

Christianity among the Scheduled Tribes of the Northeast: Arunachal Pradesh

One of the main stories of the Religion Data of Census 2011 is about the Christian penetration into Arunachal Pradesh, a State that had largely escaped Christianisation until recently. We have discussed the issue in our earlier note, [Arunachal Joins the Christian Northeast](#). Now we present the religious profile of individual tribes of the State; this data for 2011 has been released only recently.

Discussion of the individual tribes of Arunachal Pradesh is highly complicated because of the great multiplicity of tribes listed in the Census tabulations. In 2011, the Census lists as many as 105 individual tribes in Arunachal Pradesh; the number was 100 in 2001. This numerousness of the tribes counted in the State has become possible because of the ambiguous language of the Constitutional Order listing the tribes to be included in the Schedule. The Order names only 16 tribes, but says that 'all tribes of the State including' these 16 would be part of the Schedule. This has made the list open-ended.

Many of the tribes listed in the Census are divisions and sub-divisions of the same tribe. For example, there are 29 divisions of Adi and 28 of Tangsa listed in Census 2011. These divisions and sub-divisions do not seem to be exclusive or fixed. The data is comparable over time only when we combine the numbers for the various divisions of a tribe.

We have tried to group the numerous tribes into a few groups that are ethnically distinct and inhabit distinct geographical regions of the State. The religion data for these groups indicates that some of the major tribal groups have been fully or largely Christianised, while many of the Buddhist and Hindu tribes have continued to retain their identity.

The most numerous and influential group comprising the Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang, inhabiting mainly East Kameng, Lower Subansiri and Papum Pare districts, has now become 63 percent Christian. In 2001, Christians had a share of 41.5 percent in this group. The second most numerous group of the Adi, inhabiting Upper Subansiri and Upper, West and East Siang, is now 28 percent Christian; in 1991, only about 12 percent of the Adi were Christian. The smaller communities of the Aka, the Apatani and the Tagin also have acquired considerable Christian presence in the recent past.

In the east, the Tangsa of Changlang are now 59 percent Christian, the Wancho of Tirap are more than 95 percent Christian and the Nocte are 67 percent Christian. These communities were largely Hindu or ORPs till recently.

The Monpas of Tawang and West Kameng and the Khamptis of Lohit-Changlang region remain committed to Buddhism and the Mishmis of Dibang-Lohit region to Hinduism.

Thus Christians have now come to dominate many of the major regions and tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Most of the traditional religious practices—including the widely prevalent Doni Polo—are now in danger of being submerged in this flood of Christianity.

Religious Demography of the Scheduled Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh

| | Total | Christian | ORP | Hindu | Buddhist | Muslim | Others |
|-------------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|--------|--------|
| Total Pop | 13,83,727 | 4,18,732 | 3,62,553 | 4,01,876 | 1,62,815 | 27,045 | 10,706 |
| ST Pop | 9,51,821 | 3,89,507 | 3,58,663 | 97,629 | 96,391 | 3,567 | 6,064 |
| Non-ST Pop | 4,31,906 | 29,225 | 3,890 | 3,04,247 | 66,424 | 23,478 | 4,642 |
| % of Total | 100.00 | 30.26 | 26.20 | 29.04 | 11.77 | 1.95 | 0.77 |
| % of ST Pop | 100.00 | 40.92 | 37.68 | 10.26 | 10.13 | 0.37 | 0.64 |
| % of non-ST | 100.00 | 6.77 | 0.90 | 70.44 | 15.38 | 5.44 | 1.07 |

Scheduled Tribes form two-thirds of the population

Of the total population of 13.8 lakh counted in Arunachal Pradesh in 2011, 9.5 lakh, forming 68.8 percent of the total is from the Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities. This proportion is somewhat higher than in 1991 and 2001, when the share of STs in the total population of the State was nearer 64 percent.

Four-fifths of the STs are either Christian or ORP

Of 9.5 lakh STs counted in 2011, 3.9 lakh are Christian and 3.6 lakh are counted under ORPs. Of the latter, 3.25 lakh are followers of *Doni Polo* or *Sidonyi Polo*, a faith that incorporates the traditional beliefs and practices of a large majority of the numerous tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. As we shall see below, the Christians and the ORPs have together accounted for much of the population of the State for the last few decades; however, during these decades, the proportion of ORPs has been sharply declining and that of the Christians has been correspondingly rising.

Hindus and Buddhists each form about 10 percent of the STs

In addition to the Christians and ORPs, Hindus and Buddhists each form about ten percent of the STs. Their share in the ST population has been declining, though at a much slower pace than that of the ORPs. As we shall see later, there are specific tribes—often inhabiting specific regions of the State—who are either Buddhist or Hindu; others were mostly ORPs before their conversion to Christianity. There has been little conversion in the Buddhist and Hindu tribes. Even so the share of Hindus and Buddhists together has declined from 26 percent in 1991 to 20 percent in 2011.

Rise of Christianity and decline of the ORPs

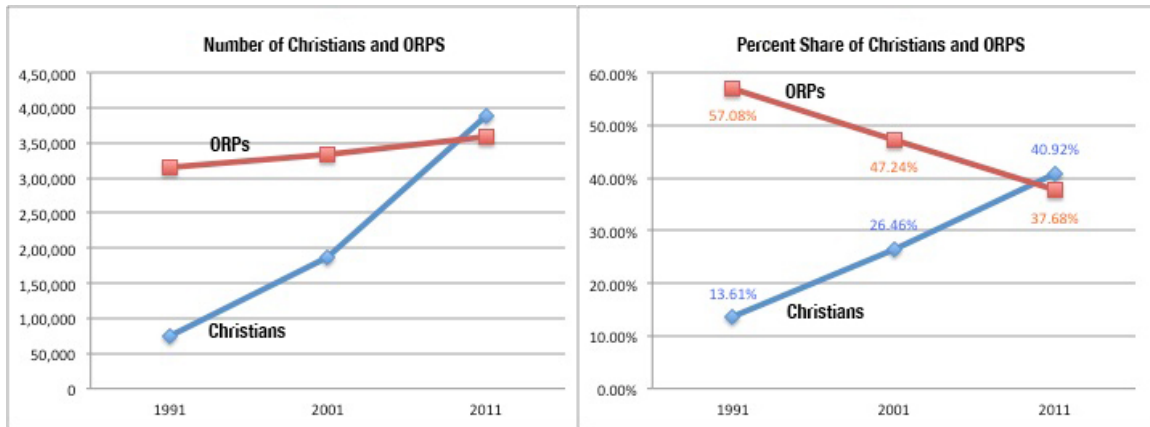
As seen in the Table here, the share of Christians in the ST population of the State has risen from 13.6 percent in 1991 to 40.9 percent in 2011. Their share had nearly doubled between 1991-2001 and has increased again by more than half during the last decade. Since the total population of the Scheduled

The Share of ORPs and Christians in the ST population, 1991-2011

| | Total ST | %ORP | %C |
|------|----------|-------|-------|
| 1991 | 5,50,351 | 57.08 | 13.61 |
| 2001 | 7,05,158 | 47.24 | 26.46 |
| 2011 | 9,51,821 | 37.68 | 40.92 |

Tribes has also increased substantially in this period, the number of Christians in the State has multiplied by more than five times, from about 75 thousand in 1991 to 3.9 lakh in 2011. The share of the ORPs in the ST population has meanwhile declined from 57.1 percent in 1991 to 37.7 percent in 2011. The Christians have recorded an accretion of 27 percentage points in their share in these two decades; somewhat more than 19 percentage points of this has been contributed by the ORPs.

The chart below graphically indicates the decline of ORPs and rise of Christians during the last two decades. The absolute number of ORPs has indeed increased slightly during these decades, but that of Christians has multiplied five times. The share of ORPs in the total ST population has therefore precipitously declined and that of the Christians has sharply risen to overtake that of the ORPs.



Decline in the share of Hindus and Buddhists

The share of Hindus in the population of the Scheduled Tribes has declined from 14.4 percent to 10.3 percent and that of Buddhists from 11.9 to 10.1 percent. This decline may not be entirely because of conversion to Christianity; part of it seems to have been contributed by a larger number among the Hindu tribes being counted as ORPs and perhaps by the relatively lower growth of the Hindu and Buddhist tribes. We shall explore these issues later when we look at the religious demography of the individual tribes. In any case, of the total accretion of 27 percentage points in the share of Christians, 6 percentage points are contributed by the decline in the share of Hindus and Buddhists.

Share of Hindus, Buddhists and others in the ST population, 1991-2011

| | %H | %B | %R | %O |
|------|-------|-------|------|------|
| 1991 | 14.41 | 11.91 | 2.96 | 0.03 |
| 2001 | 13.13 | 11.72 | 1.29 | 0.16 |
| 2011 | 10.26 | 10.13 | 0.57 | 0.45 |

H: Hindu, B: Buddhist, R: RNS, O: Others

Christians have gained 2 percentage points from the RNS also

The remaining 2 percentage points of the Christian gain has come from the decline in the number of persons counted under the category of Religion Not Stated (RNS). It is indeed remarkable that with the rise of Christianity, the share of RNS has declined to about half a percent from nearly 3 percent in 1991. This should raise concerns about the sudden steep rise in the numbers under this category in India as a whole and many of the major States, as we have discussed in [an earlier note](#).

Issues concerning the list of Scheduled Tribes in Arunachal Pradesh

Before looking at the religious demography—and the extent of Christianisation—of the individual tribes in Arunachal Pradesh, as we have done for other States of the Northeast, we need to notice certain issues concerning the large number of tribes included in the Census lists of the Scheduled Tribes in that State.

Census counts numerous tribes in Arunachal Pradesh

The Census has divided the Scheduled Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh into a large number of often very small tribes. The Census list runs into a total of 105 tribes, in addition to the residual category of Generic or Unclassified tribes. This number was 100 in 2001. Among the 105 tribes listed in the Census 2011, 6 have a population of less than 10 and another 18 between 10 and 100. Only 25 of the tribes comprise more than 5,000 persons.

The Constitutional Order for Arunachal Pradesh lists only 16 tribes

The list of Schedules Tribes as given in the relevant constitutional Order reads*: “All tribes in the State including: 1. Abor, 2. Aka, 3. Apatani, 4. Dafla, 5. Galong, 6. Khampti, 7. Khowa, 8. Mishmi, Idu, Taroan, 9. Momba, 10. Any Naga tribes, 11. Sherdukpen, 12. Singpho, 13. Hrusso, 14. Tagin, 15. Khamba, 16. Adi.” Later, by an amendment of 2008, the tribe name of Dafla in entry 4 was changed to Nyishi, because of a perception that *Dafla* is a derogative term.

The Census takes the list to be open-ended

The Census of India has interpreted the above Order to mean that the list of Scheduled Tribes in the State is open-ended and the 16 tribes named in that Order are only illustrative.* This is very odd and irregular. The list given in the Constitutional Order for a particular State is meant to define the groups that are to be treated as tribes under the Constitution in that State; the list is generally taken to be sacrosanct and any change in this list, even a trivial change in the name or spellings of a particular tribe, requires an amendment passed by the Parliament. In the case of Arunachal Pradesh, however, the list has been expanded far beyond that given in the Constitutional Order. This has become possible partly because of the extraordinary ambiguity in the language of that Order.

Not all of the tribes counted in the Census are exclusive

Many of the tribes counted in the Census do not seem to have a definitive identity; that is why the numbers of particular tribes can change widely from one Census to the other. For example, the number of Abor counted in 1991 was 1,062; it rose to 19,927 in 2001 and has dropped to 1,672 in 2011. Similarly, the number of Adi Gallong counted in 1991 was 55,268; it declined to 48,126 in 2001 and has dropped precipitously to 18,064 in 2011. There are many examples of this phenomenon. This is because the 105 tribes that the Census has identified in Arunachal Pradesh are not exclusive entities, and a person who refers to himself as Adi Gallong in one decade could well give the name of his tribe as Adi or Gallong or some other in the list at another time. Incidentally, the spellings of different names also have been changing from decade to decade; for example, Gallong was spelled with double *l* in 1991; in 2001 and 2011, it has changed to *Galong* while Adi Gallong continues to retain its double *l*. All this indicates that many of the numerous tribes counted in Arunachal Pradesh are not really distinct tribes with well-defined names and identities and that the list of 105 tribes is an artificial construct. Many of the tribes fall within a few groups and the latter have a more well-defined and exclusive identity.

The Parliament needs to specify the list of tribes

For the Census data to be useful as a time-series, indicating the changing numbers and social parameters of different tribes over decades, it is necessary that only tribes that are

exclusive to each other are listed and counted. Drawing up a firm list of exclusive tribes would require some sociological and anthropological study. But ultimately it is for the Parliament to specify such a list through an appropriate amendment of the Constitutional Order laying down the list of Scheduled Tribes in Arunachal Pradesh.

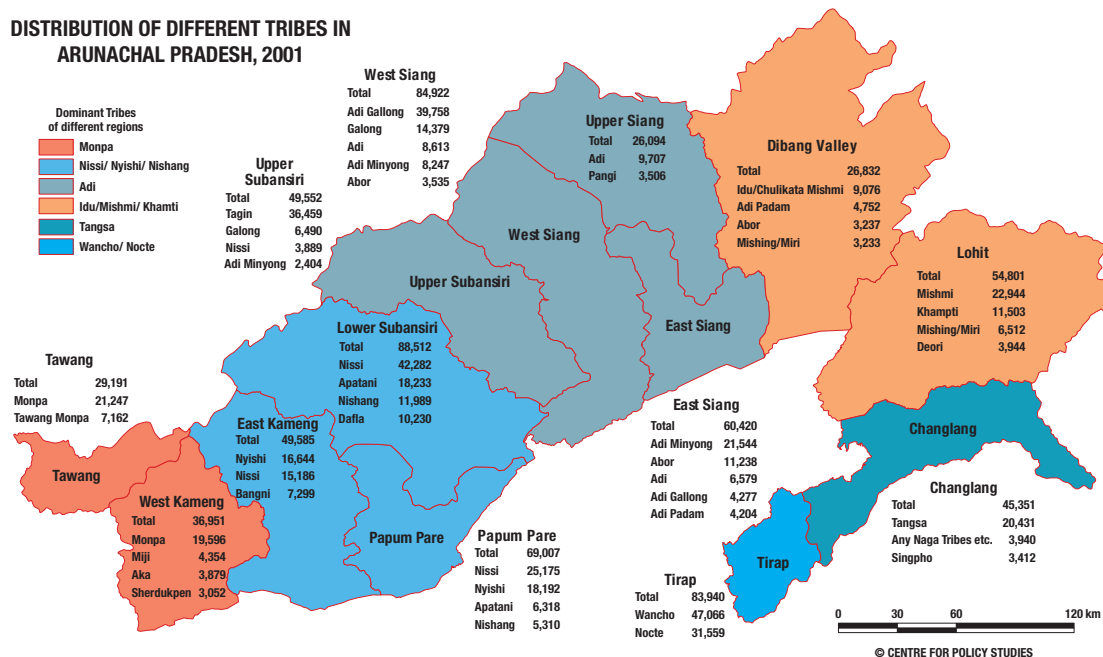
Tentative grouping of the Scheduled Tribes

In case it is found expedient to continue with the long list of tribes for some reason, it would be still necessary to formally group several similar tribes in a few meaningful and exclusive groups. The tribes of Nagaland have been formally grouped into Naga and non-Naga tribes. The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh could similarly be grouped into a small number of distinct groups. In the following analysis of the changing religious demography of the Scheduled Tribes of the State, we have tried to work with a tentative grouping of the numerous tribes.

Distribution of different tribes across the districts of Arunachal Pradesh

Different groups of tribes seem to occupy distinctly different geographical regions of Arunachal Pradesh. We have tried to record this distribution in the Map below. It shows the population of the four most numerous tribes in each of the districts of Arunachal Pradesh. These numbers are from the count of 2001; for Census 2011, district-wise data for individual tribes has not yet been released.

DISTRIBUTION OF DIFFERENT TRIBES IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH, 2001



The Map indicates that the western districts of Tawang and West Kameng are dominated by the Monpa, though the Miji and Aka do have some presence in the latter district. The

districts of East Kameng, Lower Subansiri and Papum Pare to the east of Tawang and West Kameng are inhabited largely by the Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang. These three tribe names seem to be cognate with each other and represent essentially a single, and the most numerous, group. The Nyishi were earlier counted under the name of Dafla. Lower Subansiri and Papum Pare also accommodate a considerable number of the Apatani. To the east of this region lie Upper Subansiri and the three districts of the Siang valley. These four districts are dominated by the Adi group comprising the Galong, the Miniyong, the Padam, etc. Further east are the districts of Dibang Valley and Lohit. This is the region of the Idu, the Mishmi, the Miri and the Khampri, etc. Changlang to the south of Lohit is dominated by the Tangsa; the Census lists as many as 28 tribes that carry the name Tangsa with different adjectives. Beyond Changlang is Tirap, inhabited by the Wancho and the Nocte.

The changing religious demography of Arunachal Pradesh becomes easier to comprehend in the background of this geographical location and clustering of different tribes and tribal groups in different regions and districts.

Religious Demography of the individual tribes and tribal groups of the State

As we have mentioned, the changing religious demography and rapid Christianisation of the Scheduled Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh is best comprehended by looking at the different groups into which the numerous tribes of the State are divided and the different regions that they inhabit. We attempt such an analysis below:

The Monpa and Momba of Tawang and Siang

The committed Buddhist communities

The Census of 2011 lists a total of 7 tribes that carry the name of Monpa or Momba. According to the Census of 2001, Monpas are mainly in Tawang and to some extent in the adjoining West Kameng. Mombas are located largely in West Siang and Upper Siang. Both the Monpas and the Mombas are predominantly Buddhist. Christianity has not been able to make any significant inroads into these Buddhist communities. Of 65 thousand Monpas and Mombas, 63.5 thousand are Buddhist. Among the 1,512 non-Buddhist Monpas or Mombas, there are 476 Hindus, 93 Muslims, 568 Christians, 182 ORPs, 24 Sikhs, 107 Jains and 62 of those who have not stated their religion. These numbers are small, yet it is surprising to see such diversity in remote and disciplined Buddhist communities. This is particularly remarkable in the small group of Panchen Monpa; of 24 members of this community, 6 are Christian and one is a Muslim. In 1991, there were 18 Christians, 6 Hindus and 19 ORPs in their larger population of 114.

Religious Profile of the Monpa and Momba

| | Total | Buddhist | %B |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| Monpa | 43,709 | 42,663 | 97.6 |
| Dirang Monpa | 7,172 | 7,010 | 97.7 |
| Tawang Monpa | 7,133 | 7,029 | 98.5 |
| Lish Monpa | 2,232 | 2,194 | 98.3 |
| But Monpa | 255 | 243 | 95.3 |
| Panchen Monpa | 24 | 17 | 70.8 |
| Momba, Memba | 4,495 | 4,352 | 96.8 |
| Total of Above | 65,020 | 63,508 | 97.7 |

The Aka, Hrusso and Miji of West Kameng

Hinduism survives among the Aka and the Hrusso

Besides the Monpas, West Kameng is also inhabited by the Aka, the Hrusso and the Miji. These are closely related tribes. In 2011, their combined population is around 16 thousand. Of these, nearly a quarter are Hindu, about 38 percent Christian and about 30 percent ORPs. In 1991, nearly 55 percent of the Aka were Hindu. A majority of the Aka counted under ORPs are followers of the Nyarino sect; there are not many followers of Doni Polo among them. Of the Miji ORPs, somewhat less than half are followers of Doni Polo and the rest of other tribal religions.

The Aka, Hrusso and the Miji, 2011

| | Total | %H | %C | %ORP |
|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Aka | 8,110 | 36.04 | 34.38 | 27.26 |
| Miji | 8,127 | 13.24 | 42.07 | 32.16 |
| Hrusso | 57 | 49.12 | 38.60 | 7.02 |
| Total | 16,294 | 24.71 | 38.23 | 29.64 |

Rise of Christianity among the Aka, Hrusso and Miji

Spread of Christianity among the Aka is very recent; in 1991, few Christians were counted among them and in 2001, less than 8 percent of the Aka were Christian. Among the Miji also, there were only a few Christians in 1991, but their presence increased to 19 percent in 2001 and has increased further to 42 percent in 2011. It is tempting to speculate that the delayed rise of Christianity among the Aka, as compared to the related Miji of the same region, is because a majority of the Aka were Hindu till a couple of decades ago, while a majority of the Miji were counted as followers of Doni Polo or other tribal religions.

Rise of Christianity among the Aka, etc., 1991-2011

| | 1991 | 2001 | 2011 |
|--------|------|-------|-------|
| Aka | 25 | 404 | 2,788 |
| Miji | 78 | 1,093 | 3,419 |
| Hrusso | - | - | 22 |

No Hrusso were counted in 1991 or 2001.

The Sherdukpen and Khowa

The Sherdukpen and the Khowa or Bugun are another couple of important tribes inhabiting West Kameng along with the Monpa, the Aka and the Miji. The Sherdukpen are mainly Buddhist; of 3,463 Sherdukpen counted in 2011, 3,376 are Buddhist, but there are 26 Christians even among them. Of 1,432 Khowa or Bugun, however, 302 are Christian; of the rest 714 are Buddhist and 350 ORPs. These ORPs are all followers of unnamed tribal religions; there are no followers of Doni Polo among them.

The Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang of East Kameng, Lower Subansiri and Papum Pare

The largest tribal group of the State

Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang together form the largest tribal group of the State. The name Nyishi is newly added to the list, in place of Dafla. But all of the names seem interchangeable. Many of those who were counted as Nissi or Nishang in the previous Censuses seem to have been counted as Nyishi in 2011. The three together constitute 2.85 lakh of the total 9.52 lakh Scheduled Tribes of the State. As per the district-wise figures of 2001 shown in the Map above, these tribes are concentrated mainly in East Kameng, Lower Subansiri and Papum Pare districts.

Religious profile of the Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang

| | Total | Christian | ORP | %C | %ORP |
|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| Nyishi | 2,49,824 | 1,58,048 | 74,108 | 63.3 | 29.7 |
| Nissi | 32,479 | 20,726 | 9,083 | 63.8 | 28.0 |
| Nishang | 2,849 | 1,835 | 535 | 64.4 | 18.8 |
| Total | 2,85,152 | 1,80,609 | 83,726 | 63.3 | 29.4 |

Conversion of the Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang

This most numerous and important tribal group of Arunachal Pradesh has now been largely converted to Christianity. More than 63 percent of the Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang

have been counted as Christians in 2011. Christianity seems to have arrived relatively early in this community: there were already 38 percent Christians among the Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang in 1991, when the share of Christians in the total ST population of the State was only 13.6 percent. The rise in the proportion of Christians among them was somewhat subdued during 1991-2001; in that decade their share in the population of Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang moved from 38.4 to 41.5 percent. But during the last decade, their share has risen steeply to reach 63.3 percent. The success of Christianity in Arunachal Pradesh is largely due to the large-scale conversion of this community, and of the Tangsa, Wancho and Nocte in the east. Of 3.89 lakh Christians in Arunachal Pradesh in 2011, 1.81 lakh are from this community.

Rise of Christianity among the Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang

| | Total | Christian | ORP | %C | %ORP |
|------|----------|-----------|--------|-------|-------|
| 1991 | 82,509 | 31,653 | 44,371 | 38.36 | 53.78 |
| 2001 | 1,54,839 | 64,256 | 80,420 | 41.50 | 51.94 |
| 2011 | 2,85,152 | 1,80,609 | 83,726 | 63.34 | 29.36 |

Note: The Nyishi were listed as Dafla in 1991 and 2001.

Conversion is mainly from the followers of Doni Polo

As can be seen from the Table here, the conversion of Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang has been mainly from those listed under ORPs, who are all followers of Doni Polo or Sidoni Polyo. In the last decade, the share of Christians in this community has risen from 41.5 to 63.3 percent and that of the ORPs has declined from 51.9 to 29.4 percent.

The Apatani of Lower Subansiri and Papum Pare

Besides the Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang, there are a considerable number of Apatani inhabiting mainly the Kumung Kurey component of Lower Subansiri and Papum Pare. The spread of

Rise of Christianity among the Apatani

| | Total | Christian | ORP | %C | %ORP |
|------|--------|-----------|--------|-------|-------|
| 1991 | 20,836 | 307 | 18,290 | 1.47 | 87.78 |
| 2001 | 27,576 | 2,350 | 23,761 | 8.52 | 86.17 |
| 2011 | 43,777 | 9,513 | 31,269 | 21.73 | 71.43 |

Christianity among the Apatani is lower than in the Nyishi, etc. In 2011, 21.73 percent of nearly 44 thousand Apatani have been counted as Christian. In 1991, only 1.5 percent of the Apatani were Christian and their presence was less than 9 percent even in 2001. Much of the rise of Christianity among the Apatani has taken place during 2001-11 alone. A large majority of the Apatani, however, continue to be followers of Doni Polo.

The Tagin, Bangni and Sulung of Upper Subansiri and East Kameng

Growth of Christianity among the Tagin, Sulung and Bangni, 1991-2011

| | Total Population | | | Christian Population | | | Percent Christian Share | | |
|---------------------|------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------------|-------------|--------------|
| | 1991 | 2001 | 2011 | 1991 | 2001 | 2011 | 1991 | 2001 | 2011 |
| Tagin | 32,720 | 39,091 | 62,931 | 141 | 2,226 | 7,634 | 0.43 | 5.69 | 12.13 |
| Bangni | 34,909 | 7,870 | 691 | 982 | 2,115 | 325 | 2.81 | 26.87 | 47.03 |
| Tagin Bangni | 31 | 38 | 532 | 1 | 1 | 83 | 3.23 | 2.63 | 15.60 |
| Sulung | 4,432 | 3,554 | 4,519 | 143 | 310 | 2,085 | 3.23 | 8.72 | 46.14 |
| Sulung Bangni | 21 | 391 | 35 | 8 | 63 | 13 | 38.10 | 16.11 | 37.14 |
| All of Above | 72,113 | 50,944 | 68,708 | 1,275 | 4,715 | 10,140 | 1.77 | 9.26 | 14.76 |

These tribes seem cognate with Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang

The Tagin, Bangni and Sulung are the other significant tribes in the Subansiri region. According to the count of 2001, the Tagin are mainly in Upper Subansiri and Bangni and Sulung mainly in East Kameng. From the varying numbers of these tribes in different decades, it seems that at least some of these names are interchangeable; these tribes are also probably cognate with Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang. The total population of this group of tribes has declined from 72 thousand in 1991 to about 69 thousand in 2011. Many of those who were counted in this group in 1991 seem to have been counted with the Nyishi, etc., in the later counts. All the tribes of this region—including Nyishi, Nissi, Nishang, Apatani, Tagin, Bangni and Sulung—share the larger Tani identity.

Christian penetration among the Tagin has been limited

There has been considerable growth of Christianity among the Tagin, Sulung and Bangni, even though the penetration of Christianity has not been as deep as in the Nyishi, etc. There were only about a thousand Christians in their population of 72 thousand in 1991, the number of Christians in 2011 is about 10 thousand in a smaller total population. Within this group, the presence of Christians is much higher in the Bangni and Sulung and remains fairly low in the Tagin. As seen in the Table, Christians form 47 percent of the Bangni, 46 percent of the Sulung and only 12 percent of the Tagin. Notwithstanding the Christian penetration, a majority of the Tagin, Bangni and Sulung continue to be followers of Doni Polo.

The Adi of Upper Subansiri and Siang

The Adi are the second largest group of tribes in the State

A large number of tribes of Arunachal Pradesh fall within the Adi group. Of 105 tribes counted in the Census of 2011, as many as 29 seem to belong to the Adi. The Adi are mainly concentrated in the central part of the State comprising Upper Subansiri and in West, Upper and East Siang, though there are some Adi communities in Dibang Valley also. The total population of the 29 communities that we have identified as Adi is 2.38 lakh. The Table below gives the changing religious profile of six of the largest, which have a population of more than 5 thousand in 2011. These six communities account for 2.10 lakh of the total 2.38 lakh Adi population.

Growth of Christianity among the seven most numerous Adi tribes, 1991-2011

| | Total Population | | | Christian Population | | | Percent Christian Share | | |
|-----------------|------------------|----------|----------|----------------------|--------|--------|-------------------------|-------|-------|
| | 1991 | 2001 | 2011 | 1991 | 2001 | 2011 | 1991 | 2001 | 2011 |
| Galong | 7,237 | 27,239 | 79,327 | 961 | 5,126 | 21,879 | 13.28 | 18.82 | 27.58 |
| Adi | 24,423 | 32,582 | 67,869 | 3,379 | 7,949 | 14,861 | 13.84 | 24.40 | 21.90 |
| Adi Minyong | 26,562 | 33,984 | 25,112 | 1,869 | 5,378 | 4,147 | 7.04 | 15.83 | 16.51 |
| Adi Gallong | 55,268 | 48,126 | 18,604 | 6,811 | 10,526 | 7,011 | 12.32 | 21.87 | 37.69 |
| Adi Padam | 8,348 | 11,625 | 13,467 | 1,471 | 3,002 | 4,119 | 17.62 | 25.82 | 30.59 |
| Miniyong | 7,005 | 2,815 | 5,668 | 603 | 398 | 1,163 | 8.61 | 14.14 | 20.52 |
| Total of Above | 1,28,843 | 1,56,371 | 2,10,047 | 15,094 | 32,379 | 53,180 | 11.72 | 20.71 | 25.32 |
| All Adi in 2011 | | | 2,37,997 | | | 65,691 | | | 27.60 |

Christianity has taken root among the Adi also

As seen in the Table above, the share of Christians in the six most numerous Adi tribes increased from 11.7 percent in 1991 to 20.7 percent in 2001; it has further increased to

25.3 percent in 2011. The rise is not as spectacular as in the Nyishi, etc. But the Adi Gallong have now become nearly 38 percent Christian and the Adi Padam are also more than 30 percent Christian. The share of Christians is the least among the Adi Minyong at 16.5 percent. But, as we have mentioned repeatedly, these names do not seem to refer to any fixed identities and perhaps the total numbers are more meaningful.

Share of the Christians in many of the smaller Adi tribes is much bigger than indicated by the average of all Adi communities. Thus 79 percent of the Bori, 78 percent of the Libo, 73 percent of the Pailbo, 70 percent of the Bagi and 67 percent of the Bokar are Christian. Of these, the Bokar, the Bori and the Pailbo are fairly numerous communities.

Notwithstanding the Christian penetration, a majority of the Adi continue to be followers of Doni Polo.

The Idu, Miju and Degaru Mishmis

The Census has mixed together some of these tribes

Dibang Valley and Lohit (including the new district of Anjaw) are inhabited by several Mishmi communities; their several groups live in different areas within the Dibang Valley-Lohit-Anjaw region. The Idu, also listed as Chulikata Mishmi earlier, are largely in Dibang Valley and Miju largely in Lohit. But these designations seem to have been mixed up in Census 2011 and Mishmis in general have been added to the Idus.

These tribes are largely Hindu

Hindus form a considerable proportion of this group of tribes. In 2001, when the Mishmi were counted separately from the Idu, 20 thousand of the 25 thousand Mishmis were Hindu. In 2011,

Religious profile of the Idu, Miju and Degaru Mishmi, 2011

| | Total | Hindu | Christian | ORP | %H | %C | %O |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| Idu | 32,219 | 16,884 | 1,602 | 13,218 | 52.40 | 4.97 | 41.03 |
| Miju | 9,406 | 6,636 | 139 | 2,506 | 70.55 | 1.48 | 26.64 |
| Degaru | 1,274 | 880 | 97 | 289 | 69.07 | 7.61 | 22.68 |
| Mikir | 1,068 | 1,038 | 22 | 8 | 97.19 | 2.06 | 0.75 |
| Taram | 11 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 45.45 | 36.36 | 18.18 |
| Total | 43,978 | 25,443 | 1,864 | 16,023 | 57.85 | 4.24 | 36.43 |

Note: The first 3 rows comprise several Mishmi communities.

Hindus comprise about 58 percent of this group of tribes, more than 36 percent are ORPs and there are only 4.24 percent Christians among them. In 2001, there were only around 127 Christians in this whole group. The ORPs in this group are followers of Intaya, Nani Intiya and other tribal religions; there are few followers of Doni Polo among them.

Khampti of Lohit and Changlang

Khampti, Thai Khampi, Khamba and Khamyang comprise largely Buddhist communities that inhabit Lohit and parts of Changlang districts. Of their total population of about 17 thousand, 16.4 thousand are Buddhist and another 3 hundred Hindu. There are 138 Christians even among these Buddhist communities.

The Khampti of Lohit and Changlang, 2011

| | Total | Hindu | Buddhist | %B |
|----------------|--------|-------|----------|-------|
| Khampti, Kamti | 15,762 | 286 | 15,200 | 96.43 |
| Thai Khampi | 76 | 3 | 69 | 90.79 |
| Khamba | 777 | 6 | 753 | 96.91 |
| Khamiyang | 401 | 6 | 389 | 97.01 |
| Total of Above | 17,016 | 301 | 16,411 | 96.44 |

The Meyor of Anjaw

There is also the small Buddhist community of the Meyor, also known as Zekhring, inhabiting Anjaw component of Lohit. Of 989 members of this community, 366 have become Christian. In 1991, there were no Christians among the Meyor and there were only 3 in 2001. This community has been converted largely in the last decade.

Singpho of Lohit and Changlang

This is another Buddhist community that inhabits Lohit and Changlang districts. Of 5,616 Singpho counted in 2011, 5,385 are Buddhist.

Deori of Lohit and Changlang

Deori are another significant tribe of this region. They are said to have been the priests of Ahom and Chutiya kingdoms; their name comes from that role. The Deori have remained unconverted. Of 5,365 Deori counted in 2011, 5,289 are Hindu. But, there are 24 Christians and 18 Muslims even among them.

Tangsa of Changlang

Numerous Tangsa communities are counted in the Census

Changlang district is inhabited largely by the Tangsa, among whom the Census counts as many as 28 distinct tribes; all of them carry the name Tangsa. Curiously, the number and names of Tangsa in the census lists has been changing. There were 29 Tangsa tribes counted in 1991 and 28 have been counted in 2001 and 2011. Several names in these three lists are different from each other.

Christianity has made deep inroads in the Tangsa

| | Rising Christian presence among the Tangsa, 1991-2011 | | | | | | | | |
|------|---|-------|----------|-----------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| | Total | Hindu | Buddhist | Christian | ORP | %H | %B | %C | %O |
| 1991 | 19,751 | 6,245 | 753 | 5,710 | 5,136 | 31.62 | 3.81 | 28.91 | 26.00 |
| 2001 | 29,538 | 6,631 | 1,979 | 13,491 | 104 | 22.45 | 6.70 | 45.67 | 0.35 |
| 2011 | 36,120 | 3,595 | 2,543 | 21,291 | 62 | 9.95 | 7.04 | 58.95 | 0.17 |

Christianity has made deep inroads into this community. Of 36 thousand Tangsa counted in 2011, more than 21 thousand are Christians; they form 59 percent of the Tangsa population. Of the remaining Tangsa, 3.6 thousand are Hindu and 2.5 thousand Buddhist. The share of Christians among the Tangsa has risen from 29 percent in 1991 to 59 percent in 2011. The share of Hindus has declined from nearly 32 percent in 1991 to less than 10 percent in 2001. The share of ORPs had declined from 26 percent to almost

nothing in the single decade of 1991-2001. Tangsa are perhaps the only community of Arunachal Pradesh that has converted from the Hindu religion at such an extensive level.

The share of Christians in some of the Tangsa tribes is much higher than the average of 59 percent. The main Tangsa community of 15 thousand persons is 63 percent Christian and the second largest community of Mossang Tangsa is 93 percent Christian now.

The Yobin of Changlang

There is another small but significant tribe of the Yobin in Changlang. This tribe has been nearly completely converted. Of 2,994 Yobin counted in 2011, 2,965 are Christian.

The Wancho and Nocte of Tirap

Tirap district is inhabited by the Wancho and the Nocte. Both these communities had considerable presence of the Hindus and ORPs among them even in 1991. In 2011, the Wancho have been almost entirely converted, and two-thirds of the Nocte have now become Christian. The traditional tribal religions of the Wancho and Nocte, including the Rangfra, which is specific to the Nocte and the Tangsa, have now been nearly eliminated.

Wanchos are 95 percent Christian

Of about 57 thousand Wanchos counted in 2011, 54 thousand are Christian. In 1991, 22.5 percent of them were Hindu and 45 percent

| | | The Christian conversion of the Wancho, 1991-2011 | | | | | | |
|------|--------|--|--------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| | | Total | Hindu | Christian | ORP | %H | %C | %ORP |
| 1991 | 45,182 | 10,184 | 13,190 | 20,410 | 22.54 | 29.19 | 45.17 | |
| 2001 | 47,788 | 5,003 | 35,057 | 7,585 | 10.47 | 73.36 | 15.87 | |
| 2011 | 56,886 | 1,449 | 54,165 | 312 | 2.55 | 95.22 | 0.55 | |

ORPs. The share of Christianity among them rose from 29 percent in 1991 to 73 percent in 2001 and has reached above 95 percent in 2011. Thus, this majority community of Tirap district has been nearly fully Christianised in the course of just two decades.

Noctes are 67 percent Christian

Of about 35 thousand Noctes counted in 2011, 23 thousand are Christian. In 1991, there were just about 2 thousand Christians in the

| | | The Christian conversion of the Nocte, 1991-2011 | | | | | | |
|------|--------|---|--------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| | | Total | Hindu | Christian | ORP | %H | %C | %ORP |
| 1991 | 23,418 | 8,992 | 2,328 | 11,490 | 38.40 | 9.94 | 49.06 | |
| 2001 | 33,680 | 7,754 | 14,630 | 5,732 | 23.02 | 43.44 | 17.02 | |
| 2011 | 34,664 | 6,787 | 23,093 | 4,453 | 19.58 | 66.62 | 12.85 | |

Nocte population of above 23 thousand. The share of Christians among them rose from less than 10 percent in 1991 to 43 percent in 2001 and has risen to 67 percent in 2011. The share of Hindus has correspondingly declined from 38.4 to 19.6 percent and that of the ORP from 49.1 to 12.8 percent. This transformation of the religious demography of the Nocte has happened in the course of just the last two decades.

The Census also counts three smaller Nocte communities of Tutcha, Liju and Ponthai Nocte. There are 1,049 of the Tutcha Nocte, 60 percent of them are Christian; there are 788 of the Liju, of whom 76 percent are Christian and there are 68 of the Ponthai Nocte, of whom 82 percent are Christian.

CONCLUSION

STs in General

1. Scheduled Tribes form nearly 69 percent of the population of Arunachal Pradesh and 41 percent of them are now Christian. The share of Christians in some of the largest and more important tribes is much higher than this average.
2. The rise of Christianity in the tribal population of Arunachal Pradesh is a recent phenomenon. In 1991, Christians formed less than 14 percent of the ST population; their share was near 26.5 percent in 2001.
3. Much of the conversion to Christianity has occurred from the populations that were counted as followers of Other Religions and Persuasions (ORPs).
4. The ORPs now form about 38 percent of the ST population. Their share was 57 percent in 1991 and 47 percent in 2001.
5. The ORPs of Arunachal Pradesh are mainly followers of *Doni Polo* or *Sidonyi Polo*. This incorporates the religious practices of a large number of tribes of the Tani and Adi groups. But there are also a number of other faiths and persuasions followed by several tribes, especially in the eastern half of the State. All of these diverse faiths are rapidly losing adherents to Christianity.
6. Besides, the Christians and ORPs, there are about 10 percent Buddhists and 10 percent Hindus among the STs of Arunachal Pradesh. These two religions are prevalent in distinct tribal communities inhabiting geographically distinct regions.
7. There has been little conversion to Christianity among the Buddhist and Hindu tribes, excepting a few exceptions.
8. But the share of Hindus and Buddhists together in the ST population has declined by about 6 percentage points between 1991 and 2011. This is partly because of the relatively lower growth of the Hindu and Buddhist tribes compared to others.

Numerousness of the individual tribes

9. The STs of Arunachal Pradesh are divided into an unusually large number of individual tribes. Census 2011 gives data for as many as 105 tribes. In 2001, the number was 100.
10. The Constitutional Order listing the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh mentions only 16 tribes by name. But it is drafted in an ambiguous language. It begins with the phrase “*All tribes in the State including*” and then names the 16 tribes. This has been interpreted to mean that the list of Scheduled Tribes in the State is open-ended and has led to the inclusion of several divisions and sub-divisions of the same community as separate tribes.

11. Many of the individual tribes in the Census lists of Arunachal Pradesh do not seem to have a definite identity. Their numbers keep changing from decade to decade and even the spellings and names do not seem to be fixed.

12. There is an urgent need for the Parliament to amend the order to provide a definitive list of exclusive tribes with distinct identities to be listed in the Schedule.

Tentative Grouping of tribes

13. It seems possible to group the numerous tribes of Arunachal Pradesh in a few groups that are not only ethnically related but also inhabit specific geographic regions.

14. On the basis of the district-wise data provided in Census 2001, a tentative grouping would include the following, inhabiting specific regions as we move from west to east: The **Monpas** inhabiting Tawang and West Kameng; the **Aka**, **Sherdukpen** and **Miji** inhabiting West Kameng; the **Nyishi**, **Nissi** and **Nishang** inhabiting East Kameng, Lower Subansiri and Papum Pare; the **Apatani** inhabiting Lower Subansiri and Papum Pare; the **Tagin**, **Sulung** and **Bangni** inhabiting Upper Subansiri and East Kameng; the **Adi**, with their several sub-divisions, inhabiting Upper Subansiri and West, Upper and East Siang; the **Mishmis**, including the **Idu**, **Miju** and **Degar**, inhabiting Dibang Valley and Lohit; the **Khampti**, **Singpho** and **Deori** of Lohit and Changlang; the **Tangsa**, with their several subdivisions, inhabiting Changlang; and, the **Wancho** and **Nocte** of Tirap.

Christianisation of the different groups of tribes

15. The Monpa are and remain committed Buddhists. Of the 65 thousand Monpas counted in 2011, 63.5 thousand are Buddhist.

16. The Aka, Miji and Hrusso, who together number about 16 thousand in 2011, are now 38 percent Christian. There were a total of 103 Christians in this group in 1991.

17. The Sherdukpen continue to remain Buddhist.

18. The Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang are the most numerous and important tribal group of the State. Christianity has penetrated rapidly into this group and there has been an accretion of 22 percentage points to their share in 2001-11 alone. More than 63 percent of their population of 2.85 lakh has now become Christian. Those of the Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang who have not yet converted to Christianity are mainly followers of Doni Polo or Sidoni Polyo.

19. The level of conversion among the Apatani, who have a population of about 44 thousand is relatively lower at 22 percent. In 1991, the share of Christians among the Apatani was less than 1.5 percent.

20. The Tagin, Bangni and Sulung have a population of 72 thousand in 2011 and 14.76 percent of them are now Christian. In 1991, there were only about a thousand Christians among a somewhat larger population of theirs. The share of Christians in the Bangni and Sulung is high at 47 and 46 percent, respectively; it is only 12 percent in the Tagin.

21. The Adi, who have been divided into 29 tribes, are the second largest group with a population of about 2.4 lakh in 2011. About 28 percent of the Adi are now Christian. The share of Christians among many Adi communities is much larger than this average.

22. The Mishmis, including the Idu, Miju and Degaro, have a population of about 44 thousand. Nearly 59 percent of the population of this group is Hindu and another 36 percent are ORPs following diverse faiths like Intaya, Nani Intiya, etc. Christians form about 4 percent of their population; in 2001, there were only about 50 Christians in this whole group.

23. The Khampti group of tribes have a total population of 17 thousand, of whom 16.4 thousand are Buddhist.

24. The Singpho have a population of 5.6 thousand of whom 5.4 thousand are Buddhist.

25. The Deori have a population of 5,365 of whom 5,289 are Hindu.

26. The Tangsa group, which includes 28 tribes, has a population of 36 thousand. Christians now form 59 percent of their population. The share of Christians in 1991 was near 29 percent. There were 32 percent Hindus among them in 1991; the share of Hindus now is less than 10 percent. The ORPs then formed 26 percent of their population; there are hardly any ORPs among them now.

27. The Wancho have a population about 57 thousand. More than 95 percent of the Wancho are now Christian. In 1991, 22 percent of them were Hindu, 45 percent ORPs and 29 percent Christian. The nearly complete Christianisation of the Wancho has been accomplished in just about 2 decades.

28. The Nocte have a population of about 35 thousand. Nearly 67 percent of them are Christian. In 1991, there were less than 10 percent Christians among them. At that time 38 percent of them were Hindu and 49 percent ORPs.

29. Christianity, thus, has made deep inroads into the Nyishi, Nissi and Nishang in the western and in the Tangsa, Wancho and Nocte in the eastern parts of Arunachal Pradesh. The Adis in the middle have become nearly 28 percent Christian. But Monpas of Tawang and Siang and Khamptis of Lohit region have continued to abide by their Buddhist commitment and the Mishmis of Dibang-Lohit region have continued to be Hindu.

31. The rise of Christianity has been largely to the loss of the diverse tribal faiths and practices of the numerous tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, all of which are now in danger of being swamped with the uniformity of Christianity.