

Tangsa - A Hill Dwelling People of Arunachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT This paper is the result of my stay with the Tangsa of Arunachal Pradesh. This 'land of sunrise' is located in North Eastern India. Arunachal Pradesh is predominantly inhabited by twenty six major groups belonging to the Indo-Mangoloid stock. Etymologically Tangsa means the 'people living on hills'. They inhabit mainly six villages of Changlang district namely, Kharsang, Miao, Chingsa, Lonkey and Kultom. 'Tangsa' have settled in the forest land around the Kharsang and established their Basties (Settlements). They construct their houses on a raised platform. Their economy is of subsistence type. They practice 'Jhum' cultivation. They grow rice, mustard, potato, cauliflower, cabbage, kachchu, pumpkin and fruits like pineapple, pappaya and banana. Rice is the staple food of these people. They drink rice beer. Tangsa worship nature (Dony-Polo). Statues and Photographs of dieties are not worshiped. These people are largely animistic, having belief in multitude of supernatural beings.

Arunachal Pradesh, 'The land of sunrise' is located in the North-Eastern part of India. This beautiful land is surrounded by Bhutan in West, Tibet and China in the North, Myanmar (Burma) in the East and Assam in the South. In 1987, Arunachal Pradesh was declared as twenty-fourth state of India. It is predominantly inhabited by 26 major tribal groups of the Indo-Mangoloid stock.

Etymologically, Tangsa means 'the people living on hills'. They inhabit mainly six villages of Changlang district namely, Changlang, Kharsang, Miao, Chingsa, Lonkey and Kultom. They migrated to their present habitat from Myanmar. First they settled at Changlang and then proceeded to different settlements near Kharsang. There are about fourteen sub-divisions in Tangsa community, namely, Moklum, Jaglli, Kimsing, Morang, Longching, Ronrang, Mussang, Tonglim, Longchang, Tikhat, Sangwal, Longri, Havi and Sangke.

Tangsa have settled in the forest land around the Kharsang and established their settlements which are connected by proper roads.

Clusters of houses (nearly 30 to 40) are constructed randomly on both sides of the kaccha road. Electricity has reached. Tank-like wells are commonly seen in front of the houses. In the well, water stands just 4 to 5 feet below the earth.

The Tangsa construct the house on a raised platform about 7 feet (2 metres) high from the ground. They drive strong wooden stakes or stout bamboos deep into the earth and fastening to these a bamboo framework or planks which serve as a floor of the house. Leaving balcony about 14 × 14 feet (4 × 4 metres) in front, they construct house in the rest of the platform by using sliced bamboos. The house is further divided into different rooms. Sliced bamboos and Thanku leaves (Palm leaves) are used for roofing. The kitchen is an important room in the house. The house may start or end with the kitchen. The room has fire place at the centre. They spread clay about 4 × 4 feet (1 × 1 metre) area, on it they keep tripod stand (or three stones) as hearth. To cook food they burn fire wood. Around the fire place, they clean vessels and throw waste water, all the water drains down immediately from the bamboo floor. Most of the time they sit around the hearth to warm their body as sometimes the surrounding temperature falls to 6°C in the winter. They eat, talk and drink *apong* (rice beer) sitting around the hearth. About 4 feet (1 metre) above the hearth a small framework of bamboo hangs from the roof. On this dried fishes, snakes, small crocodiles and skull of animals are kept. Guests are usually entertained in the kitchen.

The place below the bamboo floor of the house is used as cattle shed or for storing firewood. Rich people in this group have plastered their houses with cement on either side of the bamboo wall and use galvanized tin sheets for roofing. Few of them have nicely constructed R.C.C. buildings worth Rs. 4 - 5 Lakhs.

Usually, they wear handloom lungie made

by themselves; on the top their women wear blouse or a shirt and men wear a loose shirt. Most of the fashioned Burmese readymade dresses are available in the second hand market at Margretta in Assam. Ornaments made up of bones and shells are rare among Tangsa. The *daw* (a big curved knife) with its sheath is commonly seen hanging around the neck of males. A cane-basket is commonly seen hanging on the back of the women.

Economy is of subsistence type. They practice Jhum cultivation. They grow rice, mustard, potato, cauliflower, cabbage, kachchu, pumpkin and fruits (like pine-apple, pappaya and banana). The fruits and vegetables grow enormously big in size. Few of the Tangsa have elephants, horses, trucks and jeeps. Tangsa also work in the Oil India Company, Coal India, Saw Mills and Plywood Factories as labourers. Few of them work under forest contractors. Some are in government services too. Rich Tangsa are forest and road contractors. Tangsas are expert weavers too.

Ku and Mole are common festivals among the Tangsas. Usually, celebrated after sowing and before harvesting, Mole festival is of three days. Unmarried boys and girls wear traditional dresses and dance three times around the village. Men beat drums. Guests are treated with rice beer and food.

A new born baby is first fed a few drops of rice beer. After three days, they perform the naming ceremony. They take water in a plate and drop a pair of paddy uttering pre-selected name. If two seeds come close then that name is fixed otherwise, they drop seeds with another name and so on till the two paddys meet. Naming is usually done by the paternal aunt of the child.

Marriage is celebrated in a simple manner. Here the importance is given to treating guests with food and rice beer. All members of the village and representatives of neighbouring vil-

lages take part in it. Marriage is of two days. On the fixed date, bride is brought to the groom's house. Guests are treated with non-vegetarian food and beer. The same night or the next morning all proceed to the bride's house. Parents of the groom have to give a bride price of somewhere between 300 to 900 rupees. In addition to this, 6 to 8 bags of rice, 3 to 5 pigs, goats and hens are given to the bride's parents.

Tangsa are patrilineal and patrilocal. Cross-cousin marriage is practiced but uncle-niece marriage is prohibited. Inter-group marriages are entertained. Widow marriage is practiced. Divorce is uncommon. In case of divorce, guilty is penalised by 5,000.00 to 7,000.00 rupees. If there are no children to the wife, husband can remarry with the wife's permission.

When a person is dead, they give bath to the dead body and make it wear new white clothes. Cooked chicken with rice is kept near the head. (This food is not consumed by anybody). They keep the dead body for 2-3 days. People gather from different places.

Dead body is carried to the *Mangsotham* (burial ground) or *Mangsothang* (cremating ground) on the bamboo structure in a sleeping position. Four people carry the dead body. All friends and relatives participate in the procession. They burn the dead body along with his personal things. Old man in the family will put fire to the dead body. It is believed that the soul will be carried up by 'Mazilla' bird. Tuft of the dead person's hair is preserved to commemorate the dead.

Tangsa people worship nature. Few of them worship sun and moon (Dony-Polo). Churches, mosques, statues and photos of deities are not worshipped. Churches, mosques and temples are not seen in these areas. These people are largely animistic, having belief in multitude of supernatural beings.