potrang era, the first century of the second millennium following the collapse of the Tibetan empire, the area that is referred as the Monyul was a strong regional power. It was a military antagonist with the Tibetan occupied areas and was under the control of Monpas until the fourteenth century. A considerable military effort was made under the Shyalpa regime on thirteen and fourteenth centuries to resist the people, they called the Dong. The Dong was the king of Monyul, probably based at Kalaktang. They controlled the area of Ladakh, on the border of Bhutan. These areas of southern Tibet were firmly under the control of Monpas until the military expulsion in the 14\textsuperscript{th} Century.

The geopolitical configuration as is known today is something of the mid-17\textsuperscript{th} century, when the modern Ganden Potrang in Lhasa came into existence. This is the period of historical massive change all across the Tibetan plateau. Also, this is the period when Monyul came into existence. The people of the area resisted incorporation into the Drukpa state. The conflict between them and their western neighbours, the people of eastern Bhutan was used by the grand alliance of the Ganden Potrang, the Gelukpa state and Mongol army lead a military campaign to reform the political arrangements of the plateau. This conflict was used in order to establish a presence in the area and this was principally done by a religious figure, Merak Lama, a disciple of the fifth Dalai Lama. The Monyul at that time also suffered a significant dislocation in terms of a large movement of people out of Tawang. This was also the time when the Tawang Monastery was established. The Monpas moved to places like Pemako, probably due to internal disputes. This is a classic example of state building process, which brought the Ganden Potrang regime into existence.

The birth of the sixth Dalai Lama in Tawang had geopolitical repercussion. The recognition of the incarnation of a head of state in a region like Monyul, which is culturally distant, and had very little relation with Tibetan mainstream, has changed the dynamics. Monyul came into existence at that time for these reasons and remained the only representative of central Tibetan religious, cultural authority in the entire south-eastern borderland, which was otherwise an entirely different cultural, religious, and historical background. Tibetan refers traditionally to the area (Monyul) as a La’og yul gsum that means ‘the three valleys below the passes’, namely, Tawang, Dirang and Rupak. Mostly, they had an only taxation relationship, between Tawang and Lhasa.

The economic significance of Monyul to the Tibetan state was substantial. The Monyul was the only rice growing region under its administration. The Monpas tax obligation included a range of exotic product, including spices, medicinal plants, honey masks, bamboo, and wild animal skin, etc. A lot of wood that was used to make the printing bloc in Tibet was brought from Monyul as tax obligation; in addition to that Tawang monastery also
exercised monk tax on the people. The main beneficiaries of this revenue were Loseling college of Drepung Monastery and the Yiktsang Lekhung, or palace secretariat in Tibet. Monpa did not even enjoy full citizenship right under the Ganden Potrang. So, basically Tawang used to share a colonial relation with Lhasa.

Apart from Monyul, the only other territory in what is now Arunachal Pradesh; controlled by the Ganden Potrang government was the territory of Pachakshiri, now known as Mechuka. Mechuka is not a proper name, in Tibetan tradition this place is known as Pachakshiri. It was a region which was initially converted by lamas of the Nyingma School in the 18th century, subsequently attracted certain Tibetan settlers, who were subject to taxation. In a sense, these indigenous people were not the part of the Tibetan world. Pachakshiri was included in Simla agreement along with Monyul, because the Mc Mahon line would have compromised the Tibetan interest (economic interest). Under the Simla Agreement they also offered compensation for the loss of that territory. Otherwise, the rest of the Arunachal Pradesh was called as ‘Loyul’, and were not part of Tibetan World and never has been claimed by any other state historically.
Consistent with the theoretical framework of nation-state, the state requires four major elements of being a country. They are: sovereignty, population, government and territory. In the prism of the nation-state theory, Tibet was a sovereign state before the Chinese invasion in 1950. At the same time, Tawang was historically part of Tibet because Tibet exercised full-fledged political and administrative power over Tawang and also the local Monpas accepted the legitimacy of the government of Tibet. Tawang was one of the most important frontier administrative units of the government of Tibet before signing the Simla Convention in 1914. Even after the Simla Convention, the government of Tibet had continuously maintained de facto power over Tawang till the mid-20th century.

The Monyl was amply governed under the territorial jurisdiction of the great 33rd King of Tibet, Choegyal Songtsen Gampo. The Monyl was located at the feet of supine demoness (Sermo-Gangyal), which was situated in south Tibet, where king Songtsen Gampo built a monastery called ‘Zen Sa Lhek Po’ for taming the supine demoness. This monastery was maintained and managed by the government of Tibet till country lost its independence in 1950. During the reign of the great king of Tibet, Choegyal Tri Ralpachen, in the 8th century, a few anti-Buddhist ministers used a ruse to get rid of the king’s elder brother from the kingdom. The king listened to the advice of these ministers and expelled his elder brother, prince Tsangma, to Lho Mon. But Prince Tsangma and his entourage settled in Mon and married Alo Dondup Gyal’s daughter. The couple had two princes. These two sons controlled fragmented local Mon rulers and founded a strong kingdom. Gradually, their successors ruled Mon peacefully.

Meanwhile, the Ganden Phodrang government of Tibet was founded in 1642. The great 5th Dalai Lama became the spiritual and temporal ruler of Tibet. He unified all the fragmented Tibetan princely states into a unitary system of government. In 1680, the 5th Dalai Lama assigned Marag Lama Lodoe Gyaltsa and Tsona Dzong Chief Namkha Drukdhak to
consolidate the administration of Monyul under the direct control of Lhasa. And also, the Dalai Lama tasked Marag Lama Lodee Gyalts to build a Geluk monastery in Monyul. Lodee Gyalts took the personal initiative to build the Tawang Monastery by himself. Subsequently, it became a centre for spiritual and political powerhouse of Mon, which was directly governed by Lhasa. This administrative structure in Mon managed by Lhasa remained firmly in place till 1951.

The physical geography of Monyul was outlined by Bumla in the north, which delimited Tsona and the Indian plains of Assam as the southern border. Tibet had no scientific technology to survey the geographical location of the region's size and shape. Therefore, the Tibetans measured the distance of physical geography by horse ride. This traditional method of measurement was also applied to Monyul to understand the range of the geographical landscape of the region. The Monyul was situated in the south of Tsona Dzong, east of Bhutan and north east of Assam. It was also rich in flora and fauna and natural lakes.

The Government of Tibet had full control over taxation, law and order in Monyul. Tawang Monastery collected taxes and imposed law and order. Two types of taxes were collected - summer and winter tax. These taxes were mainly collected in the form of food grains two times a year. Before collecting the taxes, Tawang Monastery and Tsona Dzong issued three rounds of letters to the concerned headmen of the villages. These letters were called ‘arrow letter’ because they were wrapped around arrows with a feather attached at the end. The gesture of these tax letters and arrows signified honesty and dedication as straight and as upright as an arrow. The feather at the end of the arrow signified speed, like that of a bird. Before the introduction of the Tibetan currency, the people of Mon were using cowrie shells and iron coins as the medium of exchange in trade and business. In the beginning of the 20th century, the 13th Dalai Lama introduced the Tibetan currency. Subsequently, the Tibetan currency was circulated in Monyul by replacing cowrie shells and iron coins as the new mode of exchange.

The Simla Convention changed the political map of Monyul. The Simla Convention was signed and sealed by the Tibetan plenipotentiary Lonchen Gaden Shatra Paljor Dorjee and secretary of the government of British India, Sir Arthur Henry McMahon, in 1914. This Convention discussed and demarcated the boundary between Tibet and the eastern Himalayan region of British India. Finally, the McMahon Line was drawn as the border between Tibet and British India. At the Simla Convention, the independent and sovereign state of Tibet legally ceded the Tawang region to British India. However, even after the Simla Convention, the government of Tibet exercised de facto power over Tawang till 1951, when India under the leadership of Major Ralengnao Khathing, took full control of Tawang. Soon after, the Tawang region was incorporated into the North East Frontier Agency.
Dr. Jigme Yeshi Lama, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Calcutta University, Kolkata

**China and Cultural Nationalism in Greater Tibet: Examining Cross border linkages in Arunachal Pradesh**

Recently, with the end of the 19th communist party of China, Xi Jinping wrote a letter to a group of Tibetan families who stayed in Tibet Autonomous Region, praising them for defending the borderlands and the Chinese territory.

The location of Tawang is very important because it is located near the border that China claims. Also, what is important that, Tawang raises the importance of the border, and also the peripheral spaces of nation-state. Much of these peripheral space is part of corporeal self, that is still in the process of becoming a part of a larger organism. Hence, the population residing in these areas, assume very important function and also very mechanistic function in many cases, turning into shields for various defensive purposes on time. So, selves are both physical as well as subconscious; they have to be transformed to mechanically be a part of corporial body of nation state.

In fact, the President Xi’s letter emphasised to this particular idea. This narrative was further emphasised in 2016. He elaborated in the manner that the local resident has defended their motherland and protected the country from division. So, China emphasise a lot on the importance given to these people; a step taken by China to move Tibetan herders to the borderland, so that they can legitimise their role in the defence of borderland. Thus, region like Tibet and Xijiang assume importance for China as the outer frontier of nation-state. The party and state are involved in coventional as well as non-conventional method to strengthen the whole of this border area. Also part of deployment of culture. This can be seen with regard to land of Apatanis.

Many Chinese articles promoted areas like Ziro in Arunachal Pradesh, as a great attraction for local tourist by terming Hoba Apatanis as Chinese tribes. In this context, it seems that present day China is going back to the elements of pre-modern period and also establishing its claim through pre-modern history, in which, culture is very significant. Yet, in a very fascinating manner post colonial Nation state like China, even including India are seemed to be involved in the instrumental usage of these elements to gain legitimacy. Many of these elements are remnants to pre modern part of sovereignty and still prevail and present in
the borderlands. This is seen much in the context of Tawang and other borderlands in Himalayan belt, which are much under the influence of the Tibetan cultural world.

Tawang is one that shared not only historical memory with Tibet, but also with Bhutan. The area was being seen as periphery in Tibetan areas of influence and served as an important borderland apart from being a meeting place for a number of cultures. However, whether the periphery an attribute imposed from the outside or whether it’s to a larger extent self indulgence is debatable. The region is in a larger sense a zone of interaction in the form of trade as well as pilgrimage. The relationship that Tibet had with other Buddhist cultural areas can be understood through a dual manner, one is through priest-patron relationship and another priest-disciple relationship. Its relation with Tawang can be understood through the later that is, priest-disciple relationship, where local population were disciple of numerous Buddhist masters or lineage based inside Tibet with base at Lhasa. Even the Tawang monastery can be deemed as an extension of Buddhist diplomacy conducted by the 5th Dalai Lama. It’s a similar kind of diplomacy that the Dalai Lama was conducting for the eastern part of Tibet, at Kham region, where he instructed one of his important monks to construct 13 great monasteries, to spread Geluk dominance. This policy is seemed to be extended to periphery of Tibetan world.

This exercise of so called traditional sovereignty is seemed to be incomprehensible to the modern Nation–State. According to political scientist Rudolf, ritual or cultural sovereignty is the minimum control extended by a dominant power; in such a situation one can see the presence of self regulating groups which have certain links to the centre through giving tribute or through weakly specified sovereignty. Also, there was an emulation of certain practices followed by the ruling elites of these peripheries. In the same manner certain practices that the ruling elite at Lhasa was practicing at Tawang.

Through the Buddhist cosmological world of Himalayan region Lhasa and Tibetan reincarnates used to exercise a form of ritual sovereignty in the region. This is a phenomenon which was much prevailed before the advent of the Nation State in Himalayas. Much of this traditional form of sovereignty is not greatly understood by modern nation state. This is seen in the case of Tawang too, as the region and its culture is symbolic of Tibet’s past as an independent state, which is outside of modern day China, which is anomaly for China. Therefore, they claim for Tawang as well as the whole of Arunachal Pradesh comes under this.

Before the intrusion of the modern nation state, Tibet as well as other political spaces had no farm identification between people and the form of politicized space, which is presupposed in the political ontology of the modern state. Many of these ideas are still present in Tawang where cultural ritual sovereignty resonates in the region. Chinese officials are seemed to be laying modern form of sovereignty through deploying earlier
traditional form of authority and statehood as seen in the context of Tawang. Hence it called for a possible trade-off between Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh claimed by China and Aksai Chin in Jammu and Kashmir claimed by India. These cultural linkages become important because it husk to a period when Lhasa exercised some degree of control over the region and later failed to incorporate in the corporeal body of Chinese nation state. Hence, Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh is a prosthetic body part which has to be attached to this whole body to complete the process of the organism. To justify the claim of Tawang, China is seemed to be strategically deployed this icon of traditional sovereignty. There is an attempt of incorporating the sixth Dalai Lama and his work as the national treasure of China, which is indirectly an imposition of claim over Tawang.

Finally, the peripheries of post colonial nation states are still seen in the process of being incorporated into the body politic of modern nations. The technique that they generally adopt is the technique of rationality and the technique of modernisation, but however to a larger extent, they also seem to be utilizing these ritual sovereignties or the techniques which are pre modern. However, there is always a danger of ritual sovereignty to assume its own greater agency. Much of these can be witnessed in Tibet, where a degree of autonomy to local elites and Tibetan Buddhist practices has led to arise in cultural nationalism. Thus, the instrumentalist implementation of ritual sovereignty to barter the claim of Chinese over Tawang can lead to a situation where it will be slightly possible for China to deny the idea of Tibetan nationhood and sovereignty, because that cannot be in one sense removed and this is being exercised in Tawang and other Himalayan spaces. Still the nation state is known to be indulged, as in the context of China, much in the selective amnesia and thus prevent such an issue from occurring.
Dr. Tsetan Namgyal, Assistant Professor, Centre for Inner Asian Studies Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

**Influence of Tibetan Monastery on Himalayan Borderland Communities**

The etymological meaning of Tawang (rTa dBang) is made up of two terms Ta or rTa, meaning ‘Horse’ and Wang, or dBang means ‘authority’ or power. It means a place where there are lots of horses and most of the work done by the horses during those times in this particular part of the world called Tawang. In the context of the Tibetan culture area then the first and foremost the historical connection and linkages are of great importance. Some of the pioneers of the historical connection and linkages between Tibet and the greater cultural area are person like the 6th Dalai Lama who was from Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh, India. Similarly ‘Lama Zhab drung Nawang Namgyal’ from Bhutan, ‘Arhat Bakula’ from Ladakh, ‘Agvan Dorjeiv’ from Kalmyk all have played an important role in their respective field. They all are known for their services whether it’s religious and political activism, they have put their mark.

The priest-patron relationship between Tibet and Mongols is associated with the historical linkages. Tawang monastery is a 17th-century legendary Buddhist temple affiliated to ‘Gelugpa’ school of traditional Tibetan Buddhism and also it’s one of the largest Tibetan Gompa in Asia. Although, in the true sense, the entire Tawang including the Tawang monastery was an integral part of the Tibetan district/province called ’Tsona,’ remained under the Tibetan jurisdiction till 1914. It was the winter station of the Tsona’s district head or king (Dzongpon) while the summer station was called Tsonadzong. There are two sources based on Tibetan tradition about the Tawang monastery. The first sources tell us that as what the oral tradition and other circumstantial shreds of evidence acclaimed that the earliest Gelugpa history in Tawang begins with the ‘Thangston Gyalpo’ a Gelug pa lama from Tibet who lived from 1385-1462. As he was a disciple and associate of the first Dalai Lama, Gedun Drub (1391-1475AD)

The other version is that a famous saint lama called Tanton/Thangston Gyalpo (1385-1462), better known as a saint engineer and patron of Tibetan opera who built many bridges across over rivers in and around central Tibet. He also came to Tawang and meditated in a cave near Karling towards the Southeast of Tawang. He built the suspension bridge (Chaksam) over the Tawang river near Kraling village Southeast of Tawang and the bridge is still exists which connects Mukto and Kitpi parts of Tawang. But it was founded by
Lama Merak Lodre Gyataso in 1680-81 as accordance with the wishes and auspicious direction of the great 5th Dalai Lama (1617-1682). He was perhaps the most notable person in the political history of Tibet besides being an erudite scholar who has succeeded in controlling over the greatest part of the Tibetan area though such power and authority cannot be called absolute. Since the Mongols and Manchus used very well, such charismatic figure of the Dalai Lama for their political gains and on the contrary the Dalai Lama also well utilized the Mongols and the Manchus for the realization of their own political and religious agenda. Therefore, the 5th Dalai Lama’s influence was so prominent in Tibet’s politics besides being one of the great scholars who knew Sanskrit and Indian culture and philosophy.

It says that the lama has abandoned his former monastery called Galden Tselling Gonpa in a village called ‘Mera’ in eastern Bhutan. He came to Tawang at the request of 5th Dalai Lama and founded the Tawang monastery. He was well known as Mera lama by the locals. It was when the Mongol King Gursi Khan’s troops invaded Bhutan in 1644. And it was the period when the sectarian struggle between the Drukpa and the Gelugpa schools was at boiling phase. Indeed, the 5th Dalai Lama requested the Mongol prince Gursi Khan to help Tibet in their war with Drukpas of Bhutan and accordingly, the Mongol troops invaded Bhutan and established the supremacy of Gelugpa against the other sects particularly against the Drukpa Kagyu or Drikung Kagyu. Though in 1646 Tibet and Bhutan reached to a peace agreement restoring the status quo, however, it could not sustain for long and such hostility broke out again, and Mongol and Tibetan troops came back to assist the Monpas forces in 1647. Therefore, it says that Tawang was constructed sometime between 1643 and 1647. Dalai Lama for the first time appointed a local Monpa Lama from Rama a village south of ‘Se La’ as head of the Tawang monastery in 2008, and he was the first Indian monk who appointed as the head lama of Tawang Gompha. Till then only Tibetans had been selected for the highest post from Lhasa by the Dalai Lama.

The other important historical significance of Tawang is that the 6th Dalai Lama (1683-1706) Tsangyang Gyatso was born in Tawang, then part of the southern borderland of Tibet. Along the side of the Tawang monastery there are three other ancient and oldest Buddhist monasteries which are associated with the Nyingmapa school of traditional Tibetan Buddhism built by Lama from Bhutan called ‘Sherbum’ sometime around 11th - 12th century AD as what Padmasambhava (Tib. Slo pon Padma ‘byung nas’) once professed the construction of these three monasteries when he visited this auspicious place of Tawang. It said that Urgyan ling monastery is associated with the 6th Dalai Lama, which later after the birth of 6th Dalai Lama Gelugpa forcefully took over the monastery into their control.

There are several Mon people residing in the different parts of India’s Trans Himalayas. Apart from Tawang ‘Monpa’ community, there are several other Monpas residing in
different parts of the Himalayas, such as Mon or Monpa of Bhutan, Sikkim, Ladakh, Lahul Spiti, Balti of Gilgit Baltistan. The core and direct question arise here is that whether these ‘Mon’ people are same ethnic group or different. As far as their origin and identity is concerned, it has become such a highly debatable discourse in today’s academic research. Yet, ‘Mon’ is also one of the prominent ethnic groups after the Dardic and Tibetan that found in Ladakh and Baltistan. ‘Mon’ people of Ladakh and Baltistan are considered to be an Indo-Aryans stock of people who came to Ladakh and Baltistan from Northern India to preach Buddhism as a missionary and they came to Ladakh and proceeded further towards Baltistan around the time of the 4th Buddhist council which was held under the patronage of Kusan king Kanishka at Jalandhar between 125-152AD. Incidentally, Northern India is also possibly referred to Himachal Pradesh, and North of Punjab as ‘Monyul’ in the Tibetan and Ladakhi sources of historical texts. Some sources also connect this incident to the enthronement of Tibetan king Langdarma who persecuted and annihilated Buddhism from his kingdom which Ladakh and Baltistan were a part of his empire.

Another version says that the Ladakhi ‘Mon’ a Tibetan term used generally to refer to the non-Tibetan people who were living or hailing from Southern Himalayas, which possibly refer to ‘Tawang’ of Arunachal Pradesh because of their non-Tibetan features. It seems that because of such distinctive, the majority people of Tibetans and Dardic cornered them; as a result, most of them left the Tibet. And those fewer in number stayed back and chose the profession of musicians for their livelihood who play the ‘Surna’ and ‘Daman’ at various festive, marriage and religious ceremonial occasion. They too are called ‘Mon’ and possibly regarded as being of someone inferior in status by the Tibetan. This forced many to change their profession and adapt the meanest work like blacksmith for their own survival. Although today they are in few numbers, but considered as low caste in the Ladakhi society.
When talk about social identity of different group of Northeast India, one have to understand the difference between, collective identity and social identity. Social identity refers to an individual’s affiliation to different groups. In case of collective identity, the cognition of the group and the individual shares been the part of a member of that group. We have different identity groups in this country as a result; we see different identity conflict in India.

As far as Tawang is concerned, it is a case of marginalised collective identity. ‘Marginalised’ refers to the two levels of collective identity, one, the ‘sub group identity’ and another ‘super ordinate identity’. Sub group identity means, the cognition of an individual’s immediate group is shared, and super ordinate identity means, an individual’s affiliation with broad identity like cultural identity, national identity, etc. In case of marginalised identity, the level of sub group identity and super ordinate identity is very low. That’s why many of us are not acquaint with the people of Tawang.

Since the problem of identity is basis of many conflicts, it very important to look at the People of Tawang who are ‘marginalised’ and their processes of integration. After the 1962 war, China left Tawang after brief occupation, yet, since then it’s a major issue for some of the Chinese scholar who compunction about Tawang. It might be the Chinese policy of legitimatising its claim on Tibet. Apparently, they are exploiting scholar from different parts of India and engaging them, as part of social engineering. But if we look at social engineering as a part of the strategy, it’s an indirect persuasion of technique; it’s an indirect social influence process.
Dr. Swargajyoti Gohain, Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Ashoka University, Sonipat, Haryana

Monpas in Tawang: An Anthropological Perspective

The history of Tawang can be understood in two phases: one is after 1950s and the earlier longer history of Tibet and Monyul. There has been different relation between Tibet and Monyul.

Monyul was the dark, low land and it was always the periphery of Tibet and part of Tibetan world. In 1957, it was manifested not only through the ties of rules but also commercial relation, the ties of religion and culture. People used to travel from Monyul to Bhutan and other Himalayan region, so there was a trans-Himalayan kind of circuit which was formed due to the movement of people and commodities. It continued till 1951, when the first political post was established in Tawang. But even after this it continued till 1962 war. So 1962 war mark this moment of transformation, although the boundary was delineated in 1914.

There were several reasons why the British chose not to advertise it. For many of the Monpas, Tibetan tax collector and Tibetan officers, the Monyul was still a part of Tibet even after the agreement between the British India and Tibetan Administration. After 1962, there was loss of access to this Trans-Himalayan circuits, which was then reoriented from north bound connection to south bound connection, towards India. Between 1962 and few years later that, the local people did not know how to get basic supplies as the communication towards Tibet was cut off and communication towards India had not started yet too. So it was a luminal transact period when supply had to generate very indigenously for some time. After this communication link, various development schemes, communication between India and Tawang started. So, all these things helped with the integration of Tawang in Indian political network. However, the marginalization of the Monpas continued in the present period too, especially, in Arunachal Pradesh.

According to a report published by Arunachal Pradesh Student’s Union, Monpas and Tibetan were clubbed together. Especially in 2005, there were a lot of reports about Tibetan refugees settling down at Tawang and considered as local. So, that kind of non-recognition of the native locals generated a feeling of regional marginalisation among Monpas. In 2003, T. G. Rimpoche, who came back from Karnataka, after completing
monastery study was concerned about the state of Tibetan Buddhist culture and tradition among the locals. He felt that people are slowly losing their connection with Tibetan cultural world. He wanted to find the way to revive back and joined politics and formed a monotonous region for Mon community, to demand autonomy for Monyul. Also, he went to the Karbi Anglong district to find out how the Autonomy model is effective. He also invited a Lama from Ladakh to be an advisor to the autonomy movement. The main reasons of this swift Mon movement were, basically because Monyul remains cut off from Assam and Itanagar, so they were not getting enough fund for development, and second reason was to preservation of Tibetan Buddhist culture. Interestingly, the issue of development brings together both the Monpas and non-Monpas of the region.

The cultural preservation focused to make the Tibetan language as language of instruction in primary schools of Mon. There are certainly overlapping in terms of landscape, religion and cultural tradition of Himalayan Buddhist community and Monpas. So, Himalaya ceased from a physical geography to becoming a cultural and imagined Geography. Materially also there was attempt to claim the local area as a Tibetan Buddhist geography. The construction of Monastery at the birthplace of the sixth Dalai Lama, in 2010, was also an effort to in this direction to make this site as a Tibetan Buddhist sacred site. The role of the monks, who come back from Dharamsala and Karnataka Monasteries after finishing their study, is a very important factor because the idea of the Himalaya as Buddhist geography and Monyul as part of this geography, is an idea that travels from this Tibetan Buddhist circuits centres to Monyul and helps to make this landscape, a truly Tibetan Buddhist landscape.
Mr. Yeshi Wangchu Kharma and Mr. Nima Dorjee, Junior Research Fellows, Arunachal Pradesh Institute of Tribal Studies, Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar

Culture, Education and Heritage of Monpas in Tawang

There exist a lot of contest and claims over the construct of Monpas identity. It would be surprising to note that the tribe of Monpas are not recognised in the Scheduled List of the Indian government, which means they aren't a bonafide tribe under the central government even though the Monpas are spread around West Kameng and Tawang. While the Monpa tribe in West Kameng has a heterogeneous mix, the Monpas in Tawang are homogeneous. The Monpas of Tawang have unique cultural and social heritage. Starting from their unique Bon religion, symbolic Booti script to the spiced cuisine, Monpas have sought to preserve this culture in the face of modernity which is fast changing the lifestyle of the tribe. Thangka painting, carpet making, weaving and wood carving are popular among Monpas. Principal Monpa festivals include the Choskar harvest festival, Losar, and Torgya. During Losar, people would generally offer prayers at the Tawang Monastery to pray for the coming of the Tibetan New Year.

The traditional dress of the Monpa is based on the Tibetan Chuba. Both men and women wear headwear made of yak hair, with long tassels. Due to the cold climate of the Himalayas, the Monpa, like most of the other ethnic groups in the region, construct their houses with stone and wood with plank floors, often accompanied with beautifully carved doors and window frames. Traditional Monpa cuisine includes local paneer, Solu (local chilli), dry meat of yak, solu krepu (dried boiled green chilli), ghee and chhurpi (paneer from yak milk), Khrangpa (made from maize grain), Salt Tea, Chhurpi chutney, etc. In the context of education, the Tawang Monastery has played a main role in imparting education to the people wherein it has been a rule that every second son in a family of three sons in the Monpas has to be sent for Monastic education.

A lot has been spoken on integrating the region to the rest of India. It is also important to note that like China’s change of names, India too does it, especially the use of Hindi as the frequent means of communication has also led to the loss of Monpa names of places in Tawang. There has been apathetic towards the policy of substitution of names for easy
understanding of mainland Indians. This can be seen as one of the faulty contours of integration or the so called "mainstreaming."

**Prof. Otem Padung, Professor, Department of Commerce, Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar**

**Understanding the Changing Contours of Socio-Cultural and Economic Life of Monpas**

Tawang bordering Tibet on the north and Bhutan on the west and south-west and West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh on the east, mainly inhibited by the Monpas was once economically a backward region of Arunachal Pradesh, mainly due to geographical isolation. However, during the post independence era, especially after attainment of full-fledged district status in the year 1984, the district has witnessed tremendous improvement not only in terms of road and communication infrastructure, but also in the area of socio-cultural and economic life of the Monpas.

During pre-independence period agriculture, art and crafts and cross border trade, etc., was the main source of livelihood among the Monpas followed by the prevalence of barter system. However, over the years people have shifted from traditional economy to modern commercial, economic activities like horticulture, business, hotel industry, handloom & handicraft industry, trade, job and other tourism related industry due to which today Monpas are one of the most economically advanced tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. Due to its strategic location, scenic beauty and rich culture, etc., both state and central government is giving lots of emphasize for the development of the district in terms of border area development and tourism. In fact, Tawang is one of the most preferred tourist destinations in the country.

The social life of the Monpas of Tawang is very traditional and they are strict about the maintenance of their culture and tradition. They are still following the old aged tradition which has been passed from generation to generation. There are a number of religious festivals that are being celebrated by them and such religious festival becomes a part of their socio-religious life. However, due to contact with the outside world in due course of time people of the district are also adopting a modern lifestyle. In this way modernization has been felt by the Monpas of Tawang and the effect of modernization has brought some
changes in the life style of the Monpas. Yet, they have not lost their roots and they are still maintaining the traditional and socio-cultural values in social set up.

**BORDER MANAGEMENT, DEVELOPMENT, SECURITY AND PEOPLE AT THE FRONTIERS**

**Ms. Neeru Nanda, Former Additional Deputy Commissioner at Tawang (Retd, IAS), New Delhi**

*Understanding Social and Political relationship between Government and Border Communities*

It is very important to understand and note that throughout the history till the amalgamation of Tawang to the Indian administration, the Monpas have been seen making choices. These choices have been made consciously. Not once the Tawang Monpas have sided with the Gelukpa powers against the Drukpas and had the 5th Dalai Lama and the Tibetans forced their armies they would have faced inevitable defeat in Tawang. They had attacked the Drukpas in Bhutan four to five times, but in Tawang the Drukpa armies couldn’t move beyond. The Monpas are again facing problems and again making choices. This time it is not an external enemy, but their own people who are governed. It is the way the administration and the governance have developed over the years. The ethos of governance has earlier been that administrator in Tawang needed to identify with the Monpas. There was no concept to mainstream with them rather they had to mainstream themselves with local Monpas.

The bureaucrat was to understand what their needs; problems are and devise an administrative solution accordingly. In fact, the NEFA philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru was against putting a large number of government servants in the area as government service will start appropriating the existing infrastructure and resources meant for the local people. This single line of administration existed for a long time and the deputy commissioner actually had the power of giving imprisonment up to 8 years. The centre of power was in front of them and before any judgement was passed the community had to be convinced. Thus, the administration had a human face and the level of transparency suited the Monpas’ own ingenious as well.
As far as the Gompa tax was concerned, it was a tax that the Monpa gave voluntarily. Even the system of village headman is a well organised system where self-governance was the hallmark like most tribal social custom in the Northeast. By the mid-80s the single line of administration was slowly eroded as “to be eaten away by white ants.” As the consciously replaced and the IFAS merged with IAS and the home ministry started playing a major role, it meant that every ministry and department will have to play its own role with a total disconnect from the local tribe’s needs and welfare. These multi-faceted departments meant inviting of contractual labours, development projects without the participation of the locals.

Meanwhile, politically, in Tawang there were a lot of schisms that disrupted the community approach wherein the community will take care of themselves and the Gompa. Now, the Gompa started getting help from the government. There exists political divisions and the governance doesn’t seem to have a face any longer. The anti-dam protest that culminated in the shooting is not a law and order incident. It is the weakening away of the administration that is neither settled neither single lined. With regard to the demand for an Autonomous Development Council, it is just historically illogical. There are several encouraging trends like the movement amongst the educated youth to find their own culture, identity and try to interlink with Buddhists in Ladakh and trans-Himalayan region.

Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman, Senior Research Fellow, Indian Institute of Technology, IIT-Guwahati

Territory, Roads and Transboundary Rivers: Infrastructure Developments in Arunachal Pradesh

The question of development intrinsically connected with the dam and road construction in Arunachal Pradesh is a sensitive issue there and especially in Tawang. The dam is being constructed on two rivers in Tawang - the Nyamjang Chhu and Tawang Chhu.

The number of dams proposed to be constructed in Tawang is six as against the 13 that was initially planned for the region in both these rivers. This has divided the entire region in a kind of an anti-dam and pro-dam discourse happening over the one decade. Arunachal Pradesh, termed as a land of the rising sun, has been put in the national imagination and
security calculations post the Sino-India war. The modernisation of roads and its impact on the local communities could be seen from three aspects: sovereignty, road and connectivity and Trans-boundary Rivers, largely the Brahmaputra river basin. Since 2008 the dam construction has fuelled discontent. Even after 55 years of Sino-India war, Tawang is relatively underdeveloped and the pattern of development is further lopsided.

The local perception on possession of territories; Chinese naming policy are definitely renounced by the Indian government. Local people’s perception is resentful of the slow pace of the development. They see this development in Eastern Himalayas as China *Meherbani*. If China won’t have claimed Arunachal Pradesh then, as a policy to deter China these projects won’t have been implemented in the border region. The territorial contestations between Delhi and Beijing have close links with the water question in terms of trans-boundary rivers.

In terms of road construction, the local perception is that it serves not only the local but also the purpose of the military preparedness of India, vis-à-vis China. The anti-China fear has been played up locally to push infrastructure development under the narrative that if China is building dam’s upstream, India should also do it. The huge labour inflow for the road and dam construction has been seen as a threat to tribal identity. The hydro power project in Tawang on the two rivers is a trans-boundary river that enters Bhutan. It is this trans-boundary nature that makes the hydro power development contentious. India has always sought to view the Chinese construction on the upstream to have an effect on the lower riparian states, but for India this dam construction will also bear an effect on Bhutan or that matter Bangladesh which are also lower riparian states. Also, the proposed dam would affect several Buddhist pilgrimage sites in Tawang, the Tawang Monastery being one of them. The NGT has halted the environmental clearance of the 7,018sqkm Nyamjang Chu Project and after the 2013 there are three big projects that have come up- Nyamjang Chu (780MW) and the other is Tawang I and Tawang II (750MW each). Ecologically the dispute is over the habitat protection of the black necked crane, which is also seen by the local Buddhist Monpas as the reincarnation of the 6th Dalai Lama. In 2016 there was violence and the protestors were fired at and at least 3 people were killed.

As far as the cumulative impact of upstream down-stream concerns, there seems to be solidarity between the communities of Tawang and eastern Bhutan against the dams being built. As seen in the Doklam incident tri-junctions are very important to a country’s security spectrum and this is also one of the tri-junctions. At the administrative level in terms of hearings, there is a need to accommodate local voices. The displacement of marginalised borderland communities and silencing of alternative world view of ecology needs to be guarded against. The Namami Ganga and the Namami Brahmaputra festivals versus the Buddhist-animist sects: how do we see these two incidents together? Chief
Minister Pema Khandu (who is from BJP) and BJP have also started campaigning that conservation of Brahmaputra as a sacred river is essential but what about the Buddhist sacred sites? Can the sacred sites in Tawang go in the name of development? One of the reasons is the democratic deficit. Lot of agendas are pushed through the national security lens and the grassroots voices are often missing. Arunachal Pradesh has two representatives to the Lok Sabha and the whole of Northeast is seldom united to speak on core developmental issues.

**Dr. Pushpita Das, Research Fellow, IDSA, New Delhi**

*Role of Border Communities in Border Management along Tawang Tract*

It is important to understand these key questions: What is the nature of the border and the border space in Tawang? What about the people there and the connection between border management and security? Is there a kind of alienation among the border communities? What could be the possible suggestions to enhance border management?

Arunachal Pradesh has a 1,073km long and disputed border with China (unrecognised McMahon Line). The claims and counterclaims culminated in the 1962 border war with China. After the war, the international boundary came to be known as the Line of Actual Control. This disputed nature of the border makes management of the border extremely difficult as it is not defined. There is a perception in the mind of China as to where exactly the line lay. As a result of difference in these perceptions there has been a lot of transgression both in the part of INA and PLA in each other’s territory.

While the nature of the border is disputed, the nature of the border space is marked by pervasive underdevelopment. If one look at the nature of the border, it is a rugged terrain and mountain (3522ft). The 2011 census has put the population of Arunachal Pradesh at 50,000. In case of connectivity, Tawang is connected with Assam with an all-weather road, but the difficult terrain, extreme climatic conditions and core engineering work by the BRO has left the roads in a perpetual state of damage and disrepair. This apart, Tawang is connected by three helipads.
As far as economy is concerned, Tawang has a subsistence economy and the main source of income is through road construction and tourism. But it was also observed that many are out migrating from border villages towards the urban centre as a result of which there is a casualisation of labour in Tawang as well. Today, there is a presence of heavy military personnel due to strategic and sensitive nature of the border. The role of people in border management is with regard to facilitation of legitimate flow of goods and people. Border management serves two objectives: security and facilitation of trade and travel. As far as Tawang is concerned, the international border with China is hard border. No formal trade and travel are allowed due to its contested nature of the borderline. Hence, the objective is directed only towards security concerns.

When Bob Khathing went on his mission in 1951, the Monpas overwhelmingly welcomed it primarily because of the exploitative nature of the Tibetan administration (harsh taxes, forced labour, acquisition of agricultural produce and severe punishment). Bob Khathing was very sensitive to these issues faced by Monpas and the first thing he did was to say that he will not interfere with the religious and social customs of the Monpas. He also said that no one will be forced to do any labour. This went on the long way to win the people’s mind. Apart from this, Bob Khathing was also quite ingenious. When he went there in 1951, the local population was a victim of the earthquake that occurred a year before and Khathing lent out a helping hand towards them by providing medicine and food. Later the NEFA philosophy was propounded from the Centre. By this no external influence will be there in the region and the indigenous population will be allowed to develop according to their genius. Hence, throughout the 1962 and after, the Monpas remained loyal to the Indian army. But at the same time it was realised that while they didn’t side with the PLA, they didn’t help the Indian army too by providing them with prior information and logistical support. Taking this point into consideration, Nehru during the time advocated a policy to ideologically and physically build up the frontier people.

The SSB (Special Service Bureau) was constituted in 1963. The main objective was to better integrate the people and instil among them a sense of national belongings. For this they started a number of training and refresher courses in which volunteers were picked, lessons in self-defence so that they not only defend themselves and their village but also play the role of stay behind role for the nation. They were trained in small arms and they were trained in such a way that the spirit of resistance was developed. These volunteers fanned out in the area and took up small programmes like civil welfare programmes like teaching in schools and organising medical camps. They came to act as the ears and eyes of government. The impact of the policy was assessed to be positive as the Chinese intelligence reduced considerably and it led to the development of a harmonious relationship between the border communities and the administration.
At present, there is no perceptible alienation among the people in Tawang. But there is a great deal of neglect due to pervasive underdevelopment and lack of access to basic amenities. This is further aggravated when by a simultaneous all round development across the borders by the Chinese government.

Apart from the argument on the preservation of traditional language, the Autonomous District Council (ADC) was also a means to address the issue of underdevelopment in the region. The decision-making on development is either centralised or in the state capital, which is located far away. In order to address the issue, it is important that these development decisions are made decentralised with participation of people and frequent execution and monitoring of these areas. It should be noted that being the first state where Panchayati Raj was introduced (1967), capital is sent directly from the centre. However, in ADC the aid for administration will be rooted through the state capital. This is deemed as one of the failures apart from corruption as the ADC will not have access to finances. Thus, there appears a question as to whether the ADC stood for development or just a means of identity assertion?

The State Assembly has passed a resolution for the creation of two ADCs which is waiting the consent of the centre. In lieu of this, in 2009 the state administration constituted the department of the Adhyatmik and Karmic affairs to cater to the special development demands of the ADC. Another point to be noted is that the demand for ADC has not gone well with the rest of the tribes in Arunachal Pradesh. Thus, it is important the government pays attention to the neglect and guard against any attempt to foster identity assertion as it has become even more urgent with the Chinese government paying more attention to border development.

With regard to border development, the Indian government has had the Border Areas Development Programme in 1998-1999. But it has not made much dent as far as underdevelopment is concerned. The reasons cited are faulty schemes and corruption. This year the government has said that every block should be developed as smart villages and this will become the yardstick for socio-cultural activities, prevent out migration of people along the higher ridges along the India-China border. Lastly, efficient implementation is the key with regard to ensuring proper border management.