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Monpas' Traditional Village Council and Customary Law
A Study of Transition with reference to Gender Participation

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Abstract

This study investigates transition in the Traditional Village Council and Customary Law of the Monpa community, focusing on the role-perception of women during the transition period. The independent samples t-test results showed a significant difference in villagers' perceptions before and after the transition period. This suggests significant changes in traditional village council and its customary law pertaining to the role of women. Additionally, the findings indicated a significant difference in the perceived status of women's participation and roles before and after the transition period. These findings suggest notable changes in gender dynamics and community governance. The findings of this study have important implications for community development, social equity, and the ability of traditional governance structures to meet the changing needs of society.

Keywords: Monpa Community, Traditional Village Council, Women Participation, Governance

1.0 Introduction

In the districts of West Kameng and Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh, the Monpas are one of the largest tribes. They are Mongoloid, believe in Buddhism, have Tibetan ancestry, and value peace. Majority of them are farmers with a side business in animal husbandry (Anon.2005). Since they inhabit the southernmost point of the Tibetan geographic range, they are called Monpa; term "Monpa" being derived from two Tibetan words, "mon," which means south, and "pa," which means resident (Chand 2004). The Mopas co-exist with other tribes of West Kameng area, including the Miji (Sajolang), Sherdukpen, Aka (Hrusso), and Khawa (Bugun). (Anon. 2005 and Dollo et al. 2006). Monpas are a people with a rich cultural history and its own set of rules. Although "Losar," or New Year's Day, is their primary celebration, there are

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other celebrations held for other reasons. Plants and plant products of ethno-botanical importance are used in diverse ways at each festival (Paul et al. 2010).

Monpa villages are often made up of a few homes, but some are huge mountain villages like Seru, Dungse, Jangda, Khet, Thongleng Khirmu, Kharsa, Namazing, Yuthunmbu, Gongkher, Mukto, Rho, New Lumla, Soleng, Kharteng, Mangnam, Gispu, Shoktsen, and Shakti. Boundary markers known as "Dhotaks" are found in every community which help them categorise the village's territory for the purpose of using its natural resources, such as grazing land, agricultural land, and forest products. The term "Khyemsa" in their native tongue refers to land used for building houses. The terms Lengsa, Nag, Broksa, and Keei-Lengsa refer to several types of land: land used for farming, land for grazing, and land for *jhum* (shifting cultivation). Community land, or Mangsa land, is used for private purposes with permission and paying a nominal tax, a glass of local beer (Baang Chang/Sin-Chang/Arak) with a silver coin and scarf (Dhar and Coomar 2004), as a sign of respect for the community, but it cannot be owned privately or used for commercial purposes. Gosa is the name of the separate territory that Monpa own. Every tribal hamlet has a primary entrance road that leads to Kakaling (a welcoming gate) which is a hut-like building decorated with religious imageries. Sacred stone structures known as *Manee* can be seen along every rural route. Manee is a structure, or stone shrine, that is placed beside a road and has wheels installed. These holy wheels are used by believers and intended for public prayer. Every traveller who rolls these wheels in the proper direction and whispers the holy chant "Om Mane Padme Hung" earns religious merits. In addition, “phan” (prayer flags) are seen all over with the *shorten* (stupa); they are hung as high as they can because it is thought that this holy flag guards against evil spirits (Ranjan et al. 2023).

The Monpa tribes, who live in the steep western regions of Arunachal Pradesh, have rich traditional knowledge and old religious beliefs. Their culture is strongly tied to the environment and similar to that of the other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, yet it is also different from them. Actually, religious values are deeply ingrained in their society. The rich traditional knowledge and practices anchored in traditional cultures that are related to the use and protection of animals, plants, and the environment as a whole have formed the social foundations for inter- group cooperation and the long-term sustainable growth of the local population. In recent years traditional religious practices, beliefs, and local government have been neglected, making biodiversity conservation very difficult (Bapu et al. 2020), but Monpa tradition prescribes nature conservation as religious sanctity.

Known as one of India's most botanically rich areas, Arunachal Pradesh's population mostly depends on forest-based food items and shifting agriculture for their sustenance and nutritional security. The state is abundant in traditional meals, drinks, preparation technology for their sustenance.

Traditionally, Monpas relied on food and medication derived from nature and natural goods. They are well-versed in the preparation of food, medicine, and edible plants, all of which are employed to enhance the welfare of the community. In recent years, they worry about the loss of traditional culture and the tradition of ethno medicine practice pertaining to the food and drink. They used to combine diverse drinks and fermented foods in different ways with traditional beverages. The preparation of fermented foods, boiled foods, drinks, and nutrient-dense traditional foods from a variety of native agricultural plants, forest products, and meat from both wild and domesticated animals is done by Monpa women, for which they are rich in diverse knowledge. These foods are important in daily diet basket as well as in other socio-cultural and spiritual occasions (Singh & Sureja 2006). These fermented foods have

significant medicinal qualities against several illnesses and ailments in addition to being high in nutrients. The traditional meals and remedies that the diverse tribes of Arunachal Pradesh use are quite similar. Customary diets are utilised to preserve health, while customary remedies are used to treat conditions including diabetes, hypertension, malaria, jaundice, diarrhoea, and dysentery. The Monpas are fond of non-vegetarian diet and make a wide variety of dishes from fish, crab, hog, yak, duck, and chicken along with games from the forests, and insects gathered from rivers and forests.

The nutrition of the Monpa community's new generation has changed significantly over the last 30 years owing to the intrusion of newer crop types, materialistic living, and the present tendency towards higher consumption of commercial processed meals. Transformation from traditional food use has been radical for tribal people around the world, as people have moved, often over the course of a single generation, from a diet in which the majority of nutrients were drawn from local food to a more generic diet of store-bought food, the majority of which is produced and processed away from locality and even prepared in metropolitan cities. The introduction of fast meals via the globalisation process, along with a reduction in the usage of traditional foods of indigenous tribes, has resulted in various ailments, most notably diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and other problems (Singh et al. 2007).

2.0 Literature Review

Some works on different theses are available on Monpas. Mayilvaganan (2020) has explored the socio-cultural setting of land and its impact on the evolving Monpa way of life and healthcare issues that the Monpas now confront.

Bapu et al. (2020) have examined how Monpa and Shertukpen beliefs affect wildlife conservation in Western Arunachal Pradesh. Purposive sampling from open-ended interviews with locals, religious leaders, and monks were used in the study. It finds interrelations between spiritual traditions and wildlife protection in Monpa and Shertukpen communities.

Singh et al. (2011) research is a socio-environmental study is grounded on traditional and interactive research observations. It illustrates the dynamics of the traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) of cultivating native crops in a rain fed agro-ecosystem utilising the leaves of *paisang* trees (quercus griffithii). The findings showed that the Monpa community's social capital is mostly composed of local traditions, customs, values, and ethical standards that are connected to their particular ecosystems.

The research by Li et al. (2020) on plant species used by the Monpa is based on three perspectives. These included (i) identifying and documenting the local names and applications of plants in Mêdog County; (ii) determining which of these applications included endemic or near- endemic species in this region of the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot; and (iii) determining the extent to which plant uses in Mêdog County represent socio-economic change.

The study of Sohkhlet & Menia (2017) demonstrates that there is little variance in demographic data across Monpas at lower and higher elevations. The results might be linked to the association between the Monpa population structure and education, income, or even the geographical dispersion of the Monpa people in Arunachal Pradesh. However, owing to the limited sample size in the study, particularly at high altitude, it is crucial to stress that there is room for further research on the demographics of the Monpas at low and high altitude.

Das & Baruah (2020) have studied the belief system of the Monpas in five villages in districts of West Kameng and Tawang on the paranormal aspects of disease. Arguments are forwarded to examine why some individuals become ill while others don't. These justifications stem from the society's beliefs in things like witchcraft, ghosts, a violated taboo, God's vengeance, etc.

Pandey et al. (2020) have demonstrated that the traditions maintained by many cultural and social organisations in the Monpa community had a solid ethical foundation while gathering plants, animals and deciding on food consumption patterns. They have argued for urgent need of projects that would educate people about the value of local livelihood support crops and engage them in food biodiversity-based natural resource conservation for the long-term management of local livestock and agricultural crops, as well as bio-resources for rural livelihood security.

Das et al. 2019 have examined the plants utilised for important commercial foods and medicinal plants by the Monpa and Nyishi people in West Kameng and Kamle District, Arunachal Pradesh. The 49 species of food and medicinal plants, both wild and cultivated, that have been documented from the biocultural landscapes of Monpa and Nyishi are regularly harvested and used by the local communities as anti-inflammatory agents, antioxidant foods, and for the treatment of a variety of illnesses, including liver cirrhosis and protective measure against cancer. These species also have the potential to be used as nutraceuticals, which could support the rural community's way of life and economy.

Pangging et al. (2021) have studied medicinal plants utilised by the Monpas of Arunachal Pradesh in traditional health practices. The goal of the study was to create a complete database on the medicinal plants used by the Monpa tribe by conducting a literature review of published research papers, book chapters, and other materials pertaining to ethno-medicinal applications of plants. Their study listed 143 plant species from 54 families that are used in the Monpa community's traditional healthcare system.

Adak et al. (2022) have compared fertility and death rates among high and low-altitude Monpas in Arunachal Pradesh. The index of overall selection intensity was substantially greater among the low-altitude Monpa (Dirang Monpa:1.6094) than among the high-altitude Monpa (Tawang Monpa:0.4540). The research showed that the high altitude environment of Arunachal Pradesh has affected the fitness of the Monpas.

Adak et al. in another joint work of 2022 discovered a relationship between body mass index and blood pressure. Mean SBP and DBP were significantly greater among the Dirang than among the Tawang Monpa. Blood pressure levels of Tawang Monpa were more closely associated to body mass index than their Dirang counterparts. Their research indicates that altitudinal pressures on biological features are more pronounced in highlander Tawang Monpas than in Dirang Monpas.

Mody et al. (2018) in a study of spending habits found that the monthly average spending of male respondents is much more than that of female respondents. Furthermore, the circle-wise analysis revealed that male and female respondents of Dirang circle spent a large portion. Critically, the research recorded that the level of living of Monpa farmers in the research area is fairly high, with per capita spending of Rs 81.6 per day on food. It is much greater than the Tendulkar and Rangarajan Committees' respective baseline daily per capita food expenditures.

Tsering et al. (2022) also discussed the ethnomedical applications of 128 wild plants that are mostly employed by a section of Monpas who are yak herders and herbal healers and live in the districts of Tawang and West Kameng. Each plant that has been documented is listed with its ethnomed applications, local names, relative abundance, and utilised plant components. The study was completed as a component of author's doctoral research.

Phukan & Baruah (2020) has attempted to ascertain how adult Monpas in Tawang district relate to their body mass index (BMI) and blood pressure (both systolic and diastolic). Using data sheet information on gender, height, weight, BMI, and B.P. was collected. Standardised processes were used to gather data. Obesity and hypertension are two prevalent and serious health risks that are interrelated. Undoubtedly, the purpose of the research was to establish a connection between these two variables.

Bhaboklang Sohkhlet in a study of 2020 indicated that even though the Monpa community has experienced several phases of transition over the last three decades, their current values for height and weight are lower than those of other Himalayan groups or youngsters in general in India.

2.1 Research Gap

Despite the extensive research on the Monpa community, a significant research gap exists in understanding the nuanced dynamics of the transition within their traditional village council system and the associated customary laws, particularly with regard to the roles and participation of women during this transformative period. Existing studies offer broad insights into the sociocultural fabric of the Monpas but lack a focused investigation into the specific changes, challenges, and adaptations within the traditional governance structures. This study aims to address this gap by meticulously examining how the Monpas' traditional village council is evolving, taking into account the intricacies of the transitional phase. Moreover, the research sheds light on the status of women's participation and their changing roles within the council, contributing valuable insights into the gender dynamics of governance amidst societal transformations. By combining a comprehensive exploration of the transition in the traditional village council, this study aims to offer a holistic understanding of the evolving socio-cultural landscape within the Monpa community.

3.0 Aim & Objectives

3.1 Objectives

The study is based on the following objectives:

i. To investigate upon the transition of traditional village council of the Monpas and associated customary law; and

ii. To study the status of women participation and role in traditional village council of the Monpas with regard to transition.

3.2 Hypothesis

i. There is no significant transition in the traditional village council of the Monpas and its customary law.

ii. There is no significant change in the status of women's participation and role in the traditional village council of the Monpas during the transition period.

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study aims to comprehensively explore the transition of the Monpas' traditional village council system and customary law, with focus on the roles and involvement of women throughout this transition period. Employing a quantitative approach, the investigation employs structured questionnaire to collect data from the respondents. The sample size was 280 and the respondents were selected using random sampling technique. One of the simplest methods for gathering data from the entire population is random sampling. A technique for gathering samples from a group of people known as random sampling ensures that every prospective participant has an equal probability of being chosen. Choosing a sample from a random group may often result in an accurate depiction of the whole population.

One of the most important parts of any research effort is data collection. In this study data from both primary and secondary sources have been gathered. The primary data are gathered administering questionnaire. Furthermore, publications, journals, articles, books, research papers, annual reports, and websites are used as secondary source for gathering relevant data.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria in this study refer to who are included and who are not as subjects. The first criteria relates to Monpa community members, residents of the traditional village, and consent to participate. Non-Monpa community members, non-residents, and those who did not consent to share information have been excluded.

4.2 Tools and Techniques Tools

In this research we utilised the SPSS tool for data analysis.

4.2.1Techniques

4.2.1.1 Hypothesis Testing (T-test)

A key statistical technique for determining the viability of research ideas is hypothesis testing, which is often carried out using t-tests. It determines if the observed facts substantially differ from what would be predicted by chance. When comparing the means of two groups to see if observed differences are statistically significant, t-tests are very helpful. T-tests are often used in scientific research because they help researchers make data-driven judgements and reasonable inferences from empirical information. There are several ways to run the t-test, including the ones listed below:

4.2.1.2 One-sample t-test

This function compares the given and extrapolated mean from a population against the mean of one group.

4.2.1.3 Paired sample t-test

This test technique **examines** the similarities and differences between the means of two measurements that are taken from the same subjects, objects, or equivalent units. The paired sample t-test is used if a sample is taken from the same group as the group of individuals being studied.

4.2.1.4 An independent two-sample t-test

This is used to compare and contrast the averages of two different groups, similar to having two distinct learning groups.

5.0 Results and Discussion

5.1 Demographic Variables

The demographic profile of the sample, consisting of 308 individuals, reveals a balanced gender distribution, with 50% male and 50% female respondents or participants. The mean age of the participants is 2.464, with a significant representation across different age groups. The largest age group consists of individuals aged 35-45 years, accounting for 29.9% of the sample, followed by the 18-24 years and 25-34 years groups, each comprising 25.0% and 24.4%, respectively. Those above 45 years constitute 20.8% of the participants. In terms of education, the majority of participants have received formal education, with 28.9% having no formal education, 26.6% completing primary education, 22.4% with secondary education, and 22.1% having education above the secondary level. The mean education level is 2.376, reflecting a diverse educational background within the sample.

Regarding occupation, the participants exhibit a varied distribution, with 32.1% identifying as farmers, 39.0% as business owners, and 28.9% falling into the "Others" category. The mean occupation level is 1.967, indicating a mix of agricultural, entrepreneurial, and other occupational engagements within the study population. In terms of income, the sample is distributed across three categories; with 34.7% falling into the low-income bracket, 38.0% in the middle-income range, and 27.3% categorized as high-income earners. The mean income level is 1.925, highlighting the economic diversity among the participants.

The demographic overview provides a comprehensive snapshot of the study population, encompassing gender, age, education, occupation, and income, contributing valuable context to the subsequent analyses of the traditional village council and the roles of women during the transition period in Monpa community.

5.2 Testing of Hypothesis

H1: There is no significant transition in the Traditional Village Council of the Monpas, and its Customary Law.

The hypothesis under examination posited that there is no significant transition in the Traditional Village Council of the Monpas and its Customary Law. To investigate this, data was collected from villagers on the subject before and after the transition period using questionnairs, and a t-test for equality of means was conducted.

Gender		
Population	Frequency	%
Male	154	50.0
Female	154	50.0
Total	308	100.0
Mean	1.500	
Age		
	Frequency	Per cent
18 - 24 Years	77	25.0
25 - 34 Years	75	24.4
35 - 45 Years	92	29.9
Above 45 Years	64	20.8
Total	308	100.0
Mean	2.464	
Education		
	Frequency	Per cent
No formal education	89	28.9
Primary education	82	26.6
Secondary education	69	22.4
Above Secondary education	68	22.1
Total	308	100.0
Mean	2.376	
Occupation		
	Frequency	Per cent
Farmers	99	32.1
Business owner	120	39.0
Others	89	28.9
Total	308	100.0
Mean	1.967	
Income		
	Frequency	%
Low	107	34.7
Middle	117	38.0
High	84	27.3
Total	308	100.0
Mean	1.925	

Source*: *Computed by the Author

Table 1. Group Statistics

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Traditional Village Council of the Monpas, and its Customary Law	Villagers before the transition period	154	2.3015	.98455	.07934
	Villagers after the transition period	154	4.5937	.40012	.03224

Source: Computed by the author

Table 1 presents the group statistics, illustrating the mean scores for villagers before and after the transition period. Villagers before the transition period reported a mean score of 2.3015, with a standard deviation of 0.98455, while villagers after the transition period reported a substantially higher mean score of 4.5937, with a lower standard deviation of 0.40012.

Table 2. Independent Samples Test

Particulars		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Traditional Village Council of the Monpas, and its Customary Law	Equal variances assumed	206.761	.000	-26.76	306	.000	-2.292	.0856
	Equal variances not assumed			-26.76	**202.198**	.000	-2.292	.0856

Source: *Computed by the author*

Table 2 presents the results of the independent samples t-test, examining both equal and unequal variances. The Levene's test for equality of variances yielded a statistically significant result ($F = 206.761$, $p < 0.001$), indicating unequal variances between the two groups. Consequently, the t-test for equality of means was performed with both equal and unequal variances assumed.

The t-test results indicated a highly significant difference in mean scores between the two groups, both when assuming equal variances ($t = -26.76$, $df = 306$, $p < 0.001$) and when not assuming equal variances ($t = -26.76$, $df = 202.198$, $p < 0.001$). The mean difference was - 2.292, with a standard error of 0.0856. Given the highly significant t-test results, we reject the null hypothesis (H1) that there is no significant transition in the

Traditional Village Council of the Monpas and its Customary Law. The data suggests a substantial and statistically significant difference in perceptions and experiences of the Traditional Village Council System before and after the transition period. This implies that significant changes have occurred in the Traditional Village Council System and its Customary Law within the Monpas community. **H2:** There is no significant change in the status of women's participation and role in the traditional village council of the Monpas during the transition period.

Table 3. Group Statistics

Particular	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Status of women's participation and roles during two different periods	Before the transition period	154	2.6028	.95433	.07690
	After the transition period	154	4.3517	.59120	.04764

Source: *Computed by the author*

The hypothesis (H2) posited that there is no significant change in the status of women's participation and role in the traditional village council of the Monpas during the transition period. To investigate this, data was collected from participants before and after the transition period, and an independent samples t-test was conducted. Table 3 displays the group statistics, presenting the mean scores for the status of women's participation and roles before and after the transition period. Participants before the transition period reported a mean score of 2.6028, with a standard deviation of 0.95433, while those after the transition period reported a notably higher mean score of 4.3517, with a lower standard deviation of 0.59120.

Table 4. Independent Samples Test

Particulars		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Status of women's participation and roles during two different periods	Equal variances assumed	81.002	.000	-19.333	306	.000	-1.74892	.09046
	Equal variances not assumed			-19.333	255.358	.000	-1.74892	.09046

Source: *Computed by the author*

Table 4 provides the results of the independent samples t-test, considering both equal

and unequal variances. The Levene's test for equality of variances produced a statistically significant result ($F = 81.002$, $p < 0.001$), indicating unequal variances between the two groups. Consequently, the t-test for equality of means was performed with both equal and unequal variances assumed. The t-test results indicated a highly significant difference in mean scores between the two groups, both when assuming equal variances ($t = -19.333$, $df = 306$, $p < 0.001$) and when not assuming equal variances ($t = -19.333$, $df = 255.358$, $p < 0.001$). The mean difference was -1.74892, with a standard error of 0.09046.

Given the highly significant t-test results, we reject the null hypothesis (H2) that there is no significant change in the status of women's participation and role in the traditional village council of the Monpas during the transition period. The data strongly suggests a substantial and statistically significant difference in the perceived status of women's participation and roles before and after the transition period. This implies that significant changes have occurred in the involvement and roles of women within the traditional village council system, indicating a noteworthy shift in gender dynamics and participation during the transition period.

6.0 Conclusion

The results of the study provide compelling evidence to reject both hypotheses (H1 and H2) related to the Traditional Village Council of the Monpas and the status of women's participation during the transition period. For H1, the data analysis revealed a highly significant transition in the Traditional Village Council and its Customary Law. Villagers reported a substantial increase in their mean scores after the transition period, indicating a significant shift in perceptions and experiences regarding the Traditional Village Council within the Monpas community. This suggests that significant changes have indeed occurred, potentially influencing governance, decision-making processes, and community dynamics. For H2, the findings indicated a notable and statistically significant change in the status of women's participation and roles in the traditional village council during the transition period. The mean scores for participants after the transition period were significantly higher than those before, signifying a positive shift in the perceived status of women within the council. This implies a substantial alteration in gender dynamics, indicating an increased recognition and participation of women in the decision-making processes of the Traditional Village Council. And this study suggests that the Monpa community has undergone significant transformations in both the Traditional Village Council and the roles of women during the transition period. The increased mean scores post-transition period indicate a positive shift in perceptions, potentially reflecting a more inclusive and dynamic governance structure. These findings could have implications for community harmony, social equity, and the overall effectiveness of the Traditional Village Council in adapting to changing societal needs.

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