

Mystic Monpas of Tawang Himalaya



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ASHOK BISWAL

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PREFACE

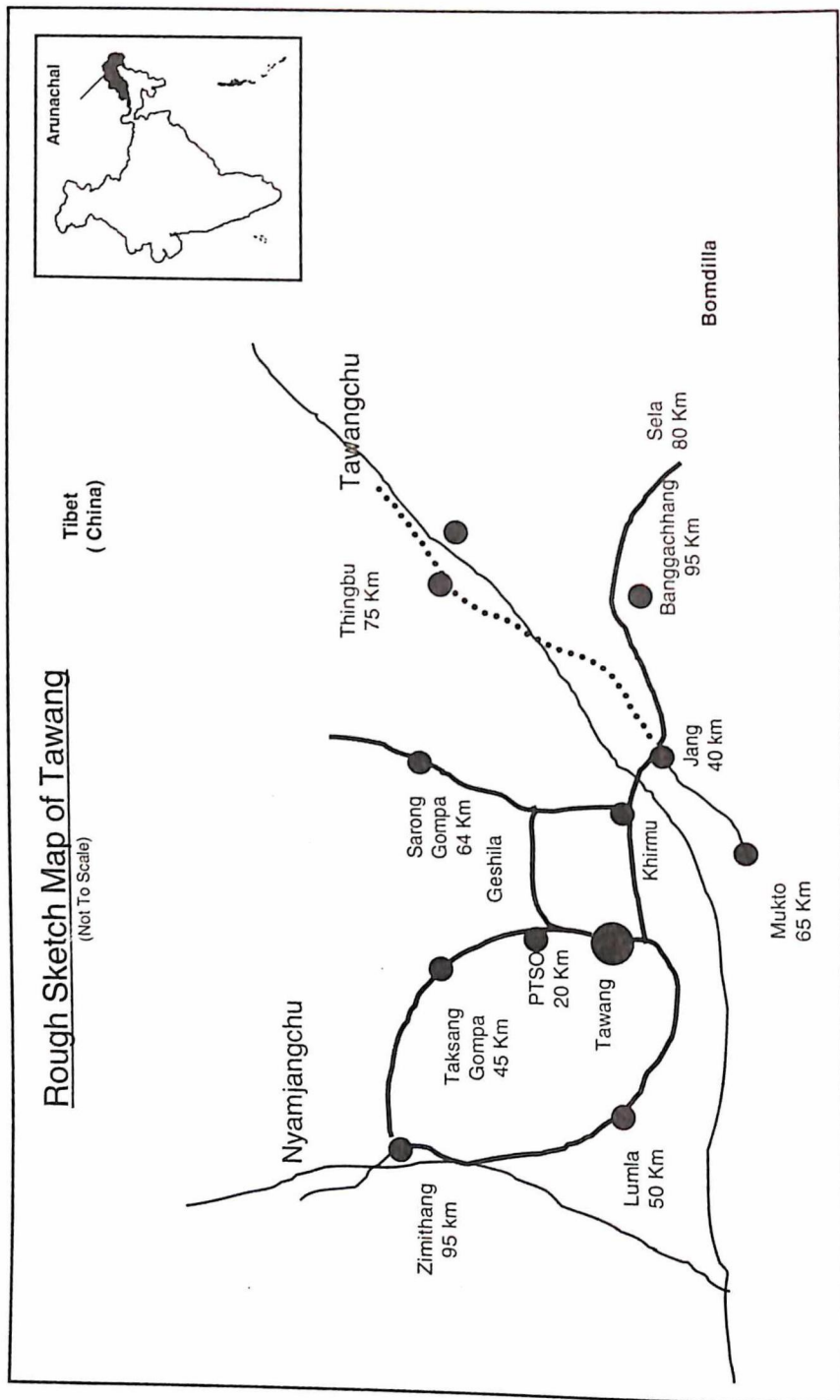
During my stay in Tawang district, I found that there was not sufficient reading material available to the public about the culture, tradition and religion of the district. Though the district is well-known for its natural beauties, yet most of the areas remain inaccessible due to prolonged rainfall and foggy conditions. So, I thought of writing this book with the aim to show the outside world a glimpse of the beauty of the area. I found the people there very caring, religious-minded, and well-mannered.

While working as Divisional Forest Officer, Tawang, I moved around the district and interacted with the common people and saw them from close. I always desired to reach those people who are hidden behind the far away mountains. This book is a tribute to those people of the tall mountains about whom the outside world knows little. The information and data given in this book have been collected from various sources. Section I deals with the basic information of the people, religion, culture and places. Section II deals with the myths, beliefs and ritual practices of the people in far-flung areas and the description of natural beauties of the Tawang district.

I dedicate this book to those inspirations which remained close to me and about which no body will ever know. Writing this book gives me much fulfilment and satisfaction.

I thank my friends and colleagues who always accompanied me during my journeys in Tawang area. I also thank my closest associates who remained with me like my shadow.

ASHOK BISWAL



CHAPTER 1

GENERAL OUTLINE

1. INTRODUCTION

Tawang, the land of myths, the land of myriad colours, and the land of snow-capped mountains lies on the north-western extremity of Arunachal Pradesh, bordering Tibet in the north, Bhutan in the west and south, and the district of Bomdilla in the east. The district spreads itself over elevations which range from 6000 to 22,000 feet in the eastern Himalaya, and the inhabitants called Monpas, are generally found in lower altitudes, and they live in the slopes of the mountains. The highest peak called Gorichen, 22,500 feet tall, is in the north-east direction and its snow-clad peak is visible above the Jang township in the Sela mountain ranges. The southern boundary runs along the ridge of the tall mountains with elevations ranging from 14,600 feet to 16,000 feet. The Chongchongmaphu mountains in the Bhutan border tower over the Lumla sub-division. The Shangphu mountain ranges spread over Bleting, the border village adjacent to Bhutan. The Tawangchu and the Nyamjangchu are the principal rivers of the district. The main river of the district, Tawangchu, enters into Tawang as Magochu from Tibet, and later named as Tawangchu after Rho-Jangda. The other major river, Nyamjangchu, also flows into the district from Tibet near Zimithang, and later joins Tawangchu near Namsering under Lumla sub-division and flows into Bhutan. The famous Thangla ridge is near Zimithang. The Sela is the major mountain pass which one needs to cross to

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enter Tawang from Bomdilla. The Bumla pass is one of the major passes to Tibet from the district through which the road goes upto Lhasa. Nyngsangla is the major pass in Mukto which goes to Bhutan. The Monpa country side is adorned with the gonpas atop the hills nearby the villages, the chortens, and religious stone shrines called *manes*. The Monpas are staunch followers of Buddhism and they keep the statues of Lord Buddha and other Buddhist divinities and saints in their respective family chapels. The Monpa households are generally double storied and are made of stone, soil and timber. Tawang township is the headquarters of the Tawang district, and is about 580 km from the state capital Itanagar. Tawang is an important centre of Buddhist learning and is particularly famous for its magnificent 400-year-old monastery of Gelugpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism. Tawang monastery is known for its beautifully-gilded 8-metre high statue of the Buddha covered with gold and a number of equally remarkable idols, *thangkas* and wall paintings. The district is particularly famous for its natural beauty and its gonpas. The basic information of the district is given below.

Area	- 2085 sq km
Population (2001)	- 34,705
Population density	- 16/km ²
Sex ratio (2001)	- 963
Decadal growth rate (1981-1991)	- 30.14
(1991-2001)	- 22.69
Literacy	- 41.45%
Forest cover	- 56%
Average rainfall	- 2760 mm
Main rivers	- Tawangchu and Nyamjangchu
Approximate height of different areas	- Sela 14,000 ft - Tawang 10,000 ft - Mukto 8,000 ft - Thingbu 11,000 ft - Zemithang 7,000 ft
Total no. of villages and hamlets	- 163
Sub-Divisions	- Tawang, Jang, Lumla

Towns of the district	– Tawang, Jang, Lumla and Zimithang
Revenue circles	– Tawang, Thingbu, Mukto, Jang, Lumla, Zimithang and Dudunghar

2. MONPAS OF TAWANG

The district also known as Monyul in the local dialect is inhabited by the Monpa tribes. The word 'Monpa' means 'inhabitants of the low land', in Tibetan. They belong to Mongoloid race and are well-built, fair in complexion and generally not tall. They also share very close resemblance with the Sharchops of adjacent Bhutan. Their language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family, but it is significantly different from the eastern Tibetan dialect and is written in Tibetan script. The Monpas are an ethnic group, concentrated in the districts of Tawang and West Kameng.

Religion

The Monpas are mostly the followers of Gelugpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism. Some of them also follow the Nyingmapa sect of Buddhism. However, the influence of Shamanism, the Bön religion, is still prevalent in some of their performances and beliefs. The Monpa villages are identifiable with the prayer flags, religious stone structures called *mane* and gonpas. Every Monpa family worships Lord Buddha and keeps his statue along with the photographs or statues of saints and divinities of Buddhist pantheon in his family chapel on a raised platform, and in front of it water-bowls are kept as an offering along with butter lamps. The high fluttering religious flags with the mystic formula 'Om mani peme hum' meaning 'Hail to him Who is born as a jewel in a lotus' are found all over the Monyul landscape. The people believe in rebirth, transmigration of the soul and reincarnation. They are a highly religious people, and religion is reflected in all the aspects of their life.

3. SOCIETY AND LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

The Monpa village consists of about one to five hundred houses with distinctive territorial jurisdiction which are identified by streams, stone-marks, or forest termed as *Santsam*. The village forests are believed to be the abode of serpent spirits or demons. The villages are headed by a headman called *Tsorgan*. A big village is divided into three divisions—Totpa, the upper division, Berpa, the middle division, and Matpa, the lower division. The community functions of the village are carried out by the village *Tsorgan*. A small body called *Mangma*, comprising of the headman *Tsorgan*, members called *Thumies* and the middle-man called *Tosbey*, looks after the village welfare and disputes. Normally, the *Tsorgan* is selected for three years. All major issues of the village are brought to the notice of the *Tsorgan* and the *Mangma* is further consulted. The decision of the village body is final and binding. However, if the party does not agree to the decision of the *Mangma* he can go to the judicial court for settlement of the disputes. The members of village body generally hold office for three years. The lama of the village *gonpa* also plays a role in settling the village disputes.

The traditional political divisions of the district are called *Cho* and *Mangma* is the substructure of such divisions. The *Cho* consists of three to ten villages. The traditional *Cho* structures are broadly grouped as follows:

1. Dagpaneng
2. Pangchin
3. Thingbu Mago Luguthang
4. Tsosum

The district is having around 163 villages and hamlets. The Tawang monastery also collects agricultural tax from different areas of the district as per the traditional *Cho* structure. All the villages are not covered in the traditional agricultural tax collection system of the monastery. The names of some of the villages as per collection system of the monastery are given below:

a) *Dagpaneng Area*

This area consists of the following villages:

- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| 1. Bongleng | 2. Bukhyung |
| 3. Buridong | 4. Gispu |
| 5. Hoongla | 6. Kharteng |
| 7. Kharung | 8. Khobleteng |
| 9. Khojo | 10. Kudung |
| 11. Kungba | 12. Lumla |
| 13. Mangnam | 14. Muktur |
| 15. Paamaghar | 16. Pamamghar |
| 17. Sakyur | 18. Sazo |
| 19. Shakti | 20. Thongleng |
| 21. Thrillam | 22. Tsaighar |
| 23. Yusar | 24. Zangthang |

b) *Pangchin Area*

This area comprises the following villages:

- | | |
|-------------|---------------|
| 1. Kharman | 2. Lumpo |
| 3. Shoktsen | 4. Kyelekteng |
| 5. Muchut. | |

c) *Tsosum Area*

This area comprises the following villages:

- | | |
|----------------|----------------|
| 1. Audung | 2. Bomba |
| 3. Bomdir | 4. Bomja |
| 5. Boxer | 6. Bumteng |
| 7. Darmakang | 8. Degha |
| 9. Gangi | 10. Gomkeliing |
| 11. Gomkelling | 12. Gongkhar |
| 13. Grengkhar | 14. Gyamdong |
| 15. Gyangkhar | 16. Jangfiar |
| 17. Jang | 18. Jangda |

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- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| 19. Khardung | 20. Khartoot |
| 21. Khet | 22. Khrimu |
| 23. Kit khar | 24. Kitpi |
| 25. Kralling | 26. Lhargong |
| 27. Lhou | 28. Mirba |
| 29. Mukto | 30. Namet |
| 31. Paidhar | 32. Paikhar |
| 33. Rho | 34. Seru |
| 35. She-mop | 36. Soma |
| 37. Surbi | 38. Teli. |
| 39. Tengthin | 40. Ungkhar |
| 41. Weikhar | 42. Yuibu |
| 43. Yusum | |

The Mangma, though powerful in the village, still does not have the financial strength to carry out developmental works. The Mangma owns some agricultural land and grazing grounds. Minor sums are collected in the form of grazer's tax and share from cultivation in the Mangma's land. The Mangma forest is accessible for the village households and no tax is levied for the firewood collection. The Mangma carries out community works like cleaning of porter tracks, repairing of village gonpas, transportation of materials to Tawang gonpa, construction and repair of small bridges and other similar works in which all the households of the village contribute manpower. In case any household does not provide labour or is absent during community work, then that household is fined. If a household is not in a position to spare labour for community work, then that household is excused.

Political Developments

After independence, Major Bob Khating, a Naga officer of Indian Frontier Service who was the then Deputy Commissioner, Bomdilla took control of Tawang district. The area was the part of Sela Sub-Agency, the administrative unit was later renamed as Kameng Frontier Division during 1954. During 1965, the Kameng

Frontier Division was renamed as Kameng district. Later on during 1980, the Kameng district was bifurcated to East Kameng district with headquarters at Seppa and West Kameng district with headquarters at Bomdilla with Tawang area falling in the later. On 6th October 1984, the erstwhile Tawang sub-division was carved out of the West Kameng district and a new district was formed.

Major Bob Khating was instrumental in bringing the first political changes by establishing permanent administrative headquarters at Tawang. He started the system of appointing Gaon Burhas (village headman) in the district in addition to the traditional model. Presently, the Panchayati Raj system has been followed. The village councils are authorized under the Assam Frontier Regulation 1945, to settle all civil matters within their village jurisdiction. However the administrative officers have jurisdiction over all criminal and civil matters and are under the control of Guwahati High Court. The district is represented by three members in the Arunachal Pradesh assembly. The assembly constituencies are: (1) Lumla, (2) Tawang, and (3) Mukto. Tawang district falls in Arunachal West Parliamentary constituency.

4. ECONOMY

The Monpas are basically farmers and cattle-grazers. Over the years they settled for permanent cultivation. The cultivation fields are in gentle slopes of the mountains and are terraced. Watering is generally done by bringing the stream to the cultivation fields by channels. Otherwise, most of the areas in the district have sufficient rainfall to sustain terrace cultivation. Wheat, millet and maize are the major staple foods of the Monpas and are widely cultivated. However, people cultivate rice for domestic use during the ceremonies. The basins of Tawangchu and Nyamjangchu are famous for rice cultivation. The terraced cultivation area around and below Lhau village, on the basin of Tawangchu river, is the granary of Tawang. The cultivation fields are usually around the village, even around the individual households. The agriculture fields and forest woodlands are intermingled with each other throughout the district. The Monpa farmers also cultivate pulses

like soyabean and oil seeds. Potato is widely farmed and its production by volume exceeds the production of any other crop. Tawang used to supply potato seed to other areas of the state. On many occasions maize is intercropped with soyabean which adds nitrogen to the soil.

The vegetables mostly include cabbage, radish, and leafy vegetables like manpatta. Horticulture has also picked up substantially. The villagers plant apple, plum, walnut, guava and oranges. Apple and walnut are commonly cultivated in the district. The cultivation in the fields is done by manual labour. The Monpa farmers carry out all cultivation jobs like soil preparation, mixing of manure with soil, transplanting, and harvesting by themselves and with the help of their family members, as hired labourers are hardly available during the cultivation time. The animal wastes like cowdung etc. are only used for manuring the fields and no household burns cowdung cake which is contrary to the practice in the highlands of Tibet.

Many of the Monpas depend on cattle grazing particularly of yak and sheep. The community in general rears yak, cow, sheep, goat, ponies and pigs. The yak and cow population is substantial in comparison to the other cattle. The sheep are reared for meat. Horse and ponies are used for carrying loads to remote areas. The Lumla Circle area has substantial population of cattle, ponies and horses. The Monpas are good at milking cows and *dzomu*, a cross-breed animal of yak and other cattle. The yak milk products are in great demand in the district. Many of the villagers also work as part-time porters and part-time labourers for different government organizations.

5. FLORA AND FAUNA

Tawang, the land of costumes and dances is also the land of rhododendrons, the treasure of high-altitude flora and fauna, generally not found in other parts of the state. The trees around the village are mostly oak, (*paseng*), magnolia (*ngangong*), poplar, blue pine (*hroseng*), and walnut (*keaseng*). The oak trees have

the maximum presence around the village because of its utility. Magnolia, blue pine, tsuga (*manseng*), fir (*wangseng*), cupressus torulosa (*dhupi*) etc. have good presence in the forest. Oak is considered to be among the most valuable trees and almost every village has a oak grove called *parmong*. Oak plays a major part in the sustenance of Monpa villagers; during the cultivation oak leaves are converted into manure and are applied to the cultivation fields. The wood from oak tree is the best firewood available in Tawang forest. Bamboo is another forest produce which has a regular presence in the Monpa household in the form of baskets and fencing material. Pine is widely used for making planks for house construction. Almost every village has a community forest, but some of the villages don't have any. The villagers who don't own a forest cut trees from the forest of other villages after paying royalty.

Tawang has probably the maximum varieties of rhododendron within a small geographical identity. The colours of the flowers range from deep red to pink to yellow to bright yellow to orange and white. The shapes and the sizes of the rhododendron flowers differ with species and vary with location. Some of the rhododendron trees are like middle-sized trees and some are like bushes. Tawang mountains are generally covered with the rhododendron trees called the *tamaseng* during the flowering season from April to June. At a higher altitude of around 11,000 feet, the rhododendron gives way to silver fir called *wangseng*. The silver fir forest with its vast expanse gives a grand view. The boles of the trees are straight and the branches spread like the umbrella at intervals. After the silver fir belt, once again the juniper and a shorter variety of rhododendron start their empire. The size of rhododendron trees at the altitude of 12,000 feet is small. The juniper is also not a big tree but short like bushes. The flower beds generally start at much higher altitude and the colour of the mountain changes with the colours of flowers between April and September.

The forest of Tawang changes with elevation which can be classified into following categories with the change of elevation:

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<i>Height range</i>	<i>Major tree species</i>
Basin of Tawangchu river to 8000 feet	Blue pine in the upper limit, alanus, rhododendron, salix, poplar
8000 to 10,000 feet	Pure ban oak forest and some overlapping forest
10,000 to 12,000 feet	Fir, tsuga, rhododendron, magnolia, <i>Taxus baccata</i>
12,000 to 13,000 feet	Fir, <i>Abies densa</i> , juniper
13,000 feet and above	Short and branchy rhododendron, alpine shrub, alpine pasture

Tawang is also the store-house of a variety of rare medicinal plants, prominent among them are rubia, *Taxus baccata*, chot, sita, aconite, lycopodium, kutki, ginseng, Swerita valeriana etc. Apart from the medicinal plants, rare high-altitude orchids are also found in the district.

The collection of firewood has resulted in the destruction of forest in the nearby areas of Tawang and old oak forests are diminishing fast. Apart from firewood collection, the extensive use of juniper leaves for ceremonial purpose has resulted in the destruction of juniper belt. At a higher altitude, the rhododendron are collected mostly by the labourers of GREF for firewood purpose which has resulted in wide destruction of rhododendron patches. Regeneration is a serious problem in Tawang forests due to higher elevation and longer winter months. Though rainfall is sufficient in most parts of the district, the establishment and growth of the tree species is not satisfactory due to higher slope and little soil depth. Rhododendron and oak are slow-growing species and their exploitation has resulted in denudation of particular species.

The district has a rich animal life. The major animals are red panda, wild goat, barking deer, wild cat, red deer, musk deer, leopard, wild boar, black bear, porcupine. The bird species are wild pigeon, house sparrow, yellow-beaked crow, highland crow, vultures, etc. Some snakes are also found in the area. The forests of Tawang are full of blood-sucking leeches, mainly of two kinds, which generally remain near the moisture-laden areas.

6. GRAZING

Rearing of yaks and other cattle is a source of livelihood for many Monpas. The yaks graze in highland grazing grounds as per different customary practices. The grazing grounds generally belong to the Mangma, the village local body and also a few to Tawang monastery. The grazing practices followed in general in the district can be categorized as community grazing, by draw of lots, and by mutual agreement. In the community grazing, all the villagers have the equal right for grazing in the particular grazing ground. During the grazing season from May to October, the villagers move in groups to the grazing grounds with their yaks. The chowrie huts are shared and repaired through joint efforts. Some times the draw of lots method is used for allotting the grazing ground to a particular household. Then the grazing land is used only by that particular house and others don't infringe into that grazing ground. Mutual agreement between the aspiring households is another method in which the grazing land is allotted to a particular person. Some times with the permission of Mangma, new grazing grounds are created after clearing the meadows. The chowriewallahs pay tax to the Mangma for the use of grazing ground which generally depend on the number of chowries grazing on the particular grazing ground. The tax is generally in the form of yak butter or cheese called *Surbi* in the local language. Otherwise also the yak butter is circulated in the society through the barter system and generally exchanged with cereals. The society does not consume milk and all the milk is converted into butter and cheese. During the winter the yaks come down to lower altitude and graze in the particular area allotted for the grazing. The traditional winter grazing areas are fixed for particular household and generally infringements do not happen.

7. NATURE IN ITS EXQUISITENESS

PT Tso Lake (Pankang Teng Tso)

The lake PT Tso, as is known by all in Tawang, is the spot of natural union of beauty of the mountains and the lake with the

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expanse of the grasslands. With every week, the lake and its surrounding take a different colour and the looks change significantly. It is not only a lake, it is a dream-like imagination because of the splendid views it captures from the setting. The magnificent symmetrical fir forest of the mountains puts a mist of green glow on the waters of the lake. The carpet of yellow flowers, particularly of the primula species are found in all the open pockets around the lake and are interspersed with rhododendron patches, blooming with the grandeur of the mountains forming the background. The pink terraces of the rhododendrons, the yellow mat of primulas under the blue roof give the lake an unusual beauty. With the advent of winter at the horizon, the blue sky with floating white clouds at the top, the snow-capped mountains all around the lake and the embrace of rhododendron forest give the lake its colour and turn it into a sleeping beauty awaiting the arrival of her beloved. Situated at a distance of around 18 kilometres from Tawang, the place is a major attraction for all round the year.

Sangesur Lake

Stepping into the lap of the nature is always enchanting and always challenging. The stream water from the mountains nearby drains into the depression, creating the water-mass, and a spring also emerges from the lake. The water-mass surrounded by the lofty mountains there at Sangesur lake holds the beauty of the mountains, the tranquility of the snow-capped mountain tops, the colours of the blue sky, the sound of the birds, and the call of the distant land which urged the soul-searchers to come near it and enjoy the serenity and the difference. The lake, created by the depression due to an earthquake decades back, still has the dry vegetation on its bed. The stumps give a totally different look to the lake, as if in the waters a new range of trees, devoid of green leaves, has come up. Though dead a long time back, the stumps on the lake give the lake a distinct look. The time pauses, everything turns quiet at the edge of the lake. The lake is about 45 kilometres away from the township and can be approached by

motorable road. On the way from Tawang, the beautiful lakes of PT Tso and other big lakes can be seen, apart from the majestic mountain ranges.

Banggachhang Lake

This lake, once hallowed by the presence of Guru Lupon Rimpoche, is situated adjacent to the Banggachhang gonpa. The road to the lake remains mostly closed due to snowfall on the way. The lake is approached both by trekking and by motorable road from Sela upto the gonpa. The lake is associated with the myths of the Monpa society and the beliefs of the pilgrims. The stories associated with this lake are about seeing the candle lights in the waters of the lake and seeing the gonpa in it. The pious and clear-minded pilgrims get the chance to see the miracles in the waters of the lake. Situated at a distance of about 100 kilometres from Tawang township, the lake is near the Sela pass. The journey itself is challenging and exciting, and the other lakes and mountains are extremely beautiful.

Sela Mountains

Sela is not a single mountain, rather a range, which one needs to cross to enter into the district of Tawang. The Sela pass, at a height of around 14,000 feet, is the gateway to the district and holds the beauty of nature to its maximum. Each mountain, each stream, each open land is a treasure of colour, treasure of shapes. The landscape extending for a distance of over fifteen kilometres is a paradise with myriad colours. The snow-capped mountains, the vastness of symmetrical fir forest, the spring waters all around, give the Sela mountains unparalleled exquisiteness.

Gorichen Peak

The permanently snow-laden, tall peak of Tawang, the Gorichen peak is 22,500 ft. in height and is around 175 kilometres from the district headquarters. This tall peak is a constant

challenge for the mountaineers and has exquisite beauty in its fold. The thrill of the mountains takes one to a different world and remains in one's memory.

Geshila Mountains

For the inhabitants of Tawang, the snow first falls during the winters at the Geshila mountains and then only the snowfall starts at other regions. The pious mountain of Geshila near the town is always respected for the Kromptin gonpa just below it, and the beauty it holds in its fold. The journey to the peak is through the grazing grounds and beautiful forests. At the solitude of the Geshila, the presence of god is felt. The mind communicates with the supreme soul without any effort.

Mago Hot Spring

This hot spring is situated 90 km away from Tawang township and it can be approached from Jang on a foot-track. This hot spring is known for its medicinal and therapeutic value.

BTK (Bap Teng Kang) Waterfall

The most beautiful waterfall of the district, the BTK waterfall is situated near the famous Gorsam chorten in Zimithang circle. The waterfall is three-storied with each storey taking a slight deviation from the other. The fall is within the lap of thick natural forest and holds the colour of the rainbow in its water. The other tall waterfall is also adjacent to this magnificent waterfall.

Nuranang Waterfall

This is a magnificent waterfall below Jang, where the water falls from a tall mountain. It is a nature's stop-over on the way to Tawang from outside. The Nuranang Hydel Electricity Project is established near the fall.

Jaswant Garh

Jaswant Garh, the site glorified by the sacrifice of Indian soldier, Jaswant Singh Rawat, who fought alone against invading Chinese soldiers continuously for 72 hours in the 1962 Indo-China war and made the supreme sacrifice for the country, is at the entrance of the Tawang district. The soldiers and passers-by bow their head in deference to the supreme sacrifice of a brave heart there.

Tawang War Memorial

The 1962 war with China was mainly fought in the Kameng sector (Tawang) of Arunachal Pradesh in which a number of soldiers were martyred. A war memorial in the memory of the brave hearts was erected during 1999. The war memorial site was even blessed by Dalai Lama who sent holy scriptures and idols of Avalokiteshwara and Lord Buddha. The memorial is 40-foot high multi-hued and is dedicated to the unsung heroes. The structure, in the form of a stupa, is called 'Namgyal chorten' and has names of 2420 martyred soldiers etched in gold on 32 black granite plates.

8. JOURNEY TO TAWANG

Following is the distance chart for various places in Tawang district from Tawang headquarters.

<i>Location</i>	<i>Distance (in km)</i>
Banggachhang gonpa	– 95
Bleting gonpa (Manshing gonpa)	– 60
Bramdungchung Ane gonpa	– 10
BTK waterfall	– 82
Changbu gonpa	– 5
Changprong	– 4
Gispu	– 58
Gorsam chorten	– 92
Jang	– 40
Khinmey gonpa	– 17

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Kudung	- 19
Lamberdung	- 7
Lumla	- 50
Mago	- 95
Mukto	- 65
Pamaghar	- 20
PT Tso lake	- 20
Rigyaling gonpa	- 1
Sakpret	- 23
Sakur	- 30
Sangelling gonpa	- 10
Sarong gonpa	- 64
Sela lake	- 80
Seru	- 11
Shakti	- 66
Sherbang	- 53
Singusar Ane gonpa	- 28
Taksang gonpa	- 45
Tawang monastery	- 1
Teli	- 10
Thingbu	- 75
Thongleng	- 26
Thongmein gonpa	- 20
Thrillam	- 33
Urgyelling gonpa	- 7
Zimithang	- 95

Following is the distance chart for reaching Tawang.

Distance from Guwahati	- 525 km
Distance from Itanagar	- 580 km
Nearest airport	- Tezpur
Nearest railway station	- Bhalukpong in Arunachal Pradesh
	- Rangapara North in Assam
Nearest authority giving permission for entry (Inner Line Permit)	- Dy. R.C., Tezpur - E.A.C., Bhalukpong

Road journey details from Bhalukpong to Tawang

<i>Location</i>	<i>Distance from Bhalukpong (km)</i>	<i>Importance/Facilities available</i>	<i>Climb/Descent from previous place</i>
Tipi	10	Tipi Orchid Centre	Plain road
Elephanta	19		Climb
Sessa	33	Orchid Sanctuary	Climb
Nechiphu	54	Highest pass on the way to Bomdilla. Diversion for Seppa	Climb
Nag temple	69	Small market	Descent
Tenga	84	Small market, Army area	Same height
Rupa-Bomdilla diversion	90	Diversion for Rupa	Climb
Bomdilla	106	Biggest township. Lodging & boarding facility. Good market, gonpa	Climb
Nafra Turning	122		Descent
Muna Camp	137		Descent
Dirang	150	Second biggest town in Bomdilla district. Boarding & lodging. Gonpa	Same height
Sapar	161		Climb
Sange	199	Halt for tea	Climb
Sangrilla	201		Climb
Sela pass	214	Highest pass at 14,000 feet. Entry to Tawang	Climb
Nuranang	227		Descent
Jaswant Garh	235	War memorial	Descent
Jang	251	Small township in Tawang	Descent
Lhou	277		Descent
Khirmu	280		Climb

Bomdir	286		Same height
Lamberdung	288		Same height
Changprong	291		Climb
Tawang	295	Final destination	Climb

The most convenient railway station to approach Tawang is Guwahati. However, the closest railway station is Rangapara in Assam and Bhalukpong in Arunachal Pradesh. From Guwahati, bus or hired taxi services are available upto Tezpur in Assam, which is the hub of journey leading to Tawang. Direct air flights are available from Kolkata to Tezpur. Regular bus, Sumo and hired taxi services are available from Tezpur to Tawang. The small township of Bhalukpong is the entry point to Arunachal Pradesh where one needs to show the Inner Line Permit for entry into the state. The distance from Tezpur to Tawang is 355 km, out of which 285 km of road passes through mountainous patches. There are not many petrol stations on the way. Petrol stations are located at Bhalukpong, Bomdilla, Dirang and Tawang. The journey is long and takes more than twelve hours. The journey in the eastern Himalayan mountains in Tawang sector is breath-taking.

The beauty one encounters during the drive is simply amazing. The springs seen in the beginning, coming across the majestic and splendid Kameng river in the early part of the journey, waterfalls all around, the lush green forests on the sides, the curves, the steep mountains—all are enthralling and unrivalled by their own accounts. Nature in its immaculate grandeur, the mountains adorned with permanent cloud cover and the orchids with their grand colour and magnificent designs and other flowers on the way, give matchless thrill to the traveller. The Bomdilla township with its cool climate and its merchandise of woollen garments and carpets, the Dirang township on the river basin, the Buddhist monuments and the journey through the pine forests, are unrivalled and extraordinary. And then comes the snow-laden peaks of the Sela mountains. The traditional gate at the entrance of the district welcomes the visitor with '*Tashi Delek*', the welcome

word of the Monpas, and one enters the land of colours, the land of flowers, the land of mountain peaks and the land of deities and myths. And, before us stands the district of Tawang, the land of Mon people.

Weather and Visiting Period

Tawang district is located in high altitude in the embrace of the lofty mountains. The temperature is cool throughout the year, with November to February being the coldest months. During winter, the temperature falls to -6 degrees centigrade and the summer temperature rises to 28 degrees centigrade, with May to September being the hotter months. The rainfall starts as early as April and continues up to September-October. The weather remains generally foggy during the rainy months. Despite having long winter and rainy months, Tawang valley is always beautiful. The summer is cool here and is the best time to escape from the blistering heat of the plains. The rainy season is the time to search out for the flowers, and enjoy the majesty of the mountains. The colour of Tawang valley and Tawang mountains changes every week. Winter is the period to watch the snowfall and the lama dances in the courtyards of the monasteries



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