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# UNIT 1 TRIBES OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this Unit, we will learn about the tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh. After introducing the tribals in the State, we shall discuss the flora and fauna, the resources available, the economic state as well as the tradition and culture along with the tourism of the State. The Unit also discusses in brief other minor tribes found in the State. By the end of this Unit, you should be able to know:

- Briefly the tribal scenario in the State;
- The resources in the State;
- The socio-economic life of the tribals in the State; and
- The tradition, beliefs and customs of the tribals in the State.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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Arunachal Pradesh, the land of the sunrise, is situated in the North-East of India. An imaginary line called the Mac-Mohan line determined the Northern and the North-Eastern political boundary of India and of Arunachal Pradesh with Tibet, now under China. The eastern boundary coincides with the Myanmar boundary. The boundary of Bhutan and of India coincides in the Western part of Arunachal Pradesh. Internally Arunachal Pradesh shares the southern and western boundary with the states of Assam and Nagaland. The first Indian soil to greet the sun is at Dong in Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh with the religious faith of the vast majority of the territory's people based on the worship of the sun and moon.

The erstwhile North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) which attained the status of a Union Territory on January 20, 1972 and was renamed Arunachal Pradesh achieved full-fledged Statehood on February 20, 1987. Its capital, Itanagar is located in Papumpare district which was once a seat of historical importance.

Arunachal Pradesh has an area of 83,743 Sq. km. which is four times bigger than the area of Manipur, Mizoram and Meghalaya, eight times of Tripura and 500 sq. kms. more than Assam. The state of Madhya Pradesh has the biggest area in India and

Arunachal Pradesh is one-fifth of its area. It is twice as big as Switzerland, Belgium and Denmark.

While it has the largest land area among the North Eastern states, its density of population, 13 persons per sq.km, is the lowest not only in the region but in the entire country. Arunachal Pradesh's Females to Males ratio of 893 is below the regional average 936. It has the highest ratio of land distribution per person in the region and in the country. It is 7.63 hectares of land to a person in Arunachal where as it is 0.67 hectares for North East and 0.31 for all India.

The state has 16 districts: Changlang, Lower Dibang Valley, Upper Dibang Valley, East Kameng, West Kameng, East Siang, West Siang, Upper Siang, Lohit, Lower Subansiri, Upper Subansiri, Papum Pare, Tawang, Tirap, Kurung Kumey and Anjaw.

Arunachal Pradesh's topography has hills, mountains, valleys and plains. Hills and mountains predominate. The great Himalayas spreads to the East and covers most of the Northern part of Arunachal Pradesh. Arunachal Pradesh with about 1,097,968 populations keeps perfect harmony with nature, having its own lifestyle, culture, festivals and dances.

The population of Arunachal is predominantly tribal, belonging to the Indo-Mongoloid stock. According to census 2011 figures, scheduled tribes form 68.78 per cent of the population as against an average of 8.6 per cent for the whole of India. There are about 26 major tribes, divided into as many as 110 sub tribes. The principal tribes are Adi, Nishi, Apatani, Tagin, Mishmi, Khampti Nocte, Wancho, Tangshangng, Singpho, Monpa, Sherdu-Kpen and Aka. These tribes speak their own dialects, though none have a script of their own.

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## 1.2 ABOUT THE PEOPLE

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The entire population of Arunachal Pradesh is divided into three cultural groups based on socio-political religious affinities.

The first groups of tribes profess Buddhism. They include the Monpas, Sherdukpens, Membas, Khamptis and Singhpos.

The second group consists of tribes like the Akas, Khowas, Mijis, Bangnis, Solungs, Nishi, Apatanis, Hill Miris, Adis, Mishmis, Tangsas, etc. These tribes practice a form of religion which may be called magico-religious beliefs and practices.

The third group of tribes are Wanchos and the Noctes who believe in a sort of animist religion and practice head hunting.

The *WONCHOS* inhabit the south-western part of the Tirap district bordering Nagaland. They are fond of wearing decorated headgears and heavy strings of beads on neck, arms, legs and ears.

The *NOCTES* inhabit the central part of the Tirap district, to the north of the *Wanchos*. These people have long and traditional contact with the people of the neighboring plains. Many of them are Vaishnavites.

*TANGSHANGS* is a common name of a group of people consisting of the Lungchang, Moklong, Yugli, Lungri, Have, Moshong, Rundra, Takhak, Ponthi and Longphi. These tribes occupy the Changlang district along the Indo-Myanmar front.

The *SINGPHOS* live on the banks of Teang and Noa Dihing rivers and extend towards

the southeast into the land of the Khamptis. They are a fine athletic race with developed Mongolian features. Their men are expert blacksmiths and the ladies are good weavers. They are Buddhists.

The *KHAMPTIS* live to the south of the Lohit district along the Kamlang, Dehing and Tengapani rivers. The Khamptis are good craftsmen, enterprising traders and skillful agriculturists. They are Buddhists.

There are three main groups of the *MISHMIS*, viz. IDU, MIJU or KAMAN and DIGARU or TARAON.

The *Idus* also called Chulikata by the plain people live in Dibang valley district. It is by the manner of hair doing that the Idus are distinguished from other tribes. The front hair is combed down on the brow and then cut straight across from ear to ear. The back hair is collected in a knot. The Mijus live in the Lohit district, east of the Taraons. The Kamans, unlike the Idus, keep their hair long. Agriculture is one of the main occupations of these people. The Digarus call themselves as Taraon. They are good agriculturists.

The tribes of the East, West and Upper Siang districts are mainly classified under the general title of 'ADIS'. They may be divided into three main groups: GALOS, PADAMS and MINYONGS, each of which can again be sub-divided into a number of sub-groups.

Along the International frontier in the Tuting area live the *KHAMBAS*. To the north along the banks of the Sipi river extends the *TAGINS*. The HILL MIRIS inhabit the lower Kamla valley. The *APATANIS* are settled in a valley in the Centre of the Lower Subansiri district.

The NYISHIS are divided into several exogamous clans. The Nyishi men keep their hair long and tie it in a knot just above the forehead and they wear cane bands around the waist.

The HRUSSOS are commonly called Akas which means 'painted' for they have a custom of painting their faces with black marks.

The KHOWAS (Bugun) occupy 7 villages in Tenga and Bichum vally in the neighbourhood of the Sherdukpens.

The PUROIKS (Sulungs) live mainly in the high altitude of East Kameng districts. The MIJIS call themselves Dhamai. They celebrate many festivals.

Arunachal Pradesh is one of the floristically richest states in India and possesses the largest number of flowering plants. This botanically rich state has many interesting plants including botanical curiosities, rare and endangered plants, economically important plants, new records and new species.

**Check Your Progress I**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer.

1) List the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

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## Flora and Fauna

Arunachal Pradesh is endowed with number of rare and endangered flora. Its forests are rich in magnificent trees of high economic value, the state is also abound with a number of ferns, a large number of bamboo species, conifers, rhododendrons and other interesting and wild ornamentals. The state is proud of having about 525 species of orchids which adorn the land and the land-scape. Arunachal Pradesh is also home to a number of medicinal plants.

The rich and diverse forest types provide natural shelter, food and habitat for wide varieties of wild animals. It is perhaps the state which harbors four major cats, i.e. Tiger, Leopard, Clouded-leopard and the Snow-leopard and also the rare felins species like the golden cats and the marbled cats. Seven species of primates and all the three goat antelopes are also found here. Arunachal Pradesh is the only place in India where Takin is found. The state is also rich in aquatic fauna and is a paradise for anglers. Mithun is a semi domesticated animal revered by the people of the state.

## Resources

Arunachal Pradesh's economy has been primarily agrarian and forest-based. The state has rich mineral deposits of Limestone, Dolomite, Graphite, Coal, Marble, Oil and Natural Gas besides many untapped Mineral Resources. Coal occurrences are known in all the districts and Limestone has been found in Kameng, Subansiri, Siang and Lohit districts and White Clay occurs in Dibang districts. In Tirap brine wells and salt springs are found. Mica and Beryl have also been reported from the Yachuli-Ziro belt in Lower Subansiri. Prospects for petroleum and natural gas are very bright.

About 60 per cent of the state is covered with rich forests and is known over the world for its rich biodiversity. There is abundance of Bamboo Cane, Orchids besides economically important tree species. The forests are rich in medicinal plants also.

The state with its many rivers and their tributaries provides immense potential for generation of hydro-power.

The land is mostly mountainous with Himalayan ranges along the northern borders criss-crossed with mountain ranges running north south. These divide the state into five river valleys namely, the Kameng, the Subansiri, the Siang, the Lohit and the Tirap. All these rivers are fed by snows from the Himalayas and countless rivers and rivulets. The other important rivers are, Namjangchu, Tawangchu, Papum Pare, Siyom, Simang, Tsering, Yamne, Sisar and Dibang. The mightiest of these rivers is Siang, called Tsangpo in Tibet (China), which becomes Brahmaputra after it is joined by the Dibang and the Lohit in the plains of Assam.

## Economy

Few decades past, the entire economy of the people was dependent on shifting cultivation and barter was the main medium of exchange. Almost everyone is basically a farmer and women are the main toilers in the field.

Accelerated work of the agriculture with better technical know-how, modern implements, better quality of seed and manures has started changing the entire system. With this disappeared the old relation between consumption and production.

## Tradition and Culture

The Sruti and the Smriti are equally the vehicles by which historic tradition has been preserved and cultural continuity is maintained in the area in oral literature. Written

records for several centuries exist among the Buddhist groups. Generation after generation, the major happenings in the tribe are versified and compressed in a style almost completely different from the spoken language; they are memorized and preserved for the posterity.

The people of this rich and colourful area are of many faiths and speak many tongues. The Nyishis regard the Sun-Goddess as the chief divinity while the Sun and the Moon are worshipped as the Donyi and Polo by the Adis.

The dance and the song are an integral part of cultural life of the tribes of Arunachal.

## **Tourism**

Part of the Eastern Himalayan ranges, Arunachal Pradesh is the most picturesque tourist destination of India.

With its numerous turbulent streams, roaring rivers, deep gorges, lofty mountains, snow-clad peaks, thousands of species of flora and fauna and an endless variation of scenic beauty, there is tremendous potential for development of tourism in Arunachal Pradesh especially adventure and eco-tourism. Arunachal has vast potential for offering various attractions to the tourists like river rafting, angling, hiking, trekking, mountaineering, hang gliding, snow skiing etc. For the wildlife enthusiasts and nature lovers, Arunachal has a number of wildlife sanctuaries, national parks and biosphere reserves; its lush green tropical forests teeming with wildlife.

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### **1.3 TRIBES OF ADI, NYISHI AND APATANI**

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Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh were known as Abor. They are concentrated in the Siang district. Adi tribe also belongs to Tibeto-Burman groups considering their language, tradition, culture and other aspects. The Adis have two main divisions the Boeums and the Bomis. Under each there are a number of sub-tribes such as Minyongs, Karkos, Shimonga, Bomdo, Janbos, Panggis, Boguns, Padams, Milangs and so on. The Gallongs are another group of Adis having seven sub-tribes.

By nature Adis are democratic having unique sense of history. They have a well organised village council called Kebangs. Polyandry is unknown but polygamy is practiced in Adi society. Adi women are very good weavers and Adi handicrafts are of high standard. Agriculture is the main profession and they prefer primitive jhum cultivation although they are gradually taking up settled cultivation recently.

‘Mopin’ is one of the principal festivals of the Adi tribe. The festival is celebrated for five days usually from fourth to eighth of April every year. This is more or less a cultivation festival like Nabanna of Bengal, Bahag Bihu of Assam, Pongal and Onam of South India.

### **Tribes of Nyishi**

The term Nishi or Nishang is derived from the word “Ni” which means “human being”. The origin of the entire tribal group is being traced to mythical figure called Abo Tani. He is believed to be of supernatural nature, while the first human being was At Nia, from whom Takr, the legendary ancestor of the Nyishis descended. Takr had three sons called Dopum, Dodum and Dol and these have given their names to three main branches of the Nishi group. Within each of the three main branches Dopum, Dodum and Dol there are several sub-branches which may be described as phratries and these in turn are divided into clans.

The Nyishi religion begins with a primary belief in the existence of the Wiyus, the spirits and the thought that the world is full of Wiyus. There are Wiyus in the jungle, on the lofty hills as well as in the shadowy recesses and inaccessible caves on the top of the tall trees, in the river and inside and outside the house. When the rains are incessant and the sky gets stormy with lowering clouds and when gale flows across the hills, the Wiyus in their hunting dresses walk all over the world in search of the souls of men. There are the Orums, the ancestral ghosts who return from the land of dead to carry the things they had forgotten to take with them. Both the Wiyus and the Orums make the people sick and even cause death, unless appeased with appropriate sacrifices. However, the Wiyus and the Orums are not supreme.

Ane Duini is the supreme goddess who controls the universe. No one can achieve anything in this world without her will and kindness. Duini also decides the fate of a man, whether he will be rich or poor. The name of Ane Duini is sung in songs on all important occasions. Below the rank of the supreme mother goddess, there is chains of spirits known as Wiyus.

The Nyishis are comparatively poor and have little cultural tradition of arts and crafts. Only few of them know weaving though there is some work in bark fibre. In agriculture the Nyishis still depend on slash and burn method. Major crop from Nishi field is paddy besides millet, sweet potato, etc. Nyishis keep mithuns, pigs, fowl, goat, etc. for the purpose of getting milk and meat.

The Nyishis are fond of different types of ornaments. Most important and valued ornament for the Nyishis is a Tibetan metal bell known as Maje. The Nyishis have four types of dances – Buiyasodon, Ropsodon, Northon and a dance performed as part of the worship of a spirit called Yab.

### **Tribes of Apatani**

The Apatanis are settled in Lower Subansiri district and known for their intelligence, applicability and traditional technology. Their neighbours and the people dwelling on the plains of Assam close to Lower Subansiri district often refer to them as Sardarjis of Arunachal Pradesh, firstly because of their hair style and secondly the Apatanis are known for their commercial knowledge similar to those of Sikhs. They were responsible for bringing the pashmina wool of Tibet to NEFA and carrying Assam's silk to Tibet and NEFA. Apatanis may be the only hill tribe who are perfectly commercial and who never lose transactions.

Apatanis are also known for their agricultural technology. Apatani is one of the few hill tribes who prepare irrigated or terrace cultivation instead of jhumming.

Apatanis' religion is a world of spirits and deities. They believe in a Supreme being who is supposed to be creator of all. The Apatanis believe that all the lives are created out of water and by evolution gradually the homo sapiens were created. The term Apatani probably was created from Abotani the Supreme God as per Dono Polo religion who created this universe and the life on it. In addition to the Supreme being there are good and evils spirits. To carry out the rituals the Apatanis have their priests known as Aaiah Galang and Lile Puioh who perform the rituals as a part of the priestly team.

Apatanis have many major and minor festivals. The major festivals are Dri festival, Morom festival and Ropi ceremony. Their festivals are mostly based on agriculture. The Dri festival is celebrated sometime in the month of June for a good paddy crop and for protection of the paddy crop from pests. The Morom festival is celebrated in the

month of January-February to ensure communal welfare and prosperity. The Ropi ceremony is basically associated with war. This ceremony is performed when a war party was successful in killing an enemy.

**Check Your Progress II**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) Write three major features of the Adi, Nyishi and Apatani tribes.

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**1.4 TRIBES OF TAGIN, MISHMI, KHAMPTI AND NOCTE**

The Tagins are Indo-Mongoloid tribe. They speak a dialect belonging to Tibeto-Burman group.

The Tagins believe in one Supreme creator, called Abotani, who created this earth and supposed to be the ancestor of human beings and tigers. Besides the Supreme Being they have a number of deities like Chonglotago the deity of the earth, Daulotago the deity of the sky, Chenkitrimet and Dokiriment their wives and Chongdur and Dodur their brothers who ultimately became the priests. There are other benevolent deities like togung, Ponung, Mindik and Rabdik who are responsible for joy and happiness. In addition they believe in a number of evil spirits residing in trees, sky, spring, rivers, hills, etc who are responsible for disease, death and miseries. Their culture, prayer festivals, etc. revolves around all these deities and spirits.

The Tagins are basically agriculturists. They live on agricultural products and meat they get by hunting wild animals and by killing domestic animals like mithun, pig, etc. They follow jhuming. Besides paddy which is the main agricultural crop they produce maize, pulses, vegetables, etc.

**Tribes of Mishmi**

Mishmi tribe mostly settled in Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh are one of the Mongoloid tribes of Tibeto-Burman origin.

The Mishmi society is divided into a number of exogamous clans and the larger clans are again divided into sub-clans. The members of clans trace their origin from single ancestor. The three major Mishmi clans are Idus, Taraons and Kamans.

Religious values of Mishmi's has high philosophical value and can be compared with those of Rig Veda. They also believe in spirits both malevolent and benevolent and follow a sort of magic ritual too. The different groups of Mishmis have different names for the supreme god. Idu call Him Inni while the Taraons and Kamans call Him as Jab Malu and Matai respectively. They believe the supreme God is beyond all human propitiations, and, therefore, no sacrifices or offerings are made to Him. But his name is invariably invoked on all sacrificial and ritualistic occasions. It is also believed that in case of death due to accident or unnatural death the soul becomes an evil spirit.

The religious rites and sacrifices of the Mishmis are conducted by the priests who are called “Goak” or “Kambrang”. The Idus recognise two classes of priests who have different functions. There are senior experienced priests who officiate at various ceremonies. The others are medicine men concerned with causes and cure of diseases more or less vaidyas.

Mishmi may be termed as a festive tribe or tribe of joy particularly since they believe any day of the year is auspicious for a ceremony if provision exists and animals and birds available for sacrifice. Name of the festival and upto certain extent varied from clan to clan. Di-Batai is the main festival of the Taron clan of Mishmi tribe. Tamla or Takka is a festival celebrated by sacrificing animals every year to please village deity who protects the village. Reh is one of the most important individual festivals celebrated by Idus for six days. The festival is so expensive that this can only be celebrated once or twice in life time. During the festival outsiders are not allowed to enter the village. Most of the festivals of Idus are related to agriculture.

Mishmis are an exception to sense of village community which is very strong among other tribes of Northeast. A Mishmi village is merely a scattered collection of houses. Obviously village chief system or autocratic or democratic ruling system is almost absent in their society.

Handloom and handicrafts are in the blood of Mishmi people. Spinning, extraction of fibre and weaving are work of Mishmi women while the men are famous for cane and bamboo work.

### **Tribes of Khampti**

The Khamptis are a quite, industrious and progressive people of Shan or Tai stock who migrated from the Bor-Khampti country near the source of the Irawaddy about 200 years ago. The Khampti tribe is populating the south-eastern Arunachal Pradesh, in Lohit district on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra in the vicinity of Sadiya of the Assam valley.

Khamptis means tied to the spot or Gold spot (Kham=stick to, Ti=spot; also Kham=Gold). When they entered Assam, first they settled round Tengapani. Later on they captured Sadiya from the Ahom Governor, the Sadiya Khowa Gohain, and the Khampti chief himself became the Khowa Gohain. The tribe thus settled itself round Sadiya.

The Khampti language is an Indo-Chinese tongue of the Tai family. They have an old traditional script of their own.

The Khamptis are far advanced of all the Arunachal tribes in knowledge, arts and civilisation. They are Buddhists and have regular establishments of priests well versed in the recondite mysteries of their religion.

The Khamptis have two great religious festivals in the year, one to celebrate the birth and the other to mourn the death of Gautama.

In agriculture the Khamptis are advanced. They have acquired the agricultural pattern to the standard of their Assamese neighbours. They grow paddy, mustard, potato and vegetables. They rear cows, buffaloes and other domestic animals. The milking of cow is known to them. The rice beer, which they call Thon, is a favourite beverage among them. Khamptis are business minded people.



In marriage Khamptis observe the clan exogamy and tribal endogamy. The bachelor's dormitories for the young women are in existence. The young girl on attaining puberty is sent to the dormitory. The dormitory is administered by old maidens. Monogamy is a rule but the chiefs do have more than one wife. In case of polygamy the first wedded wife is considered the lady of the house. The cross-cousin marriage is allowed. The society is patriarchal.

In inheritance, the wealth is distributed equally among the sons. Their society is divided into social hierarchy. Highest is the chieftain's family; then the priest class which is a noble class respected by all other classes as it is concerned with performance of religious rituals; third is the class of common people.

## **Tribes of Nocte**

Bulk of the Nocte people are settled in Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh.

The Nocte society is patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal. It is organised under chiefs each controlling a number of villages, and the major chief receive tribute from subordinate villages. The chief is called Lowang. The chief and his descendants form a separate class called Lowangjat, while the commoners are called Sanajat. Each of these two classes consists of many clans or lineage group.

A striking feature of the Nocte community is its Chums or physical divisions of the village. All clans within a particular 'Chum' have a common name.

The Noctes believe in the existence of a supreme being whom they variously call Janban, Jongban or Tesong, who is ambivalent having both good and evil aspects. He causes miseries and troubles as well as brings joy and prosperity to human beings. They also believe in a number of spirits and deities. The benevolent spirits and deities dwell in houses and protect human being from sorrow and miseries. They are worshipped regularly offering food and other items in order to get their support to fight the malevolent spirits. The Noctes came under the influence of Hinduism through Vaisnava movement in Assam. Vaisnavism was carried to the Nocte area by one Naga Naruttam about 250 years ago when Ahoms were the rulers of Assam.

The Noctes believe that after death, the soul substance called Mang or Ja Khang, returns to Ulim or Balum a place in the sky. It may take the shape of a sky and appear on the day when the dead body is disposed of. In case of abnormal deaths they believe that the soul turns into evil spirits.

The Nocte family consists of father, mother and their unmarried children. The sons except the eldest one leave the ancestral house after marriage and establish their new houses. The married sons are however permitted to stay in the ancestral house with their wives if there is sufficient accommodation for them till they attain parenthood. The father is the head of the family and he is succeeded by his eldest son.

## **Religious Ceremonies**

One of the most important ceremonies of Noctes is called Jauban Chowom. It is performed once or twice in a year in each village. Time of the performance of the ceremony varies a good deal from one place to another and is connected with harvesting of millets. During the ceremony the rice beer or 'Zu' is prepared and kept in the house of the priest. Persons from neighbouring villages are not allowed to enter the village during the ceremony. Duidam is the ceremony performed by the priest near the village

gate by offering chicken to spirit Tesang and Sangaam to save villagers from calamities and diseases.

The principal festival of Noctes is Loku, celebrated around the month of July-August, just after harvesting finger millet. The word 'Loky' is derived from 'Life' meaning to drive out and 'Rang-ku' or season. Loku therefore literally means to drive out of the old season or year.

The sowing festivals are Kopkhut and Challiwan. The festival Ronglo is connected with harvesting of millets while the Chalow is with that of paddy. Noctes rely on jhum cultivation or slash and burn agriculture. Of late however some of them have started wet-rice cultivation. Their crops are paddy, millet, arum, tapioca, maize and a few local pulses.

### Check Your Progress III

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) Write a short note about the religious beliefs of the Nocte tribes

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## 1.5 TRIBES OF WANCHO, TANGSA, SINGHPHO, MONPA, SHERDUKPEN AND AKA

Wanchos mostly stay in Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh. The villages are controlled by hereditary chief. There are four Wancho classes, each class is formed on the basis of marriage relations and each one of them receives social recognition according to their gradation and status in the social hierarchy. The highest of these classes are the Wanchams – Chiefs enjoying special privileges and position in the society. The lowest of these classes are the Wangpans, the commoners. Between their classes, there are two intermediary classes – the Wangshas and the Wangsus, who sprung from the inter class marriages. The Wangshas are the descendants of Wangham men and Wangpan women, where as Wangsus are said to have descended from marriages between Wangpan men and Wangham women.

The Wanghams, the Wangshia and the Wangsus practically control the society and the Wangpans merely obey and abide by the decision of the higher classes. This is similar to the principle in Hindu society where Sudras are born to carry out orders of Brahman, Kshetriya and Vaishyas.

The wanchos have a vague belief in the Supreme God of the Heavens called Rang, the benevolent creator. They believe that the benevolent Sky-God Rang is eternally opposed by Bau-Rang a god of the earth and the male destroyer. These two deities are brothers. The Supreme God Rang created men and animals and he takes care of them, where as Bau-Rang is a destroyer of human beings and the animals. Besides these two principal God there are a number of spirits Wanchos believe in and worshipping and appeasing the spirits and deities are part of rituals during festivals. The spirits propitiated by the Wanchos are Baua, the benevolent jungle deity, Lamlongkang, the rainbow spirit, Hung Wang a malevolent water spirit and so on.

The smallest unit of the Wancho society is the family consisting of father, mother and their children. They also follow a joint family system. The grown up boys of the village sleep apart in bachelor's dormitories. There is no separate dormitory for unmarried girls. When a family becomes too large and it is difficult to accommodate, the younger married sons establish separate houses for their families while eldest son occupies ancestral house and continues to look after his old parents. In the joint family all the members take their meals from a common hearth. The management of the kitchen and the cooking of food are the responsibilities of the eldest female member of the family, who is wife of the head of the family.

There are a number of Wancho festivals it varies according to area of inhabitation. However, most important festival of Wanchos is Ojiyele which is celebrated during March-April just after sowing paddy. It is celebrated by all Wanchos irrespective of area of inhabitation. Dancers are held around long ceremonial pole called "Jangban" planted for the occasion. Sakila and Chachai festivals are held to celebrate the sowing of millet and paddy. Chachaban is the festival celebrated on the occasion of harvesting of millet. Besides this Laudongle, Chachiywan and Poatak-Le are also the festivals connected with harvesting.

Wancho women are expert spinners and weavers. Wanchos have a keen sense of colours and combination. Wanchos are also known for wood carving. The central motif in wood carving is a human head. The head hunting is the inspiration not only of the wooden or brass heads worn by the warriors, but also of carving on drinking mugs and pipes, of head hunting scene on the pillars of dormitory and human figures carved on baskets. Wanchos are good craftsman for manufacture of cane and bamboo items and are well known blacksmiths as well.

Wanchos too have a number of dances for various occasions. Hambowshon dance is performed after construction of chief's house. Dongthanepu dance is performed when a member of the Chief lineage dies. Gallangpo is the dance performed after the enemy is defeated and his head, the hands and feet are placed at the entrance of the village.

### **Tribes of Tangsa**

Tangsa people belong to Tibeto-Burman group occupying the eastern hills of Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh.

The word "Tangsa" means hill people (Tang = hill and Sa = people). The Tangsa story of migration alludes to the fact that search for cultivable land and inter-tribal feuds compelled them to migrate from their abode across the Patkai and settle in present place of inhabitation a few centuries ago.

Tangsa tribe is divided into sub-tribes and clans. Important Tangsa sub-tribes are Haves, Moklums, Khemsings, Ron-Rangs, Mosangs, Yoghis and Lungchangs. The sub-tribes are divided into a number of ancestral exogamous clans. The clan organisation regulates the marriage but not the political life of the people. There is no clan distinction among the Tangsas.

The Tangsas believe in an invisible supreme being, who lives in the heaven and is personified by the names of Sikia, Pra or Rang Kau Hawa. He is considered to be fountain of blessings for mankind. But they do not worship Him nor do they propitiate Him by offering sacrifices, for He does not harm human beings nor He desires anything from them. The Tangsas believe in a number of deities or spirits called Thangs or Sangs or Jubedis to whom sacrifices are offered. The Tangsa appease the malignant deities or

spirits by performing rituals according to a sort of a magico-religion system. There is a deity called Himmatai to whom they used to sacrifice human beings earlier.

The profession of a priest or diviner in the Tangsa society is not hereditary. Anyone whether man or woman having acquired sufficient knowledge of the procedure of the craft may aspire for the position. The tradition is handed down orally from generation to generation. The priest is considered to be a pious man. The Tangsas also consult the Omens before embarking on any work be it hunting, agriculture or fishing. The Omen is indicated through the position of legs of the sacrificed chicken or through the bamboos placed on the fire.

Tangsas believe in curing diseases by propitiating spirits who they consider to be responsible for various maladies. They celebrate three major agricultural festivals, one before sowing, second after sowing and the third when seedlings grow about 30 cm high. The greatest festival of Tangsas is Lamra or Perong, which is celebrated after the harvest.

### **Tribes of Singpho**

The Singphos live in the foot hill of the Miao-sub-division of Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh, adjoining the southern boundary of the Lohit district. The Singpho boundary is blessed with the river Nao-Dihing and the tributaries of Burhi-Dihing and this gives indirect help to their economic stability.

The Singpho also belong to the Tibeto-Burman group linguistically. They have mongoloid features, stout figures and average height. A basic point that differentiates Singphos from other tribes of Arunachal is that they have their own script which is based on Shan script.

Like other tribes the Singpho also have clan system or class system. The Singphos are divided into a number of clans or groups each under a chief. Their clan organisation is based on lineages or sub-lineage groups. All these groups are patrilineal.

The Chief of a Singpho group has several privileges, but his authority is not absolute. He is in theory the lord of all lands in the territory under his jurisdiction, but in practice individual rights in land are also recognised. The distinction between the chief and his people is in some measure bridged by the elders who command great position and influence in the society and can exercise separate jurisdiction in the event of the chief's failure.

Traditionally the Singphos had their own religion which was more or less an animist or magico religion in nature. They had a number of spirits whom they used to worship. The malevolent spirits known as "NATS" are propitiated regularly by sacrificing bulls, cows and chickens. They also used to have several house deities like "Niglche", "Pungphoy", "Natkum", etc. But about a century back a revolutionary change took place in their society. A Buddhist monk called Dingla Chrato baptised them into Buddhism. He built a Buddhist monastery at Phakial village. The Singphos call this temple "Samuksing" where they go for pilgrimage. Though they have embraced Buddhism Singphos have not given up their old faith. Singphos have priests to carry out religious rights. Those priests who carry out traditional rituals are known as 'Drumsa' while the Buddhist priests are "Punguya".

The principal Singpho ceremonies are based on Buddhism. Sangken, an important Buddhist religious festival is observed by them. The festival is observed for three days.

The occasion is the ceremonial bath of the image of Lord Buddha. They also have certain agricultural festivals, one of which is known as “Sanjo” which is held before the sowing of the seeds. On this occasion they sacrifice one pig and four hens to appease the deity of agriculture. “Namangchole”, another festival is characterised by offering of rice grains and sacrificed animal to the deity of agriculture in order to protect the plants from pests and insects. “Manglup” is the death ceremony performed by the relatives of the deceased with the villagers. The Singphos cremate the body but again bury the bones of the deceased during the Manglup ceremony.

When a village is established each family is allotted with a plot of land. One can construct house in a suitable site within the limits of the plot allotted to him. But one will have right over the land as long as one occupies it. If one abandons it to settle in another village, one loses the right of ownership.

As regards agriculture is concerned the Singphos may be considered as an exception among the tribes. They practice both dry and wet rice cultivation of paddy by transplantation using better implements for tilling. Besides paddy and millet other crops include potato, maize and mustard.

### **Tribes of Monpa**

Monpas are Mongoloid in look speaking Tibeto-Burman language mainly settled in western part of Kameng district belonging to Mahayan Buddhist sect. Considering style of dresses they use and the language they speak they are similar to the people of eastern Bhutan. In addition to Buddhism which came later many Monpas believe in their traditional religion known as Bon religion. Bon religion is based on a cult of local deities. Close to many Monpa villages there are sanctuaries consisting usually of several flat stones or stone structures used for the burning of incense, where rites in honour of local deities are performed. Bon culture is considered as original culture of Monpa tribe.

Unlike most of the tribes of North Eastern region Monpas have recorded history in their own script found in gomphas, a script similar to those of Bhutan and Tibet. Economically Monpas are not as good as neighbouring tribes. Monpas employ primitive way of agricultural methods. They produce rice, wheat, barley, millet, potato, maize from their fields. They also have the tradition of animal husbandry. They breed mithun, yak, jiatsa (cross between mithun and Indian cattle), nuptsa, dzo and dzomu (cross between yak and jiatsa) and sheep. Traditionally sheep breeding is for the purpose of eating meat. It may also be noted that unlike other tribes Monpas consume milk regularly and extract butter out of the milk of yak, mithun and cow.

Monpas are expert in weaving woollen carpets in their traditional way. Monpas of Tawang are expert paper makers who are producing hand made papers since ages.

Monpas are lovers of songs, music and dances. But all their songs do not carry meaning always. Torgya is one of their principal festivals celebrated every eleventh month in the year to drive away evils of the year. Losar is the New Year festival held in February. Buddha Purnima is one of their principal festivals celebrated for a month with meditation by elders, prayers by all and dances by younger generation.

### **Tribes of Sherdukpen**

Sherdukpen is a Tibeto-Burman tribe settled in western corner of Arunachal Pradesh. They profess Buddhism simultaneously with magic-religions. They call themselves as

“Senji-Tonji” while people of Assam refer them as Sat Raja or the people with seven kings. They have similarity with neighbouring Monpas and Bhutanese but at the same time they have their own separate cultural identity.

Sherdukpen society is divided into two classes according to social rank, each class again divided into several clans. The upper clan is known as Thong and this comprises of clans of Thungdok, Thungshi, Thango, Krime, Mosubi, Wangdza, Klengtung and Lamaguri. The lower class is referred to as Tsao, and within this class there are the five clans of Megedzi, Shindzadzi, Dingla, Monodzi and Midzidzi. Inter marriage between two classes are normally not allowed.

Sherdukpen is traditionally a trading tribe. They used to play important role in the trade between Assam and Tibet.

### **Tribes of Aka**

Aka tribe is found mainly in the Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh. In their own dialect the Akas call themselves Hrusso. The term Aka is derived from the Assamese word Anka literally meaning painted. They are so termed so because of their custom of smearing their face with the mixture of the resin obtained from the *Pinus excelsus* and charcoal. The Akas speak their own dialect belonging to the Tibeto-Burman group. They are Mongoloid in appearance with yellowish brown complexion.

Aka religion is shamamistic animism. Due to proximity to Buddhist neighbours, they were influenced to an appreciable extent by Buddhism. Some of their villages have chortens and prayer flags. Shaman, the Aka priest is important in every Aka village as his service is sought on every possible occasion. A shaman is distinguished from the others by the fact that he wears a yak's tail on his back and his pill box hat is covered with tiger or leopard skin. Any young person having supernatural power can become a Shaman. The post is hereditary.

According to Akas, Bhusluao is the supreme creator who is creator of all living beings. In addition to the supreme creator, they have a number of spirits both benevolent and malevolent whom they worship for happiness.

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## **1.6 TRIBES OF TANGAM, KHOWA, KHAMPA, MIJI, PADAM, MINYONG, MEMBA AND YOBIN**

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The Tangams live along the upper reaches of the Siang and the Nigong or Yang-Sang Chu in the northern extremity of the Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. Tangam is an off shoot of Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. As per story they had larger population earlier but after the Shimong tribes attacked them their population reduced. The present Tangams are descendants of those who survived.

Tangams belong to Tibeto-Burman group having no script of their own and the cultural heritage is carried forward orally from generation to generation. According to their belief they trace their origin from Pedong Nane, the mythical mother of all beings. Originally they had eight clans such as Ngakko, Ngakki, Kondo, Jodo, Mudo, Doron, Daji and Tamut. It is said that some of these clans have gradually vanished.

Tangams divide the year in two seasons Lobo and Digin, i.e. summer and winter respectively. The Tangam divide the year in twelve lunar months. The Tangam new year starts from the month of Biro, i.e. March.

Like any other tribes, the festival or ceremony of Tangams is also agriculture based. Their religion is similar to Dono-polo religion practiced by most of the tribes in Arunachal Pradesh. They have a number of spirits or Gods for different purpose that they appease during the festival. Pedong Nane is the mythical mother of all human beings whom all Tangams pray. Gumin Soyin is supposed to be the God of Tangam who protects them from all evils.

### **Tribes of Knowa**

Knowa, numerically a smaller tribe, is of mongoloid origin and linguistically belong to Tibeto-Burman group. They do not have their own script hence do not have their own written history. They have a village chief in each village whom they all obey.

Agriculture is the principal occupation of the Knowa people. Their principal agricultural produce is paddy since rice is their principal staple food. Besides paddy, they also produce the pulses, vegetables, fruits, etc. They follow slash and burn agricultural method. The only tool they use is sickle. To avert pest attack they use a number of magico religion rituals as they believe that pest attack is due to the harmful spirits.

Knowas believe in one Supreme being who created the universe and life there in. There are several deities and spirits inhabiting different places who are either benevolent or malevolent whom the Knowas worship and try to keep them happy by different ritual meant for different purposes. The rituals are conducted by the village priest following certain set procedures. Most important deity is Khatchoaih who is responsible for better crops, wealth and thus happiness. Similarly there are several other deities whom they propitiate.

As Knowas are agriculturists their festivals are based on agriculture or cultivation. Most important festival of the Knowas being the Chasoai festival they celebrate in the month of January-February. They perform the rituals connected with this festival for eight days, to ensure their prosperity and a good harvest as well as to drive away the evil spirits from the village so that these cannot afflict them with various calamities.

### **Tribes of Khampa**

The Khampa tribe is one of the mongoloid tribes settled in Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. Their language belong to Tobeto-Burman origin. Since they do not have any script of their own, they do not have any recorded history. Therefore it is difficult to predict regarding their origin and their path of migration. From the legends that were carried forward since generations orally, it is presumed that this group of people came to India to settle from Tibet sometime long before the birth of Gautam Buddha.

Like any other hill tribes of the region, Khampas are also principally agriculturists practicing slash and burn method of cultivation. Paddy is their principal produce besides millet, barley, vegetables, fruits and pulses. They rear mithuns, cows and pig for consumption.

This is one of the Buddhist tribes who were converted to Buddhism by one of the disciples of Lord Buddha named Padmasambhava whom the Khampas call Uzer Rimboche. Prior to the era of Buddhism, the Khampas used to have a number of malevolent and benevolent spirits who used to propitiate by several types of traditional rituals. Chanting of the sermons of Lord Buddha and following scriptures of Tripitaka, Pancha sheel, Ashta sheel and Dasha sheel is part of their rituals. With introduction of Buddhism reading Pali language was also introduced in their monasteries. Jataka stories are told and retold to the boys. This tradition is still being continued.

The Losar is the principal festival of the Khampas. They celebrate this festival twice during the year. The first Losar is celebrated as a sort of New Year festival during their first month Dawa Tamgbo (January/February). It is celebrated for a week for prosperity, good health and happiness. Similarly it is again celebrated for one week during last month of the year, Dawa Chungipath (December/January) for the same reasons.

### **Tribes of Miji**

The Miji tribe is a mongoloid tribe speaking a dialect belonging to Tibeto-Burman group. It is not basically a Buddhist tribe but certain influence of Buddhism is noticed in their culture. Their religion is based on nature worship and is a world of spirits and deities usually associated with nature.

Mijis are basically agriculturists. Rice being their staple food, paddy is obviously their agricultural product. They also produce pulses, vegetables and other food requirements. Bamboo is their main industrial raw material. They live in a bamboo hut with thatched roof, they make bamboo baskets for storing and carrying goods, they wear bamboo ornaments, bamboo rain coats and hats while eat bamboo shoots and bamboo pickles. Their loin looms are also made of bamboo. In brief it can be said that their skill is basically centred on bamboo.

Mijis believe in one Supreme Being they call Thenerang who is also supposed to be their ancestor and ancestor of the tiger. Besides “Thenerang” there are several deities or spirits both benevolent and malevolent. They have two house deities Huthungi and Nachuni who are benevolent and are worshipped for happiness in a house. There is a deity called Sijangni who lives in the sky and Sajongni who lives in the earth both benevolent.

The principal festivals for the Mijis is Chidang celebrated for eight days usually in the month of December. They observe this festival for eight days in which the sky deity Sijanguni, earth deity Sajanguni and other deities living in the hills and rivers are worshiped for a good crop and welfare and prosperity of the whole community. A ceremony called Dhoromiji is performed when an epidemic breaks out in a village to drive away evil spirits responsible for the epidemic. During successful killing in a war a ceremony called Dommadeiniuwai is performed for protection of the slayer from the spirit of the slain enemy.

### **Tribes of Padam**

Padam tribe is settled in Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. Like other tribes in Arunachal Pradesh, the Padams too are mongoloid tribes speaking a dialect belonging to Tibeto-Burman group.

Like any other hill tribes the Padams practice jhuming or slash and burn agriculture. Besides paddy they produce maize, pulses, barley, job tears and so. Rice beer is their favourite beverage which they prepare by fermenting rice.

The social structure of the Padams as well as their family structure are similar to other Indo-Mongoloid tribes. The village administration is run by a village council headed by a village headman assisted by elders. All bachelors live in a bachelors dormitory and are the volunteers who help the entire community in war and peace, in joy and sorrow. The Padam village administration runs with absolute discipline, justice and equality. For sickness there is village doctor who known as Ayit Miri who treats the sick with his magic religious rituals.



Solung Etor festival is one of their agricultural festival performed during the month of March-April. This three days festival is performed after construction of a big circular fence around the village so that cows and mithuns cannot get into the field and able to damage the crop. Solung Ponung is celebrated just after the last weeding and before harvesting. Epak ceremony is performed when a person is sick and Keming ceremony is performed after the head hunting.

Delong dance is one of the most famous Padam dances they perform during Solung Etor festival. The leader of the dance, usually a man is called Delong Miri. The Keming Inam dance is a war dance performed during Keming ceremony after successful war. Ponung dance is associated with Solung festival. The leader of the dance party is a man known as Ponung Miri. Elong dance is a group dance performed by girls for amusement, especially performed on happy occasions like marriage, house warming ceremony, feasts, etc. The leader of the dance may be a man or a woman known as Elong Miri. Epak dance is a ritualistic dance performed by their magico priest or doctor while treating a patient. This dance is supposed to drive away the evil spirits.

### **Tribes of Minyong**

Minyong tribe is settled in Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. Like their neighbours the Padam the Minyongs are also principally agricultural tribe. In fact they have much in common with the Padams including linguistic similarities, economic activities and even the names of their festivals and dances.

The Minyongs are basically a agricultural tribe. They practice slash and burn agriculture. It is only recently that they have started practicing terracing but in a very limited extent. The agricultural tools are also very primitive mostly the tools like hoe, axe, sticks, etc. Even with a meagre production most of the rice they convert into liquor. Paddy is their main agricultural crop; besides this they also cultivate short staple cotton, maize, barley, ragi, vegetables, fruits and pulses. Besides agriculture Minyongs domesticate pigs, mithun, cow, etc. for the purpose of meat. Hunting is one of their subsidiary occupation to get meat.

Minyong believe in a super being or super power who is supposed to have created this earth and all who live on it. They also believe that tiger and human beings were sons of same ancestors and therefore they follow almost same ritual when they kill a man or tiger. Besides this they believe in a number of spirits both benevolent and malevolent.

Etor is one of the principal festivals of Minyong tribe celebrated during the month of March/April. The Solung festival is celebrated in September to ensure good harvest and to prevent evils spirits from coming into the village to afflict the villagers with disease and evil spirits. Dongkong is a ceremony performed after a successful war operation. After killing a tiger they perform Meosong ceremony. The Minyongs believe that diseases are caused by evil spirits. The ceremony of treating patients is known as Koyning ceremony. Ayit Miri is a priest and a village doctor who can cure diseases through rituals and ceremonies of magico-religious type.

### **Tribes of Memba**

Memba tribe settled in Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh is a Buddhist tribe having rich cultural heritage. Like any other Buddhist tribe in case of Membas too the monk plays important role in the society. In fact the monk dictates the procedure and rituals

governing the tribal life particularly connected with their religion and culture. But they are still influenced by pre-Buddhism culture.

Membas too are agriculturists producing paddy, maize, short staple cotton, etc. Membas are well skilled in cane and bamboo work. The Memba cane and bamboo products are famous for elegance and durability.

With the arrival of Buddhism the Lord Buddha was accepted as their principal God and is now equated with their traditional supreme being. But they still believe in their second traditional Gods and Goddesses. Choijegepu is the equivalent of Hindu Chitragupta who records the deeds of every man and women. Lakhapro is the presiding deity of the heaven, equivalent to Hindu Indra. Denakpo is a God who guards the passage to heaven, a sort of Memba St. Peter.

With the influence of Buddhism, the major Buddhist festivals came to stay with them. Buddha Purnima and other Buddhist festivals are celebrated with utmost serenity and calm atmosphere. Most important Memba festival is Losar festival which is celebrated twice a year, in the first Memba month Dawa Tonyba falls in January/February and during the Memba month Dawa Chungipah which falls around December/January. The purpose is to express their gratefulness to the Gods for keeping them happy and prosperous in the outgoing year and extorting the Gods to bestow more prosperity and happiness in the coming year. The Bardo festival is another important festival of the Membas. It is performed to ensure the communal welfare and also to impress the villagers that a person leading a pious life in the world goes to heaven and enjoys blissful life there; while a person leading a sinful life here goes to hell after death only to face a tormented existence there.

### **Tribes of Yobin**

The Yobins, also known as Lisus, migrated across Patkai range during the decade of forties of twentieth century and settled along the Noa-Dihing River in the Vijaynagar area of Arunachal Pradesh.

Detail of their history and migration is not known due to absence of script and hence was not recorded. Perhaps due to frequent migration many of their legends were lost.

Yobin society is divided into a number of clans. The clans are divided according to profession. For example, Ngaza clan are supposed to catch fish or expert in pisciculture while people belonging to Jeza clan are beekeepers and so on. The Yobin society is patrilineal and their family normally consists of father, mother, sons and daughters. A married son usually leaves the family to build up his own house. The youngest son inherits the property and hence remains with the family. The Yobins live in well demarcated villages, each comprising of a number of houses.

The Yobins are basically good agriculturists and are comparatively advanced in this trade. They have their own land where they produce rice, millet, different vegetables and pulses. Yobins are traditionally good beekeepers.

The religion of Yobins is based on nature worship and the world of spirits. They have their own deities and spirits whom they propitiate by sacrifice. Their festivals are usually based on agriculture, hunting and other professions. The festivals are associated with dance, songs and music.

### Check Your Progress IV

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) Write a short note on Minyong tribe of Arunachal Pradesh.

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## 1.7 LET US SUM UP

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In this Unit we discussed briefly about the tribal scenario in Arunachal Pradesh. The people, the resources, socio-economic conditions as well as the tradition and culture existent in the region have also been described. The different tribes found within the region along with their distinctiveness have also been mentioned. Each of these tribes has its own distinct culture, customs, habits and religious beliefs.

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## 1.8 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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1. Census of India, 2011
2. Ministry of Tribal Affairs

