

Ethno Zoological and Socio-cultural Aspects of Monpas of Arunachal Pradesh

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INTRODUCTION

Arunachal Pradesh is geographically largest state among the North East states. It is a part of Eastern Himalayan range situated between 26°28' to 29°31' N longitude and 91°30' E longitude. This state has vast tribal diversity, inhabited by 26 major tribes and 105 sub tribes. Each tribe has its own socio-religio-cultural practices (Sengupta, 1994; Solanki, 2002). Monpa is one of tribes of Arunachal Pradesh that inhabits at the higher altitudes varying from 10,000 to 15,000 ft. in Tawang and western part of West Kameng District (Fig.1). The districts share the border varying with Bhutan and Tibet, the growing place of Buddhist culture and traditions. Among the total population of Arunachal Pradesh about 5% is Monpa tribe. This tribe exhibits many similarities in anthropometrics, blood grouping and in other characters with other Arunachalee as well as with many other tribes of mongoloid characters of neighboring N.E. states (Goswami and Das, 1990). Monpas have also their own and unique system of the practices. Culturally they are akin

to the people of eastern most Bhutan (Sengupta, 1994). The Budha, the Dharma (righteousness) and the Sangha (order of monks), constitutes the Buddhist Trinity. These are the three sacred ideals of Buddhism (Choudhury and Duarah, 1999). Like the other tribal group of Arunachal Pradesh, Monpas are traditionally dependent on nature and natural products. Dam and Hajara (1981) have discussed the use of various plant resources in the lifestyle of the Monpa. They also use different animals and their by products in different ways for various purposes viz., food, zoo therapy, magico-religious, decoration and in other beliefs. Though the hunting is not common practice in Monpas but cowboy and people of very interior places still do.

Their unique faith and culture teach them the principles of non-violence but they exhibit the utilization pattern of animal resources as tribes like Nishy (Solanki et al., 2001), Adi and other tribes (Borang, 1996) in Arunachal Pradesh. Present study was conducted for understanding the faunal resources and their utilization pattern by this tribe in their socio-cultural and magico-religious practices.

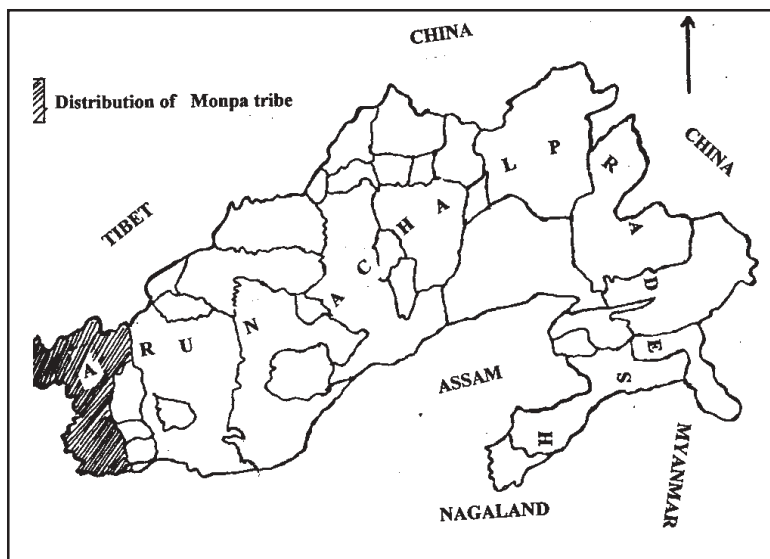


Fig. 1. Arunachal Pradesh

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present work is based on information gathered through interview with the "Gaon burha", village headman and village elders through questionnaire. The villages selected for informations were from semi-urban and rural localities where the local beliefs and indigenous practices are performed and have knowledge of identifying the wild life and their traditional use in their society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ethno-zoological and Zoo therapeutic Uses of Faunal Resources

Biological diversity is towards fast depletion because of large scale hunting, therapeutic uses and habitat alteration due to jhuming and seasonal uncontrolled fire in the most of the N.E. states (Harit, 2000, 2001, 2002). In entire northeastern region in general and particularly in the hilly states, the local trade of the wild animals, zoo-theurapic uses, different cultural as well as magico religious uses of animals is commonly practiced (Borang and Thapaliyal, 1993; Borang, 1996; Harit, 2001, 2002; Solanki et al., 2001; Solanki, 2002; Solanki et al., 2002; Kumar and Solanki, 2003). The sale of meat, as food supplement, of primates and deer species at public markets is still not uncommon in Arunachal Pradesh and in Indonesia too, (KSBK, 1998). Larger wild animals being utilized in various ways and their mode of utilization are described below.

1. Himalayan black bear (*Selenarctos thibetanus*): It is one of the largest mammal, which they traditionally use. Meat is used as delicious food item; gall bladder is used as medicine for malaria, typhoid, T.B and other serious fevers. They believe that these diseases are curable by such traditional folk medicine system. Gall bladder is dried, powdered and immersed in water and extract of that is used for therapeutic purpose.

2. Tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*): Meat of tiger is used as delicious food. Bones are dried, powdered and applied as paste for curing rheumatic and other body pain.

3. Leopard (*Panthera pardus*): Meat is used as food as well as medicine for typhoid, malaria and rheumatic pain.

4. Musk deer (*Moschus moschiferus*): It is one of the important and rare animals of deer group found in Tawang district. It has high ethnological importance, meat is used as food and musk is used for therapeutic purposes for malaria and diarrhea. Musk gland is highly priced item in national and international market.

5. Non-human primate species: Non-human primate species too are utilized in different therapeutic, socio cultural and magico religious activities. These primate species are described below –

- i). Assamese macaque (*Macaca assamensis*): It is one of the common primates of N.E. region being used regularly by tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh. Monpas believe that monkey meat has good medicinal properties and is used to treat the diseases like malaria typhoid, T.B., small pox, etc.
 - ii) Capped langur (*Trachypithecus pileatus*): It is one of the endangered primate species in the N.E region. Monpas of Wes Kameng district are utilizing meat as food and as medicine for malaria, typhoid dysentery and small pox, etc.
 - iii) Rhesus monkey (*Macaca mulatta*): Tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh also use it as food and therapeutic purposes. Adi people occasionally use meat of rhesus monkey for treating epidemic diseases like malaria, typhoid, cholera and pox etc. (Borang, 1996). They also have magico-religious faith under which the palm or finger or skull is hung above the main door to propitiate evil spirit, (Borang, 1996). Monpas use the flesh for treating malaria, typhoid and small pox but generally do not use this animal in magico religious practices.
 - iv) Hoolock gibbon (*Bunopithecus hoollock*): Meat is used as food and zoo therapeutic purposes for treating the serious fever, typhoid, malaria and pox. It is an endangered ape found only in N.E. region of India.
6. Yak (*Bos grunniens*): It is not found elsewhere in India except in Tawang in semi domestic condition. It is the animal of high utility for Monpas. Yak is sacrificed for food very often on various occasions. Hair and skin are used for making a variety of household items.
7. Birds: Monpas show no reservations for consuming various kinds of birds as food. The kind of bird they use depends upon its availability. However the following birds have zoo-therapeutic uses in addition to food.
- i) Hawk-eagle (shahin falcon): It is large bird, which is highly used by tribal people. Monpa people use its meat as food, fats for therapeutic purposes to treat the diseases like malaria, typhoid, dysentery and diarrhea.
 - ii) Jungle crow: This bird also has ethno zoological importance for tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh. Like other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, Monpas also use its meat as food and fat is used for treating the diseases

like pox, malaria, typhoid, diarrhea and dysentery, etc.

Mode of Killing of Animals

Though the killing and hunting of different wild animals is not common practice, but it is going on in interior villages. Different types of hunting tools and techniques are being used.

1. *Mechanical trap*: It is very common practical method and made up of bamboo strips. It is used for killing and capturing the bear, tiger, leopard, primates and deer.

2. *Gun*: Gun is very common now-a-days and effective method of killing wild animals of different categories including birds. Economically sound and politically influential people possess gun with valid license and lend to other for hunting and killing the animals. Rounds are issued for every six month without any asking about account of previous stock.

3. *Poisonous Arrow*: They also use bow and arrows to kill above mammals. Plant root extracts deadly poisonous in nature, are applied at the tip of the arrows for killing the animals. Other tribal groups use extract of roots of *Aconitum ferox*. The extract is applied on the tip of arrow to kill the animals. This plant is locally called as "chandu".

Animal Products and Their Use in Socio cultural Practices

The products of different animals are used in different socio cultural activities of the tribe. Different products of animals to make different things are described below.

1. *Hide shield*: It is locally called "Khuk" and traditionally used by Monpas as Armour of defense made up of dry skin of bear or yak.
2. *Coat*: It is locally called "Pakcha" and made from dry skin of sambar and other wild animals. They wear the coat to protect from severe cold and climatic severity but not during religious occasions.
3. *Cap*: It is locally called "Yama", which is a kind of head gear made from the tail hair of yak. It is used commonly by aged person of either sex during routine work.
4. *Hat*: There are three types of hats, one is locally called "Yangcha" and made-up of monkey hair and skin. Female folk use it only during cultural practices. It is round in shape, central part is made up of woolen cloth encircled by a stripe of fur of monkey. The

other type is locally called "over chamo", made up of skin of jungle cat. It is very beautiful and aesthetic, used only by male during their cultural rituals. The rest one is also made up of fur of jungle cat. It is also beautiful and aesthetic used by male during special occasions but the shape is different. It is also rounded but encircled by corrugated strip of fur of cat skin.

6. *Dao*: It is locally called "dang" made from iron, which is decorated with skin and hair of wild goat. Dao is used regularly as a tool while in forest and weapon of war and peace.

Ethnographic work, socio-political and economic formations about the northeast have been emphasized by various writers of colonial period. The colonial disclosures about the various tribal groups of this region were considered unbiased and post colonial writers have considered this information as the basis for further additions in the existing knowledge. Thakur (2001) has revealed the perception about the tribals of Arunachal Pradesh with considerable qualitative improvement, which initiated a revolutionary change in the researches on the socio-political, economic and other human dimensions associated with socio-religious activities. Thakur has mentioned the role of Monpas in trade in pre-colonial and colonial Arunachal Pradesh. They played an important role of intermediaries in trade between Assam and Tibet. While they used to go to Tibetan trading market during the summers, they usually visited Assam plains during winters. Produce like chillies, vegetable, dyes, hand made paper, and husked rice traded for Tibetan salt, wool and churpi. Masks, animal hide, chillies, etc., were also important trade items of Monpas to be exchanged with Tibetan rock salt, wool, woolen cloths and Tibetan dao resembling swords. Within the Arunachal also Monpas exchange butter, coats shoes, carpets, blankets, masks and yak cap, salt and beetle nut with Sherdukpen tribal group in exchange of cows, Assamese endcloths, mithun and animal-skins as described by Sharma (1961).

The trade fairs played very important role in trading pattern between Assam and Tibet. Dutta and Jha (1999) have highlighted the role of trade fairs and process of decline of such fairs during twentieth century's British period. In 1809 the fairs at Udalguri and Doimara in Assam clearly established the facts that animals and animal

products along with the forest based resources were the main items that were to be exchanged with finished products from European market through Tibet. These fairs for trade began to decline during later part of British period. In 1901 tea industry gradually expanded in Doimara in Darrang district of Assam, salt was imported from England, improvement of land connectivity put-off the demand of donkeys and horses and British colonial government entered in to direct foreign trade with Tibet by making some legal provisions viz; Anglo-Tibetan convention, 1904 and Commercial Treaty with Tibet, 1914. These trade fairs further discouraged by enactment of Inner-line regulations by forest regulators in Darrang frontiers (of Assam). These provisions led Monpas of Twang and East Kameng restrict their movements within sub Montana forest.

Hill inhabitant Monpas and Sherdukpens were reduced to the suppliers of cheap raw material available in forest in exchange of finished goods. These processes had significant affect on regional pattern of economy of the Monpas and their relationship with other adjoining tribals. This regional pattern of resource utilization went on taking diversified shape with the passage of time. Their use in folk medicines (zootheapeutics), in observing different religious and cultural practices, various recepies etc., became common and routine practices.

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KEYWORDS Monpa. Ethno Zoology. Zoo therapeutic. Socio Cultural. Magico Religious

ABSTRACT Arunachal Pradesh is, a tribal state, inhabited by 26 major tribes and 105 sub-tribes. Monpa is one of the major tribe inhabiting mainly in Tawang and West Kameng Districts

of Arunachal Pradesh. Monpas has unique socio-cultural entity and claim themselves Indo-Bhutan and Indo-Tibet in origin. In-spite of their ritual concepts in Buddhist culture use of animals as food and therapeutic use is not uncommon. Present communi-cation deals with the diversity of use pattern of wild fauna as food item, therapeutic and medicinal purpose and in socio-cultural practices.

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