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# Everyday Life at a Buddhist Monastery:

## An Ethnographic Exploration of Rumtek Monastery



# **Everyday Life at a Buddhist Monastery:**

**An Ethnographic Exploration of Rumtek Monastery**

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**DISCOVER INDIA PROGRAM**

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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work incorporated in this report entitled “*Everyday Life at a Buddhist Monastery: An Ethnographic Exploration of Rumtek Monastery*” submitted by the undersigned Research Team was carried out under my mentorship. Such material as has been obtained from other sources has been duly acknowledged.

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## **ABSTRACT**

With the invitation from the King of Sikkim, to establish the new seat of the Karmapa in the kingdom, the construction of the monastery started in 1961. Rumtek Dharma Chakra Centre, the largest monastery in Sikkim, situated around 23 km from Gangtok propagates Tibetan Buddhism. The research analyzes various aspects of the Rumtek Monastery like the history, and architecture, lifestyle, socio-economic activities, and cultural practices performed within the monastery and life at Nalanda Institute.

The exploration briefly mentions the monastery's architectural significance and historical facts. Which comprises of the importance of Thangka paintings, the Golden Stupa, the main shrine and the old monastery. After establishing the historical elements, the on-field research advances to study the varied cultural practices like prostration, the importance of prayer flags, prayer wheels, festivals, traditional dances and most importantly the ongoing oral transmission. The monks have a very rigid and scheduled lifestyle. The aim of this research is to understand the daily routine of the monks and the student monks living in the monastery and the institute. The study supported our pre-field research to unravel the socio-economic aspect forms of livelihood prevailing in Rumtek because of the monastery, the role of government, social identity that prevails, financial structure and lastly about how has Rumtek Monastery contributed to the growth of tourism in Rumtek.

There has been very little academic work done on Rumtek Monastery and most of the existing literature talks about the 16th Karmapa and the history of the Monastery. Our idea is to collate the primary and secondary data to contribute to the study of Rumtek Monastery as a whole. This analysis is an attempt to present an ethnographic study about the history and magnificent construction and flamboyant colors of architecture, an austere lifestyle followed by the monks and the co-existent socio-economic conditions of locals and monastery and experiencing the age-old cultural practices that prevail in Rumtek Monastery.

The sampling was done essentially from Rumtek, and some people from Rawatey and Gangtok using snowball sampling. The secondary or pre-field research was done using Journals, Books, Periodicals, Research papers, Documentaries and Websites. The primary study was conducted using interviews, focused group discussion, observation, visual documentation and life-stories of the people. Finally, the analysis of the collected information was done by the method of thematic analysis.



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## Chapter 1

# Introduction



Image 1: *An image of Buddha's sculpture.*

People have always been intrigued by the idea of asceticism, and withdrawing from the society to lead a life of simplicity to achieve peace. A monastery is such a group of monks or nuns who withdraw from the life of pleasures and desire. In Buddhism, the monks aim to achieve *nirvana* which means freedom from the cycle of birth and death. The monastery in time becomes the spiritual focus of the village or town. In the foothills of Eastern Himalayas, in Sikkim, rests a small and beautiful monastery, famously known as the Rumtek Dharma Centre. It is known for its religious practice of Tibetan Buddhism which one of the schools of Vajrayana Buddhism.

### **1.1 Buddhism**

Buddhism, the well-known religion and philosophy has developed over a period of time from the teachings of the Buddha between the mid-6<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries. Spreading from India, to China, Japan, Korea and central and Southeast Asia, Buddhism has played a vital role in spiritual, cultural and social life of Asia. This period was also the period of intense religious activity and great social change. The disagreement regarding Buddha's birth and death between scholars makes it tough to precisely define as to when Buddhism was born. Buddhism like many other religions, developed in the northeast of India because of a teacher, whose teachings formed the basis of the religion.

In various traditions of Buddhism, the teacher Buddha is believed to have existed in the past and will exist in the future. Few Buddhists also believe that only one Buddha exists for a historical age, while some contend that all beings will become Buddhists by possessing the Buddha nature. This historical figure, Buddha, born in the northern edge of Ganges river basin or southern Nepal is believed to have lived for 80 years with a family name Gautama and a given name Siddhartha.

According to the traditional accounts, Buddha was born in the ruling of Shakya clan. It is also believed that he was a member of the Kshatriya, or the warrior caste and at the age of 16, he married princess Yashodhara, who would bear him a son eventually. At the age of 29, while the prince was on a chariot ride outside his palace, he observed the suffering of the world and then renounced his family and wealth to live the life of an ascetic. One day, after he fainted in a river out of weakness after meditating for six years, he concluded by saying that

the path to liberation was not through mortification. Buddha after receiving enlightenment by meditating under a tree spread his message for the next 45 years throughout north-eastern India receiving patronage of kings and merchants and also establishing orders of monks and nuns. Finally, at the age of 80, when the Buddha fell seriously ill, he met all his disciples for the last time imparting his final instructions to them and then passed into nirvana.

Centuries after the founder Buddha's death, Buddhism had developed into two different directions, Hinayana and the Mahayana. Hinayana, also called Theravada is a more conventional group, comprising of compiled versions of Buddha's teachings preserved in collections called the Sutta Pitaka and Vinaya Pitaka, while the other major group Mahayana, recognised the other teachings making salvation available to a greater number of people. These teachings were for the more advanced disciples of Buddha and were expressed through the sutras.

The spread of Buddhism encountered various currents of religion and thought such as the Karma, a belief that good actions create pleasure in the future and bad actions create pain. Similar to other great religions, Buddhism generated various practices (*Hazra*). However, these practices are rooted in one way or the other in all other Buddhist rituals like rites of passage, calendrical rituals, pilgrimage rituals as well as protective rites.

Buddhism in the last two century has faced many challenges, especially by the interference of western rule and their politics, religious activity, cultures and traditions. During this period, Buddhism had been an important force, spread very rapidly towards the west (majorly from India), where it got affected by the new developments that took place. Buddhists responded to this situation in various ways such as making Buddhism a more appealing and effective force, de-emphasizing supernormal and ritual aspects and focusing on continuity of Buddhism and modern science and promoting missionary activity in Asia and in the West.

## **1.2 Sikkim**

Sikkim lies in the north-eastern territory of India. It is bordered by the province of West Bengal in the south, Nepal in its west, Bhutan in the east and China in the North. Sikkim is also known as Nye-mae-el meaning "paradise" by the Lepcha people, who are the original inhabitants. It is the second least populated state of India with a population of 619,000 as per the 2012 census. Being a part of the eastern Himalaya, Sikkim is well known for its

biodiversity which includes the snow-capped mountains and sub-tropical atmosphere. Kanchenjunga, the most elevated top in India and third most noteworthy on Earth is an integral part of the territory of Sikkim. Gangtok is the largest city and the Capital of this paradise. About thirty-five percent of Sikkim is secured by the Khangchendzonga National park.

The state of Sikkim was established by the Namgyal tradition in the seventeenth century. It was administered by a Buddhist ruler well known as Chogyal. It turned into a regal province of the British India in 1890. Sikkim joined hands with the Indian Territory on April 26<sup>th</sup> 1975 as the 23<sup>rd</sup> state.

Sikkim, due to its mountainous territory and poorly constructed transport infrastructure does not have a large scale industrial base. Tanning, refining, watch making and blending are the fundamental ventures and are situated in the southern parts of Sikkim, essentially in the towns of Melli and Jorethang. In spite of its negligible modern framework, Sikkim's economy has been one of the quickest growing in India since 2002. In 2010, Sikkim's GDP extended by 89.93 for every penny. Sikkim, in 2003 chose to switch completely to a natural cultivating state-wide, and accomplished the title in 2015 as the organic state of India.

Sikkim has 5 seasons: summer, winter, harvest, spring as well as a rain storm season between June to September. Sikkim has subtropical climate in the south to the Tundra region in the North. Majority of Sikkim's territory deals with mild climate with temperature surpassing 28 degrees Celsius in summer. The normal temperature throughout the year is around 18 degrees Celsius; snowfall is consistent in this state. The snowline in the north of this state is 4,900 meters. The tundra-sort area is covered in snow for 4 months and the temperature there falls below zero degree Celsius.

Sikkim is a land of multicultural people who speak many languages and represent a variety of ethnicities. Sikkim has 11 official dialects: English, Rai, Gurung, Tamang, Lepcha, Nepali, Limbu, Magar, Sunwar, Sikkimese and Newari. English language is used as a part of the government official reports and in schools. The prominent religions there are Hinduism, Buddhism and Vajrayana. To a great extent, Sikkim's economy is a subject to horticulture and tourism.

Sikkim's Nepalese dominant part celebrates Hindu festivals, including Diwali and Dussera. They also celebrate their local festivals such as “Drupka Teshi and Bhumchu, Lhabab Ducchen, Saga Dawa, Loosong, Losar, Maghe Sankranti and Bhimsen pooja”. They also celebrate “Amid the Losar” which is Tibetan New Year. Muslims in Sikkim pray during Eid-ul-fitr, Muhrram and observe fasts. To pull in travellers amid off the season, Christmas is also celebrated in Sikkim.

### **1.3 Rumtek Monastery: An Overview**

Rumtek, originally called the Dharma Chakra Centre, promulgates Tibetan Buddhism, which incorporates a number of religious practices such as chanting, meditation and other essential teachings. Amongst all the monasteries in Sikkim, Rumtek is the largest, and is home to a large number of monks.

Only half a kilometre away from Rumtek Dharma Chakra lies the ruins of the old Rumtek monastery, also known as ‘Karmachokhor Thubtenling’ constructed in 1734 A.D. by the fourth Chhogyal Gyurmed Namgyal. However, the monastery was burnt to ashes in an unknown incident. Later, in 1959, the Sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje, along with a group of 150 *tulkus*, lamas, monks and lay followers, made a difficult and long journey to India through Bhutan as a result of a political uprising in Tibet. The Karmapa was welcomed by the king of Sikkim, His Majesty Chogyal Tashi Namgyal, with an invitation to establish a new seat in the country. The acceptance of the invitation marked the relationship between Karmapa and the kingdom of Sikkim.

The construction of the new monastery started in 1961, and after six years of hard labour, the new Rumtek monastery was standing tall and beautiful on seventy-four acres land, in Sikkim. A provision of funds issued by the state government covered the costs for fixing the electrical cables, supplying food and water, and helping in the reconstruction of the road leading to the picturesque monastery.

Rumtek owes its beauty to its intricate architecture and colourful designs. The entrance hall of the monastery is embellished with eye-capturing Thangka paintings which has artistic and iconographic elements in it. Furthermore, the monastery includes a worship hall, a beautiful shrine temple and a big courtyard encompassing small rooms for food, education, storage and many different uses. There are several sacred objects within the monastery, the most magnificent one being the Golden Stupa in the great hall, which contains

precious relics of His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa. Undoubtedly, the Rumtek monastery has a great architectural significance with a mystical ambience which creates a sense of inner peace in the hearts of visitors.

The rich traditional beliefs and values propagated by the monks in Rumtek attract a large number of travelling enthusiasts from around the world. Tourism is one of the main sources of income for the monastery which is earned by providing hospitality to the visitors. The institution is also economically benefited by the sales of handicraft and traditional products which are sold at a profit. On the other hand, large donations by the lay people and gifts from the tourists add on to their monetary gains.

Apart from having an elegant architectural importance, what keeps the monastery alive are the daily activities of the monks residing there. The monks indulge in practices like torii making, chanting, meditating, dance and music. Their daily life incorporates a religious routine which includes a week-long religious practice, concentrated on a particular Buddha. The ultimate goal of the monks is to attain enlightenment and free themselves from all the worldly pleasure, and if failed to do so, they can always return back to the conventional society.

The monastery is celebrated for its practice of Tibetan Buddhism. Because of the same reason, it is a significant Buddhist monastery. The Sixteenth Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje, under whom the monastery runs, aspires to help spread the teachings of the Buddha throughout the world.

#### **1.4 Conclusion**

As mentioned earlier, Rumtek is the largest monastery, which makes it the biggest tourist attraction in Sikkim. The architectural elements and the traditional beliefs of the monastery creates a sense of fascination within the soul of the people. Built after much struggle, the monastery is now an essential part of His Holiness Sixteenth Karmapa, and is a living epitome of Karmapa's vision and lifelong dedication to the Dharma. People from all around the world visit and pay their respect to the Buddhist culture. Buddhism developed around 6<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE and is based on the teachings of the Buddha. Buddhism has spread to a lot of places over time but in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is facing a lot of new challenges that need to be overcome. Buddhism is practiced in India and is a very important religion in Sikkim. Sikkim located in the northeast of India houses three main communities.



They are the Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Nepalese. Sikkim has a lot of monasteries dedicated to the various sects of Buddhism.

We of the study aim to learn about the everyday life at Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim. This ethnographic exploration includes the socio-economic, cultural practices and lifestyle of the monks and people around the monastery. We intend to investigate the above on the basis of field work. Through various research methods, the field workers wish to examine how the monastery operates on a day to day basis and how the rituals and practices are followed by Tibetan Buddhist monks. Along with this, they hope to analyse the socio-economic impact of Rumtek Monastery as well as the gender roles within and outside the monastery. The next chapter will further elaborate on the various themes and talk about the various literature that we read before going on field.

## Chapter 2

# Literature Review

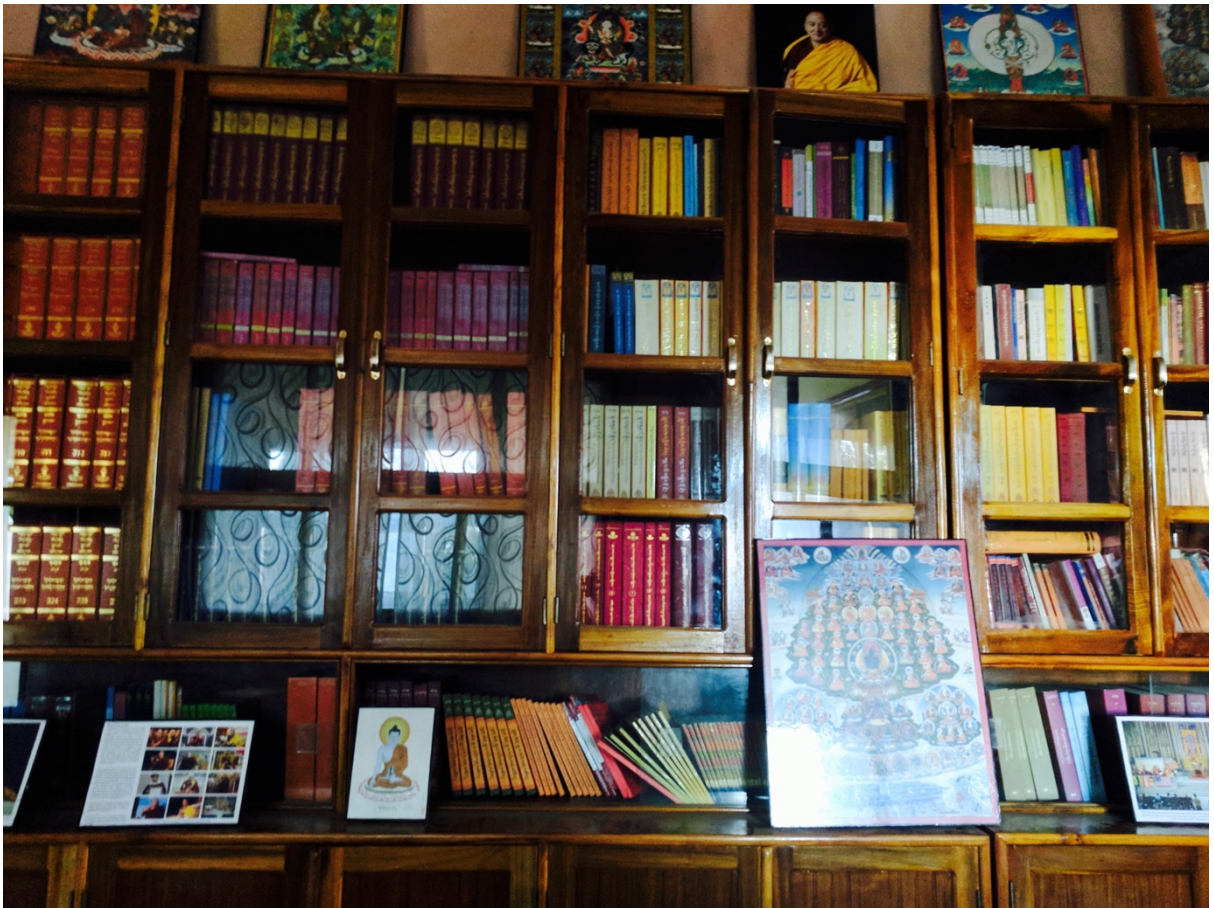


Image 2: *An image of Nalanda Library*

“What you think, you become. What you feel, you attract. What you imagine, you create.”

-Gautama Buddha

## **2. Literature Review**

Buddhism is a religion that preaches that your life is what you make of it. A very famous quote by Tibetan author Ole Nydahl mentions that “We just have to remind ourselves that the source of any happiness is mind itself.” Be good and you shall receive good, be bad and that is what you shall receive. It also tells us that suffering exists however there is a cause and an end to it. However, Buddhism’s fundamental goal is to bring peace, not only to this but all worlds. Furthermore to be able to bring peace, one must learn the cause of peace. Once we gain knowledge of that, we recognize how and where to direct our efforts.

Monastery is the place of worship and study of Buddhism. One such monastery that we came across was the Rumtek Monastery. As mentioned in the previous section, our research aims at exploring the Rumtek Monastery based on five broad aspects. These aspects or themes are History, Architecture, Cultural practices, Lifestyle of monks and socio economic practices of the monastery. For the same as part of a pre-field research, we began by collecting available literature on these themes. This paper shall be detailing on the subject matter covered in the introduction and also talking about the other themes.

### **2.1 Historical Overview**

The history of Sikkim, in North East India, began with the association between ancient Hindus and Tibetans, this was followed by the establishment of a Buddhist kingdom or the ‘Chogyal’ in the 17th century. The earliest inhabitants of the state of Sikkim, India were Lepchas (Rong pa) who came from the east. Presently, Buddhism is known to be a predominant religion in the state. Sikkim has 75 Buddhist monasteries and the oldest dates back to the 1700s.

Buddhism at that time was spread across India, Tibet and other South and East-Asian countries such as Japan, Korea, Sri Lanka etc. The history of Buddhism can be traced all the way back to the 5th century. The religion emerged in and around the ancient Kingdom of Magadha which is present-day Bihar and is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama or now commonly known as Gautam Buddha which means “the awakened one”. Buddhism is followed all over the world. It rose in the ancient kingdom of Magadha which is current day Bihar of India.

During the rule of the Buddhist-Mauryan Emperor Ashoka, the community of the Buddhists divided into two separate branches: The Mahasamghika and the Sthaviravada. Each

of these is widely spread throughout India and are fragmented into numerous sub-sects. Presently, two major branches of Buddhism which exist are: The Thervada in Sri Lanka and South-east Asia, and the Mahayana covering the whole region of the Himalayas and East Asia.

A form of this religion is Tibetan Buddhism. Gradually, it got separated into two sects: The Yellow Sect (Gelug) and the Red Sect (Nyingma, Kagyu, and Sakya). Of these, the followers of Nyingma sect, the Bhutias, migrated to Sikkim from Tibet and established themselves as the dominating class over the Lepchas or the old residents of Sikkim. Tibetan Buddhism was introduced in Sikkim by Lhatsun Chenpo, a resident of Kongbo in the lower valley of the Tsangpo.

Of the many monasteries that exist in Sikkim, Rumtek Monastery is the oldest. It was built by the 4th Chogyal in the year 1730. It is a 45 minutes' drive from Gangtok. The monastery is prestigious seat of the Gwaliya Karmapa of Kagyu sect. After the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa arrived in the late 1960's, the monastery began to be known around the world. It houses, some of the world's most unique religious scriptures and rare objects like the Black Hat.

The construction of the new monastery was initiated by the Sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje, as his main seat-in-exile outside Tibet. During the 1959 uprising, reaching towards the Indian border, the Karmapa was welcomed with an invitation to establish a new seat in the country by the king of Sikkim. At that time Sikkim was not a part of India. The Maharaja of Sikkim gifted seventy-four acres of land for construction of Rumtek to the 16th Karmapa. The government of Sikkim also donated funds for the cost of preliminary construction, additionally, they were provided with free timber. Furthermore, a road was constructed, electric cables were fixed and food and water were supplied in the area that the monastery was going to be built.

The construction of the new monastic complex started in 1961 and it took around 6 years to finish this beautiful monastery. Being the headquarters of Kagyu, here at Rumtek is a large community of monks being trained in meditation and Buddhist cultural practices.

## **2.2 Art and Architecture**

Buddhist architecture has its roots deeply implanted in the Indian soil – the birthplace of the Buddha’s teachings. The religion expanded quickly from the 5th century BCE all through Asia. Buddhism is an extensively practiced religion in Sikkim, especially Tibetan Buddhism.

Rumtek monastery is well-known for its exercise of Tibetan Buddhism amongst a lot of different things. The Rumtekese people believe that Rumtek is an extremely sacred and holy place for everyone looking for peace, happiness, unity, and prosperity. Rumtek is placed at the foothills of the greater Himalaya and it is said to be an extremely spiritual place of worship. It is said to have seven streams flowing towards it and seven hills facing it. The people of the city are extremely warm and helpful. They are proud of their beautifully built tourist places namely The Dharma Chakra Centre, Golden Stupa and Karma Shree Nalanda Institute.

The Monastery is an absolute feast for the eyes and creates inner peace in the hearts of visitors. The drive to the monastery itself is spell-binding and is filled with the majestic views of mountains. Rumtek monastery has great architectural and artistic significance. And this may also be the reason as to why; such in-depth research has been conducted on the architecture of this monastery. Despite being constructed from modern materials and the fact that the monastery is different from other monasteries, the Rumtek Monastery still has many followers. The monastery has been built with very precise architectural and structural guidelines. It is a typical Tibetan Monastery and it follows the same basic architecture. There are various structures inside the monastery, the most important ones being the Main Shrine with the prayer hall, the Nalanda Institute and the Golden Stupa. Other than this there are other structures such as a post office, the monks’ residence, cafes and shops within and outside the monastery and cafeterias for the monks and tourists. There is also a prayer pole which is visible from a distance called Tharchen.

### **2.2.1 Worship Hall and Main Shrine**

The worship hall of the monastery is quite spacious as contrasted to that of most other monasteries seen in the Himalayas. The shrine that is rectangular in shape faces a panoramic view of a river valley and the hills of Tibet. Higher on the hill are two buildings, one is the chapel and the second one a subsidiary residing. The vertical prayer flags and thick forests are present very clearly on the hillside. The functional monastery has a very big courtyard paved with asphalt and stone and it is enclosed through defensive partitions and by means of small

rooms for food, education, storage, woodblock printing and many different uses. In this courtyard stands a pillar on which the entire history of the monastery is engraved in the Tibetan language.

There are three most important doorways on the outside of the main shrine. Murals and elegant paintings of the four guardian deities embellish the entrance hall of the monastery. Ancient Thangkas and silk banners are suspended inside the principal shrine on a red pillar. Artwork of the Kagyu lineage and the eight Bodhisattvas can be observed as well. A ten feet high statue of Sakyamuni with Sariputra and Mangalputra is seen behind the throne of Gyalwa Karmapa.

The second-floor altar complex here is replaced by a raised and draped throne that is meant to be occupied by the Karmapa Lama. In front of the throne, as offerings are elephant tusks on both sides. The tusks are known to be an extremely auspicious offering. There are large windows on the side walls and clerestory on the top. Next to is a formal yet intimate room for worship and study.

### **2.2.2 The Golden Stupa**

Behind the Monastery's main prayer hall, a series of stairs leads to a small prayer room where footwear and use of electronic devices are prohibited in. The room consists of a small low height table in the left corner, which is generally used for meditation, and also consists of a few Buddhist paintings. To the right of this room lies a huge glass wall with an entrance which leads to the golden stupa. The stupa is a diminutive structure which is ornate and studded with amber and turquoise. The entrance to the structure is through a glass wall which displays the essence of the stupa. Subsequently, the great hall is crowned with the aid of a golden stupa. The stupa has a symbolism that is pan-Himalayan that is a mixed vase and jewel symbolism. On top of the constructing, there exist six cylindrical banners of cloth. Inside the altar, the primary image is of Buddha sitting in a meditation posture. But, because of all of the scarves tied to him as an imparting by using followers, it is tough to see the particular iconography of his body. His eyes and hair are painted blue. His body is twice that of his life-size body. To his left, there is a smaller figure of Padmasambhava, and to his right are attendants.

The golden stupa is believed to be the crown of the 16th Karmapa who is considered to be one of the greatest leaders of Buddhism. The eyes, tongue and the heart of the Karmapa are preserved inside a glass case in the golden stupa as a sign of significant reflection of

peace, harmony and bold path. The precious organs are guarded by the idols of the remaining 15 Karmapa's and thangka paintings on three sides of the room. These idols are placed in display cells with glass doors along with primitive lighting. The fourth side consists of a glass wall where lies the entrance to the room along with a table filled with treasuries, ritual paraphernalia, and religious cloths.

### **2.2.3 The Old Monastery**

The old monastery is dedicated solely to the 9th Gyalwa Karmapa. There is a statue of the 9th Karmapa in the main shrine along with stunning wall paintings of Tilopa, Milarepa, Gampopa, Naropa, Vajradhara, Narpa, Karmabakshi of Kargyu lineage and the 16th Karmapa is seen. The legend goes as that when the 9th Karmapa, threw holy rice after performing a ceremony four rice grains were strewn in Sikkim. One of these probably landed on the spot where we find the Rumtek monastery today.

### **2.2.4 Thangka Painting**

In Rumtek Monastery, there are religious scrolls with unique paintings put up on the walls, known as the 'Thangkas'. These paintings they are considered to be highly auspicious by the locals and the monks. The life events of various deities, Buddhist God and Gurus, who hold a great significance in Buddhism, are depicted in these sacred Thangka paintings. Images of Lord Buddha and Guru Padmasambhava are often a part of these painting. Most of the times, the major deity is depicted at the centre of the painting, making them the cynosure, which is then encircled by other lesser known deities. (Sikkim endeavours to preserve heritage of Thangka art, para.1-2; para.5-8) The traditional original Thangka paintings are made by skilled religious artisans. Canvases made out of paper or cloth is used in order to create such paintings. Tapestry is made possible with the help of gold threads and rich silk while vegetable dyes and stone colors are used to make the painting look more appealing to the eyes of the viewer. (Thangka paintings taught through the internet in Sikkim, para.1-2; para.5-6)

## **2.3 Lifestyle**

Daily life of a monk centres around tantric rituals and prayers whose ultimate goal is to attain enlightenment and complete liberation from worldly pleasures. The main objective to go to a monastery is essentially to get educated to pursue religious fulfilment also to merit their family. Monks have to be involved in several kinds of religious services and tasks related to administration on the behalf of the monastery community.

The main themes of monastery life are services and religious study. (Rinpoche, 9) According to the journal of Tibetan's "A normal day in the lives of these monks would predominantly include devoting early morning to text memorization and taking small tests on the previous day's material. Their work continues until mealtime. After breakfast, and then again after lunch, younger students study Tibetan, English, writing, and spelling. Older monks learn torma making and ritual instrument playing. Late afternoon is devoted to learning texts, and after dinner, the students return to their rooms where older monks perform practices such as Mahakala, and younger monks study." Other than that monks in the monastery are mostly going about doing their business, which consists of certain menial jobs. Tasks such as sweeping the courtyards, washing the robes and hanging them out to dry, while others just studying scriptures can be seen.

Generally, the study lasts for 18 years, or even more. They learn subjects like crafts, medicine and astrology. Those who pass this examination are allowed to participate the Monlam; debate. It is said that only a few scholarly monks enter a religious life and advance to religious fulfilment. Others either give up the practice or fall into more secular jobs. One of the major aspects to this monk's life is the gender representation. There are no women in Rumtek.

The monks at the monastery lead a very simple life; right from their choice of clothing, to food and even their daily activities are very meek. Yet vastly distinctive from ours. Most monks don't leave the monastery very frequently; hence they have several activities within the monastery which includes conjuring games as well. In addition to their daily classes and the usual study lesson, each month the routine of the monastery includes certain week-long practices. These practices are mainly focused on particular Buddhists, Deities or other lineage masters. These dates are recognized according to the Tsurphu system of astrology.

## **2.4 Cultural Practices**

Tibetan Buddhism encompasses teachings of Mahayana Buddhism and pre-Buddhist religion called Bon. (Powers, 2007, p.139-154) The two sacred Tibetan Buddhist books are known as the Kanjur and the Tanjur. While the Tanjur talks about the teachings of the Bodhisattvas i.e. a human being committed to the attainment of enlightenment for the sake of others. The Kanjur entails the teachings of the Buddha. (A Study in Cultural Syncretism, p.291) Dating back to Tibetan history; there have been several changes in the arrangement of cultural lineages. (Powers, 2007, p.139-154)



Rumtek Monastery, Sikkim practices the rituals and traditions of the Kagyu sect of Tibetan Buddhism. Kagyu literally means “teaching lineage”. The followers of Kagyu claim that its teaching is passed onto future generations by illuminated instructors; who have a clarity of understanding on the characteristics of truth and reality, without any conceptual knowledge which they, later on, communicate to the next generation of meditators. Kagyu commenced as a tradition that was austere and heretic but eventually it started to have large monasteries all around the world and became one of the foremost traditions in Tibetan Buddhism.

The two most important practices of this sect are Mahamudra; the Great Seal and The Six Yogas Of Naropa.

“The former has three primary features of tantric practices:

- a. Visualizing oneself as a deity and practice of sadhanas
- b. The practice of inner yogas, which work with the subtle body and
- c. Formless meditations, in which one rests in the nature of mind.” (Powers, 2007, p.399; p. 416)

The sole aim of this practice is realization of personal truth and not to lay extreme emphasis on Buddhist texts or doctrines. Lobsang Lhalungpa states that the term mahāmudrā “stands for the ultimate nature of mind and reality. Just as a royal seal wields unchallengeable authority, so the all-encompassing voidness of the ultimate reality prevails upon the cosmic phenomena. It also stands for the path of self-realization, which integrates authentic vision, contemplation, and action into one perfect insight.” (Powers, 2007, p.416)

The latter custom of six yogas of Naropa is one of the most significant practices of the Kagyupas. The six yogas are:

- a. Heat (gtum mo)
- b. Illusory body (sgyu lus)
- c. Dream (rmi lam)
- d. Clear light (’od gsal )

e. Intermediate state (bar do)

f. Transfer of consciousness ('pho ba).

Each of these meditation practices has its own unique quality in contributing to the growth of a disciple in terms of self-realization, awareness, awakening, concentration and gaining control over mind and body. (Powers, 2007, p.405-406) In addition to these practices, there are several other traditions that pay reverence to Buddha and lead them to the path of enlightenment. Such as the practices of the birth and the death ceremony in Buddhism.

#### **2.4.1 Birth ceremony**

When a child is born in a Buddhist family, the lamas conducts prayer for his/her health and performs a naming ceremony where they examine the birthmarks on the child's body and bless him/her by giving a virtuous name. The baby's wrists are tied around with sacred threads in order to welcome 'Khwan', a spirit that looks after the new-born. (A Study in Cultural Syncretism, p.294)

#### **2.4.2 Prayer Flags**

In order to raise a prayer flag, proper motivation is essential. If it is lever up with the attitude "I will benefit from doing this"– that is an ego-centred motivation and the benefits would be finite. However, if the attitude is "May all beings everywhere receive benefit and find happiness" the virtue generated by such a motivation will escalate the power of the power of the prayers and give meritorious benefits. (The Prayer Flag Tradition, p.1-2) The horizontal prayer flags are called Lung Dar, they come on ropes to be hung in horizontal displays. On the flip side, long narrow strips of cloth, known as Dar Cho, are tied on vertical poles. Of the two flags, the Buddhist Monks in Sikkim only worship the Dar Cho.

These flags have various symbols printed on them, which by definition have significantly larger meaning than their visual appearance. When discarding the old prayer flags, the traditional way to do so is by burning them with coconut oil so that the smoke from the fire shall carry their blessings to the Almighty sitting in the heaven. (The Prayer Flag Tradition, p.5-8)

#### **2.4.3 Prostration**

Prostration is a practice performed as a reverence to Buddha. It is carried out in order to eliminate ego, get rid of any kind of negativity and to develop veneration and adulation for the Three Jewels as it liberates the mind of an individual and gives them an opportunity to

comprehend and learn from the good qualities of others. When they bend; they visualize Buddha and the 34 rays emanating from his heart. Before starting the prostration, hands are joined with the thumb tucked in. (Wangdu, 2013)

To start off with the ritual; the hands are rested on the crown, then the forehead. While joining hands on the forehead, they must visualize the white light flow out of Buddha's forehead to theirs as it purifies negative actions such as killing. The hands are then kept near the throat imagining red light flowing out of Buddha's throat cleansing the negativity of speech. Later, proceeding to the heart; they picture the mind's eye a blue light emerging from Buddha's heart to purify the negative action of mind such as coveting. Prostration is ended by lying down with hands outstretched on the floor and then stand up and repeat the similar order. By doing so, he/she acknowledges the fact that the Buddha has attained supreme Nirvana and complete enlightenment. (Wangdu, 2013)

#### **2.4.4 Prayer**

In Tibetan Buddhism, the prayer goes on most of the time. They pray for setting free the living soul from samsara or the suffering world. (A Study in Cultural Syncretism, p.292) It is believed by the Tibetan Buddhist that if certain sounds and words, called mantras are reiterated often, it can open up one's' mind to a responsiveness which is beyond any word and thought and can arouse positive vibes within the soul of that person.

There are two main types of Buddhist meditation: vipassana (insight) and samatha (tranquillity). The two techniques are often combined or used one after the other (usually vipassana is followed by samatha). The object of concentration or what they call it as kammattana is less significant than the skill of concentration itself. This may vary from individual-to-individual depending on the situation. One pali texts list 40 kammattanas, which incorporates various virtues (like loving-kindness), devices (like color or light), recollections (such as sayings of the Buddha) and repulsive objects (like a corpse). (Buddhist Meditation, para.1-5)

#### **2.4.5 Death and Dying in Tibetan Buddhism**

The most exemplary manner in which one could die is letting go everything. A person must have an empty mind; relinquish all attachments and possessions and give away to charity. It is better for the dying person not to have any relative or friends around as it causes grief and a heavy soul. "The Tibetan Book of the Dead says that your crying and tears around a person's bedside are experienced like thunder and hail." (Rinpoche, 2002, p.229).

A death procedure can be conducted only under the guidance of a great master who chants some prayers. Traditionally, Tibetan Buddhists follow the ritual of sky burial to free the soul. The corpse is taken to a heightened mountain after a three-day ritual in which various prayers are performed. After the ceremony has been performed; a needle is inserted in the skull of the deceased in order to enable delusion of consciousness; after which the skull is splintered and fed to the vultures. Buddhists believe that human body is just a vessel for the soul and by the meat being eaten gives the soul a path to exit the body and continue reincarnation. (Powers, 2007, p.349-351)

Later on, the dead's house is purified by trashing the bricks into the river, on which the corpse was rested. However, in case of kids, lamas and masters of high spirituality they are either buried or cremated. A death procedure is considered to be very holy and therefore, it is considered to be one of the most significant rituals in Tibetan Buddhism. (Powers, 2007, p.349-351)

## **2.5 Socio-Economic Dimensions**

Around the world, culture is one of the most eminent themes in people's lives. Almost every monastery preaches different religions ranging from Christianity to Buddhism. However, irrespective of the faith that they preach monks living together in monasteries live respected paths of life wherein they serve their lives as devotees to a greater being. There are several socio economic repercussions of choosing to live this kind of lifestyle, involving not just sacrifices but regimental schedules that involve sermons, prayers, vigils and several other religious services.

Historically speaking, since the middle ages, the lives of monks have largely inculcated three aspects, providing hospitality and services to visitors, monastic jobs and occupations, and prayer. The lives of monks involve several responsibilities, like sustaining enough grain and vegetable to provide the brothers, to educate the children, to provide medical aid to the community, to provide congeniality to visitors and other people outside of their communities. The washing and cooking of utensils and the caretaking of the monastery was a primary responsibility of the monks in the community. This is highly relevant even today, in the lives of monks around the world.

Socio-economic – It refers to the relationship between social and economic factors within a society. These factors influence the acts of the society members. (investopedia-socio-

economics) Discussing the social economic factors of Rumtek Monastery the following things fall and affect the society:

1. Tribes around the Rumtek monastery
2. Source of income of people in Rumtek, Sikkim
3. Livelihood of people in the monastery and income generation
4. Gender ratio in Rawatey – Rumtek and different caste percentage

### **2.5.1. Tribes around the Monastery**

#### Bhutia Tribe:

“Bhutia” is a word derived from Nepalese language which means “Bhotay” which means the people of Tibet. They are people originated from Tibet who later has migrated down to India in the thirteenth century and make about 12%of Sikkim’s population. (Sharma and Borthakur) The family of the Bhutia people is principally patriarchal. Father is the head of the family and followed by the mother and also the eldest son. (Bhutia) Decisions in the family are taken by the Father and in his absence by the eldest son. The women in this tribe are given equal respect and power but usually not when it comes to property.

With time its seen that rules have changed for them and even women are getting their rights on property and other things. This tribe is unique in terms of being liberal, no men or women are stopped from pursuing their higher studies or getting a job. (Dwivedi) Bhutia women are largely seen working in press and television, they also are a part of political and legal activities.( Bhutia) The Government of India has been working really hard to give this tribe its recognition in the society. Coming to the factor of religion Bhutias are Buddhist by religion. Bhutias have their own language and script which they follow indoors. Outside the house, they talk in the Nepali language which is understood by the rest of common people and other tribes.( Mishra)

#### Lepcha Tribe:

“The lepchas are the earliest settlers of Sikkim. They call themselves ‘Rongkup’, meaning the children of Rong.” (Dorjee) Even before the Nepalese and Bhutia existed the

Lepcha tribe in the state of Sikkim. Lepchas make about 10% of Sikkim's population. (Sharma and Borthakur) "Lepcha is a name given by the Nepalese which means 'unintelligible speaker'". (Dwivedi) They as a tribe belong to Buddhists but many of them are Christians too. Lepchas basically live their livelihood on growing paddy, cardamom and oranges. They are people with a very unique lifestyle. (Dwivedi) Lepchas and Bhutias are considered to be of the same social strata.

"It was much later in time when Lepchas started following Buddhism or Christianity." (Nirash) Before that they followed worshipping the bone, spirit- also called as bone faith and mune faith based on the spirits, both good and bad. They speak Lepcha language which is very high on vocabulary and which is related to the flora and fauna of Sikkim, the language is not very developed but most of their works like literary works are found in Tibetan language. They are heavy meat eater- they eat pork, flesh of monkeys, fish and corn. Their source of income is through hunting animals and fishing. Polyandry marriages in permitted in Lepchas. They are a tribe which do not follow the joint family system. They are similar to Bhutias in terms of giving equality to men and women. (Nirash)

#### Nepalese Tribe:

It was only after Bhutias and Lepchas when Nepalese entered Sikkim. "They migrated in a very large number and soon became the dominant community. Today Nepalese make around 70% of Sikkim's population." (Dwivedi) They are the tribe which introduced economy in Sikkim. They introduced terrace farming in the state. Nepalese unlike Bhutias and Lepchas do not follow Buddhism, they in fact are Hindus with usual caste system such as Bawan (Brahmins), Limbus, Magars etc. A very few of them follow Buddhism. The language they speak is similar to Hindi and is understood by everyone throughout the state of Sikkim. Nepalese don't have much of a role when it comes Rumtek Monastery. (People of Sikkim) "They are a tribe which follow temples, god and goddesses." (People of Sikkim) They are people who are well educated and have got government jobs. They are very good traders, businessmen and agriculturists. Their food habits are ordinary like the other and they follow normal marriage systems. (Dorjee)

#### **2.5.2. Source of income of people in Rumtek, Sikkim**

Rumtek being a tourist attraction has many activities which increases its economy. Tourism in Sikkim is considered as its backbone to generate income. Rumtek having Sikkim's

largest monastery makes it even more attractive to a lot of tourists. A lot of handicrafts and famous art styles also contribute in Rumtek's economy such as Thangka paintings, wood carvings, Sikkimese carpets, chokes etc. (Sharma and Borthakur) (Urban Development and Housing Department, Government of Sikkim)

Besides tourism economical activities like agriculture, trade, horticulture, mining etc. Tea is being exported to Germany and USSR which brings in great profit. Sikkim as a state alone has about 40 exotic species of orchids, as a state it is very rich with its flora and fauna. Besides flora and fauna forest is one of the richest natural resource of Rumtek, Sikkim. "The state is also blessed with moderate amount of natural minerals such as coal, graphite, limestone, thermal springs, quartzite etc." (SIKKIM'S ECONOMY) which has a contribution in the economy. Sikkim is also known as the land of spices. Huge amount of cardamom, ginger and pepper is exported from Sikkim which brings in alot of foreign exchange. (SIKKIM'S ECONOMY), (Sikkim the Land of Spices)

### **2.5.3. Livelihood of people in the monastery and income generation**

Rumtek monastery being Sikkim's largest monastery accommodates monks to live in it. "The monastery provides facilities for study of Buddhism and philosophy with Vedic philosophy and Hindu philosophy being a part of the study". (rumtek org), (Ghosh)

Income in the monastery is generated through sales of handicrafts and other products. Being a tourist attraction the monastery earns its income through the money donations and gifts from visitors. From 2000 to 2007 about 7.8% growth is seen in the GDP of Sikkim because of tourism which is very impressive. (CHAKRABARTI) Also the entry fees collected by the monastery from the tourists add to the monastery's income. The monastery also has a Buddhist school which contributes in generating income. Also more than financially the monastery survives spiritually. Maximum of the income is generated through tourism and selling of handicrafts and other traditional products.

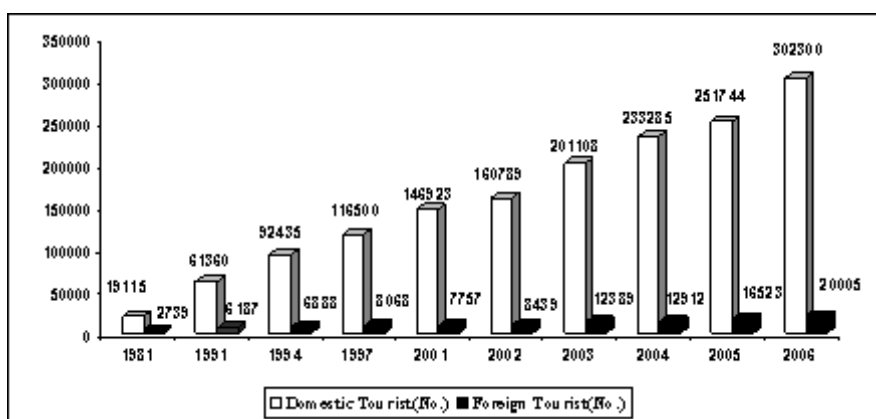


Figure 1: Annual Growth of Tourists (Domestic, Foreign and Total) in Sikkim (1981-2005)  
(Source: Economic Survey 2006-2007, Govt. of Sikkim, p.188)

#### 2.5.4. The gender ratio in Rawatey- Rumtek and different caste percentage

Rawatey - Rumtek is a medium sized village located in Sikkim. As per Census 2011 the population of Rawatey- Rumtek was 1573 out of which 809 are male and 764 are female. (Rawatey-Rumtek Population - East Sikkim, Sikkim). The schedule tribes make 12.84% of the population, whereas, schedule caste make 12.64% of the population. The on field research will fill in our gap question which is- the gender ratio in Rumtek monastery (and why).

	Total	General	Schedule Caste	Schedule Tribe	Child
Total	28.3%	12.4%	35.2%	461.1%	-13.2%
Male	31.1%	17.1%	30.1%	421.1%	-17.6%
Female	25.5%	7.7%	40.3%	505.9%	-7.9%

Figure 2: Growth of Population (percent) 2001 to 2011 – Rawatey, Rumtek  
(Source: Census survey 2011)



Now that we gained a basic knowledge of our research themes, we went along and decided the specific objectives and questions that we wanted to base the research on. The next chapter details what shall be studied, who it shall be done on, how the analysis will be done and many other topics.

## Chapter 3

# Research Methodology



*Image 3: An image of the interview being conducted*

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter comprises of the rationale behind the research, the research questions which eventually give us the objectives and finally, the research methodology which will clearly explain the setting, sampling and tools of data collection. In order to accomplish the research questions and objectives, we have opted qualitative research methods. This includes pre-field data and on-field data. Further, we have divided these two sub-categories into various brackets in order to ease out the research project.

### **3.2 Rationale**

When one goes through the pages of the Sikkimese history, Rumtek Monastery is ought to be admired due to its immense size, inception and the aesthetic Buddhist architecture. Besides the aforementioned aspects, the cultural practices followed by the monks, their lifestyle and their unique art form of *Thangka* paintings caught our attention as researchers and coaxed us to explore these facets of the monastery. Rumtek monastery is of great architectural and artistic significance. It is highly appreciated for its magnificent construction and flamboyant colors that enhances its picturesque, which evolved over time. The architecture of this monastery also entails *Thangka* paintings which plays a very significant role in depicting the local deities aiding in meditation and education of student monks. Therefore, it grabbed our interest. In addition to architecture, we also endeavour to observe the lifestyle of the monks and their daily cultural practices. Whilst researching, not much secondary data was obtained on these topics, hence, we opted to throw light on their rituals and daily routine which has been the part and parcel of Rumtek Monastery. Even though enough research has been conducted on the monastery, there is no mention on how the monastery has affected the surroundings and the livelihood of the people. Thus, our primary agenda is to target the socio-economic aspect which incorporates tourism, trade, job opportunities and gender issues. Considering all these elements, we decided to study everyday life at a monastery and the effects of the monastery on its neighborhood.

### **3.3 Research Questions**

#### 3.3.1 History and Architecture

The Monastery is an absolute feast to the eyes and creates inner peace in the hearts of visitors. Rumtek monastery has great architectural and artistic significance. The *Thangka* paintings on the walls are very critical in the explanation of Buddhist teachings. The old

monastery got completely burnt by fire and had to be rebuilt. The new structure was built with the help of government funding after dismantling the old building. We along with focusing on the current architectural features, intent on throwing light on the historical facts.

1. What is the artistic significance of Thangka paintings amongst the followers of Tibetan Buddhism?
2. How has the architecture of the monastery changed over time?

### 3.3.2 Lifestyle and Culture

The monks have a very rigid and scheduled lifestyle. We aim to understand their lifestyle which includes prayers, classes, recreation and much more that keeps them occupied. The Buddhist culture is considered to be very vivacious, they have several practices that they perform throughout the day to make a connect with Buddha.

1. What is the daily routine of a Tibetan Buddhist monk in the monastery?
2. What are the major cultural practices associated with Rumtek Monastery?

### 3.3.3 Nalanda Institute

Nalanda Institute is a Buddhist educational institute at the monastery that imparts Buddhist teachings. Besides, it also transmits languages such as Sanskrit and English. The primary objective is to discern the nature of knowledge and its incongruousness from traditional teaching. Furthermore, the purpose is also to fathom the life of a student monk.

1. What is the learning culture at Nalanda Institute in Rumtek?
2. What is the everyday lifestyle of a student monk at the Nalanda Institute?

### 3.3.4 Socio-Economic Aspects

Tourism in Sikkim is considered as its backbone to generate income. Rumtek having Sikkim's largest monastery makes it even more attractive to a lot of tourists. Besides tourism economical activities like agriculture, trade, horticulture, mining etc. prevail in Rumtek. Income in the monastery is generated through sales of handicrafts and other products. Being a tourist attraction, the monastery earns its income through the money donations and gifts from visitors. Also the entry fees collected by the monastery from the tourists adds to the monastery's income. We aim to apprehend and get an overview of the socio-economic background of the monastery.

1. How has Rumtek Monastery contributed to the growth of tourism in Rumtek?
2. What is the social identity of people of people who are associated with tourism in and around the monastery?
3. What forms of livelihood prevails in Rumtek because of the monastery?
4. To what extent does the government and civil society organizations influence the monastery?
5. What is the financial structure of the monastery?

### **3.4 Research Objectives**

1. To document the dynamics of daily functioning typical to Rumtek Monastery.  
Rumtek Monastery is home to innumerable monks who lead a very distinct lifestyle in contrast to conventional lifestyle. They have a plenty of chores that keep them occupied, such as their prayers, debates, assemblies, studies and leisure time. We seek to document the lives of monks in order to explore their idiosyncratic lifestyle.
2. To observe cultural practices associated with the Tibetan Buddhist monks at Rumtek.  
The essence of any holy place is the cultural practices. The devotion to god is expressed in the form of offering prayers, meditation and prostration. Furthermore, our study will entail traditional music and dance which plays a very significant role in Buddhist prayers.
3. To assess the socio-economic impact of Rumtek Monastery on the locals.  
All establishments have a substantial effect on its surroundings. Similarly, this monastery too influences the trade, tourism and employment of Rumtek City. This study will also envelope the various tribes abode in nearby village that chose to convert to Buddhism.
4. To examine the gender roles within and outside the monastery.  
The Rumtek Monastery does not inhabit any female monks so therefore we aim to understand the reason behind the absence of women inside the monastery. Moreover, we seek to comprehend the role of women outside the monastery such as the vendors, tour guides and so on.

### 3.5 Setting

Of the three places we will visit, the major setting of our research project will be Rumtek city where we will explore the Rumtek Monastery and its neighbourhood. The Monastery being the area of study will be visited often. Various interactions will occur in order to obtain substantial information along with observation of various activities in and around the monastery. Furthermore, to expand the spectrum of our research we would also be visiting a nearby village, Rawatey and the Gangtok city to understand the perspectives of the locals on the monastery and its impact on them.



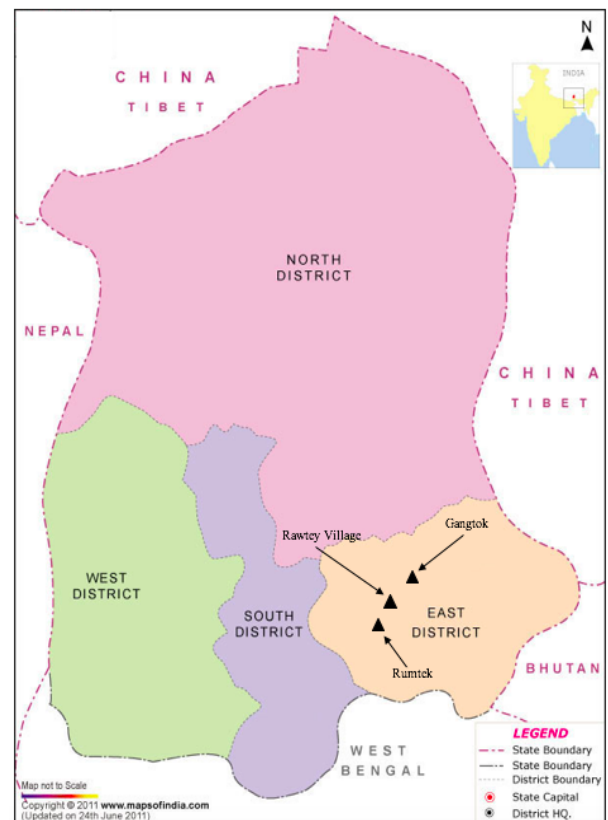
Image 4: *An image of Rumtek Monastery*



Image 5: *An image of M.G.Marg Gangtok*



Map 1: *Demonstrating the location of Sikkim in North-East India*



Map 2: *Demonstrating the exact location of Rawatey Village, Rumtek and Gangtok*

### 3.6 Sampling

The city of Rumtek is a cynosure for tourists as well as the Buddhist devotees. Due to this atypical blend of people visiting in Rumtek, it was difficult for we to target the right segment of the population whilst conducting the research. Hence, a sample group will be chosen using Non-Probability Sampling method.

3.6.1 Non-probability Sampling: As the name suggests, this sampling technique does not give an equitable chance to all the members in the population for being selected as a part of research. Off the various types of Non-Probability Sampling, we employed:

- a. Snowball Sampling – Since, the locals working or living in Sikkim are hard to track down digitally or over calls, this method will be used. It shall involve a particular individual as a point of contact who will then use his/her liaisons and refer other people of similar segment so that the right people are targeted in a comparatively lesser amount of time.

### 3.7 Tools of Data Collection

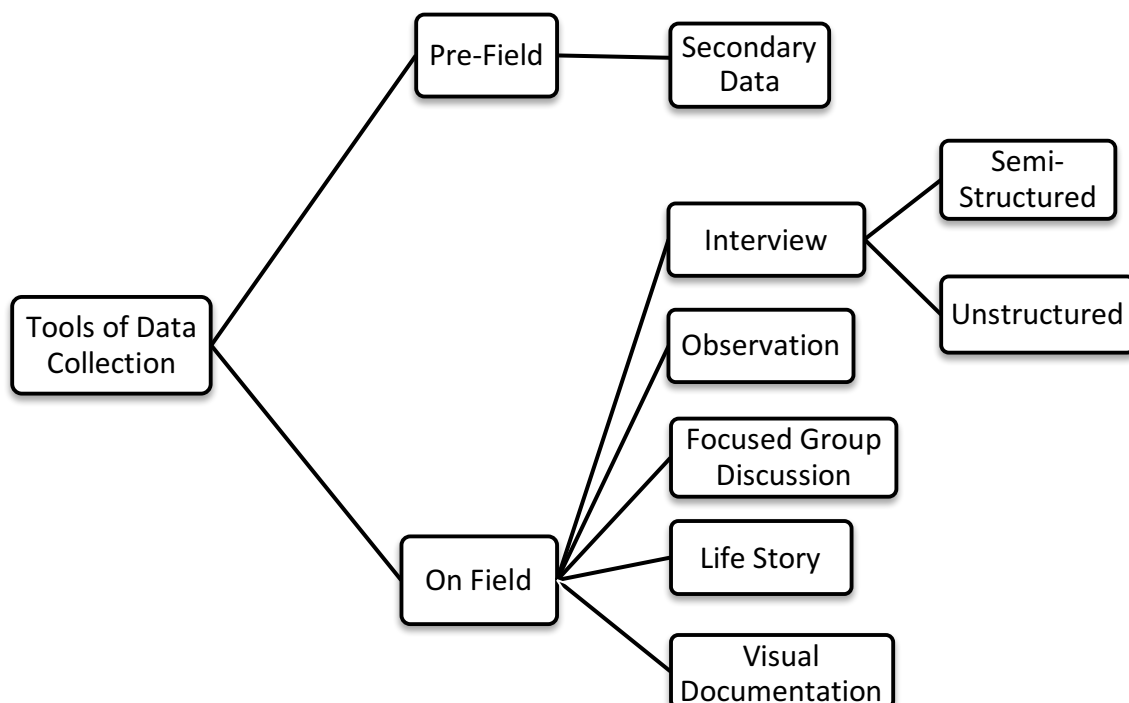


Figure 3: Flow chart of the *Tools of data collection*

### 3.7.1 Secondary Data

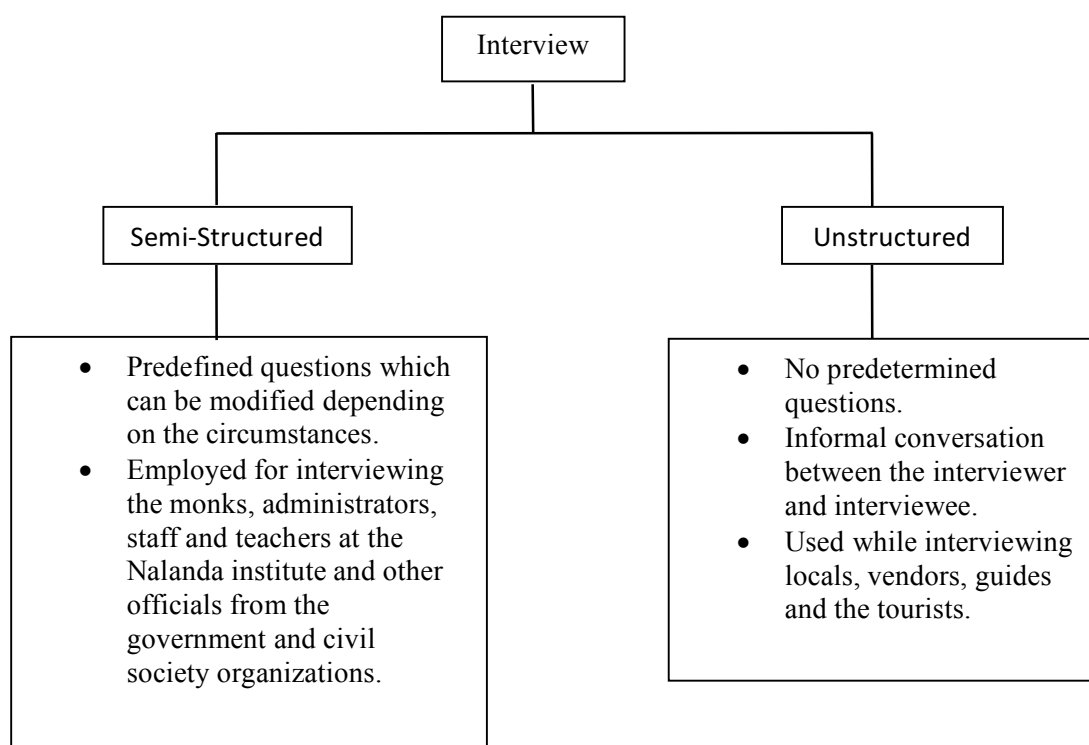
Rightly defined, secondary data refers to data collected by someone other than the user. As the same, we, we collected a good deal of secondary data after an exhaustive reading on our project topic from the following sources:

- Journals
- Books
- Periodicals
- Research papers
- Documentaries
- Websites

This aided us in understanding notable and important facts about the Rumtek Monastery which eventually gave us a more appropriate understanding of our research topic, thereby leading us to our three major themes:

1. Lifestyle
2. Cultural Practices
3. Socio-Economic Aspects

### 3.7.2 Interview



*Figure 4: Types of Interview*



<b>NAME</b>	<b>DESIGNATION</b>	<b>PLACE</b>
Sulten Yuma	Head Master of Philosophy at Nalanda Institute	New Rumtek
Ashish Lama	Cab Driver at Rumtek	New Rumtek
Karma	Owner of Restaurant outside (Vajra)	New Rumtek
Anaika and Brother	People from Meghalaya	New Rumtek
Sonam	Monk- Manager for logistics	Rumtek Monastery
Karma Dechchen Bhutia	Monk	Rumtek Monastery
Kamala and Shungpa Amma	Villagers	Camp Site
Shanti Sharma	Vendor	Outside Monastery
Anita	Gardener	New Rumtek
Dubju	In charge of Health Medicine and Astrology	New Rumtek
Christene	Tourist	Rumtek Monastery
Focus Group Discussion	Cleaning staff at Rumtek	New Rumtek
Kharma Khopi	Monk	Rumtek Monastery
Chukki	Owner of Curio craft	Outside Monastery
KarmaTupda	Student Monk	New Rumtek
Tujia Ompe	Vendor	New Rumtek
Tshering Chopel Acharya	Monk- Teacher	Rumtek Monastery
Baburam Thapa	Worker at Monastery	Rumtek Monastery
Karma	Monk	New Rumtek
Monay Rai	Guide at the Monastery	New Rumtek
Yeshi Palmo & Phunsuk	Local Buddhist women	New Rumtek
Tina	Tourist- America	Rumtek Monastery
Tilak Pradhan	Taxi Driver	Outside Old Monastery
Alan C	Tour Guide	Rumtek Monastery
Sindhuji	Tourist	Rumtek Monastery
Yeshi Palmo	Vendor	New Rumtek
Sonam and Suresh	Vendor	New Rumtek
Karma Sonam	Vendor/Student Monk	New Rumtek
Sonam	Nun	Rumtek Monastery
Pema	Shop owner inside Monastery	Rumtek Monastery

Rudra Pandey	Vendor	New Rumtek
Anil Kumar	Vendor	Rumtek Monastery
Karma Chunchin	Student Monk	Rumtek Monastery
Mayo	Tour Guide	Rumtek Monastery
Lali Gurooung	President, Gangtok Tourism	Gangtok
Sujith	Villager	Rumtek Village
Acharya Diljing and Son	Nalanda Cafe owner	Rumtek Monastery
Andreas	German Lama	Rumtek Monastery
Bhutia	Local	Rumtek Monastery
Lama Erik	American Lama	Rumtek Monastery
Dashono Thinley	Retired Army General	Rumtek Monastery
Kali Bhur	Vendor	New Rumtek
Vincent	Businessman	Gangtok
Tesring Dolma	Practitioner	Rumtek Monastery
Natasha	Practitioner	Rumtek Monastery
Wangshu Sharma	Student Monk	Rumtek Monastery
Nisha	Vendor	New Rumtek
Karan Singh	Assistant cormant	Rumtek Monastery
Karama Tesering Bhutia	Civil Police Officer	Rumtek Monastery
Gyanvi	Wife of a tailor	New Rumtek
Mahin Runshun	Nun	Rumtek Monastery
Niroj Jionjan	Vendor	New Rumtek
Mr. Baikarama	Monk	Rumtek Monastery
Itpo	Nun	Rumtek Monastery
Tenzing Sherpa	Manager with Lali	Gangtok
Neha Thirani	Nun	Rumtek Monastery
Chunksu	Monk	Rumtek Monastery
Goorung Thapa	Vendor	New Rumtek
Rinchen	Nun	Rumtek Monastery

Table 1: *List of interviews taken on-field.*

### 3.7.3 Observation

This is the most prominent tool of data collection in an ethnographic study. Therefore, we will be employing the technique of non-participant observation, which will be used to collect primary data on cultural practices, lifestyle, architecture, working of the monastery and the Nalanda Institute. Moreover, this tool is also beneficial in situations where a few people may refuse to interact with us.

### 3.7.4 Focused Group Discussion

It is a method of data collection wherein a few members of the research team will interact with a group of people sharing similar interests such as the villagers from the Rawatey village and student monks studying at the Nalanda Institute.

### 3.7.5 Life Story

Life story is a method of qualitative research that enables us to gather information about the life histories of people in order to get a better understanding from their life experiences by having an informal conversation. This method will be put to use with the monks, vendors and the villagers.

### 3.7.6 Visual Documentation

This is the one of the most effective medium through which we can represent our primary data. A visual documentation of the lifestyle of the monks, their cultural practices and the architecture of the monastery will be carried out.

<b>Inside the Monastery</b>	<b>Outside the Monastery</b>
Monks	Locals
Staff	Visitors/Pilgrims
Administrators	Tour guides
Student Monks	Vendors

Teachers	Local Transport Drivers
	Government Officials
	Political Parties/Local Leaders
	Civil Society Organization
	Rawatey Villagers

Table 2: *List of research participants interacted with on-field.*

### 3.8 Analysis

We aim to use thematic analysis as a method of research analysis. Thematic analysis is a common method of research analysis that helps in organizing collected data into themes. This allows for more systematic research especially for data with rich detail. The themes that emerged from the literature review that we aim to analyse for our research as stated before are History, Architecture, Lifestyle, Cultural Practices and Socio-Economic themes. We aim to study the lifestyle of people in and around the monastery and also the cultural practices followed in the monastery. Talking about art and architecture, we aim to emphasize the use and significance of Thangka paintings. Since research about anything is incomplete without knowledge of its history, we wish to track the events that mark the evolution of Rumtek monastery. Finally, we wish to learn about the financial structure of the monastery, the village as a whole and the working of Nalanda Institute. However, after the research trip we would be revisiting these themes and modifying them if need be as these themes should essentially emerge from the data.

### 3.9 Limitations and Challenges

- Observation bias: We aim to use non-participant observation and interviews in order to find answers to their questions. There are many problems associated with these types of research. The observation method is, takes time and most

importantly, is vulnerable to observer's bias. Another limitation of the non-participant observation is that the fact that someone present is observing people's behaviour, might be the very reason that they change their behaviour.

- **Cultural Barriers:** One of the chief problems we are likely to face is cultural barriers, in particular, language. The people of Sikkim speak three languages which are Sikkimese, Nepali and Lepcha, all three of which are unknown to us. This barrier may reflect to bias opinions.
- **Access:** Another difficulty our group would face is access to all parts of the monastery. There are certain places in the monastery which are accessible to the monks only, here, our team would be unable to collect complete data. Since Sikkim is a different geography compared to where we come from, they may face concerns related to the difference in terrain and climate.
- **Insufficient Secondary data:** There lies the issue of deficiency of secondary data required for the literature reviews and for we to be well prepared before going on-field.

### **3.10 Chapterization**

There are a total of eight chapters, of which, five chapters will be completely devoted to the analysis of the data collected on the five major themes that our research aims to explore.

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter gives a brief of the Rumtek monastery, about Buddhism and about Sikkim.

#### 2. Literature Review

As part of pre-field research, we reviewed relevant literature about the various themes. This helped us formulate our objectives and questions of research and also the methodology.

#### 3. Research Methodology

This chapter aims to give us answers to how this research is being conducted, what is being researched on, and who are going to be the participants of the research. This chapter also gives us a reason to why this research should be conducted.

#### 4. Cultural Practices

The monastery is known for its unique set of festivals, and various other forms of prayer and meditation. This chapter elaborates on how the cultural practices happen in

the monastery and who practices them.

5. Lifestyle

The monks and the students follow a very strict schedule. This chapter covers how they live and also other smaller themes such as food and technology.

6. Socio-Economic Aspects

The last chapter speaks of the various economic practices that happen around the monastery. This also talks about how funds are organized within the monastery.

7. Conclusion

The concluding chapter summarizes our various learnings and also the analysis of the same.

## Chapter 4

# Cultural Practices



Image 6: *An image of prayer flags*

## Introduction

The Cultural Practices in Rumtek Monastery mostly belong to the Buddhism school of thought. Tibetan interpreters going to India and Indian sages coming to Tibet revived Buddhist teachings in Tibet between the late 900s and the 1200s. By the mid-1400s, there were four noteworthy schools of Tibetan Buddhism. The Nyingma School referred to the Vajrayana lessons from the prior imperial time frame. The Kagyu, Sakya, and Geluk Schools all followed after later Vajrayana lessons coming into Tibet from India. The schools were formed because of individual showing genealogies and the relative accentuation each gathering put on specific recondite lessons. These schools, which keep on existing right up 'til the present time, concede to the fundamental lessons of Buddhism.

Most of the Monks in Rumtek Monastery belong to the Mahayana sect. A verse from one of their prayers perfectly describes the significance of cultural practices and prayers.

*“There is no any single being who has not been a father or mother in this life or maybe previous life so nowadays due to some natural disaster many people get killed so that kind of people must get peace and also in this world there may be any bad circumstances now people are facing so for that kind of person, people also get some peace and for that purpose, we are just praying and dedicate but not from our compose, that is not from our side that’s from the Buddha’s sutras, we read and we memorize and we dedicate every morning, every evening.”<sup>1</sup>*

### 4.1 Oral Transmissions of the Kangyur

The Oral transmissions started in Rumtek on October 9, 2017. This is also known as the Maha Pooja as; it is one of the biggest Pooja happening in Rumtek i.e. 2-month long. This Pooja has never taken place before. Mr. Sonam, a manager monk at Rumtek, claimed that “It takes great arrangements to carry out this Pooja attend the guests. We need to look after their stay, food and comfort. This is one of the main reason why such a Pooja never happened before”<sup>2</sup>. Usually this Pooja takes 8 months to complete but the *lama*, Kyabje Dubwang Sangye Nyenpa Rinpoche, is planning to read all the transcripts in the time period of 2 months. According to Karma monk,

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<sup>1</sup> Research Interview: Karma Monk, 10th October

<sup>2</sup> Research Interview: Mr. Sonam, Manager Monk take on 12<sup>th</sup> October,2017



“Right now in the monastery in here, some of the very special and important oral transmissions are going on here and thousands of monks are here for this empowerment. So today we are all receiving all these oral transmissions from the great master Sangye Nyenpa Rinpoche. Oral transmissions are actually Buddha teachings, so there is a 108 sutras which we have to learn as a Buddha philosophy, his teachings. Transmission means like a permission. If we get this kind of transmissions from the great lama and the great guru then we can learn this sutra very easily. This is just like a permission like you can do something. So now the guru amidst the great masters giving the old monks and lay practitioners some permissions that you can learn these 108 sutras anytime. So in Buddhist traditions it’s very important to have some transmissions, oral transmissions from high lama, like a high master. So after we get the oral transmissions, we feel like we can now learn it very nicely, with full of bless so with oral transmissions we can like read those Buddha’s teachings in philosophy so that’s why transmission is very important.”<sup>3</sup>

So there are a lot of people who have come down to attend the transmissions. The people attending the Pooja cannot leave the Pooja whenever they want to unless in case of emergencies. There are breaks after every hour where people can go out and freshen up. The nuns and the monks aren’t allowed to sit together. There are different sections made for nuns and monk to sit in the Pooja. The main motto of this transmission is to preach the Buddha’s teaching. Visitors and monks from around the come her to attend this sacred Pooja. While the Pooja is going on they sit and meditate listening to the *pravachan*.

**Karma,  
Head Monk,  
Rumtek**



*“The Oral Transmissions entail Buddha’s teachings. There are 108 sutras, which we have to learn as a part of Buddha’s philosophy.”*

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<sup>3</sup> Research Interview: Karma Monk, 10th October 2017.



Image 7: An image of the monks attending the transmission (Maha Pooja)

#### 4.2 Other Prayers in the Monastery

There are other prayers performed in the monastery by the monks like *Taradebi*, one of the most important Pooja carried out in the monastery. Mr. Karma the head monk stated that “There are 21 *taras* and if we worship them all through *mantras*, it will help us fight the 16 fears of life which includes water, fire and others”.<sup>4</sup> It is said that if we really pray from our heart, the *taradebi* has the powers to protect us not only from the fears but also from the other celestial beings around. This Pooja is conducted every morning and every evening. In order to increase their wisdom, they pray to goddess *manjushi* just like goddess of knowledge, Saraswati in Hinduism<sup>5</sup>.

**Karma,  
Head Monk,  
Rumtek**



*“We have many different prayers but the most significant one is the taradebi Pooja. We pray to the 21 taras in order to overcome the 16 great fears of life like water, fire, air, etc.”*

Besides *Taradebi*, the other important Poojas at Rumtek include, the *Patmasambhava* Pooja and the *Mahakala* Pooja. The *mahakala* Pooja is one of the most important Pooja. It is

<sup>4</sup> Research Interview: Karma Monk, 10th October 2017

<sup>5</sup> Research Interview: Sulten Yuma, Head Master of Philosophy, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2017

carried out one week before Tibetan new year. This Pooja is ended with the great Lama Dance<sup>6</sup>.

Morning and Evening Prayers happen every day where the monks read and memorize the main *sutras* and *tantras*. These prayers are dedicated to please Buddha and helps them gain complete focus.

### 4.3 Prayer Flags

Following the prayers, the Prayers Flags hold a great significance in Buddhism and to the monks and people. There are six colours in the flag that belong to the monastery, but the human eye can see only five. They are described in the Scriptures as emanating from the aura around the Buddha's head. There are 5 vertical stripes of red, yellow, blue, white and orange.

Traditionally, prayer flags in the monastery are utilized to advance peace, empathy, quality, and insight. The Flags don't convey prayers to divine beings, which is a typical misguided judgment; rather, the Tibetans believe the prayers and mantras will be blown away with the breeze to spread the positive attitude and empathy into all the available space.

By hanging prayer flags in high places the Lung ta (the Ta is the symbol of speed and conversion of bad fortune into good fortune) will convey the endowments delineated on the flags to all creatures. As wind passes on the surface of the flags, which are vulnerable to the slightest development of the breeze, the air is decontaminated and purified by the mantras.

The prayer flags turn into a perpetual part of the universe as the pictures blur from being exposed to the components of the air. Similarly, as life proceeds onward and is replaced by new life, Tibetans re-establish their desires for the world by relentlessly mounting new flags next to the old. This demonstration symbolizes an invitation of life's progressions and an affirmation that all creatures are a part of a more noteworthy cycle.

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<sup>6</sup> Research Interview: Sulten Yuma, Head Master of Philosophy, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2017

As per customary conviction, in light of the fact that the images and mantras on prayer flags are hallowed, they ought to be approached with deference. They ought not be set on the ground or utilized on apparel. Old prayer flags should be scorched.



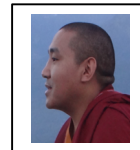
Image 8: *An image of prayer flags outside the monastery*

#### **4.4 Birth and Death Ceremony**

The members of a traditional Buddhist family in most parts of Sikkim believe that when a child is born, he/she is vulnerable to the wrongs of the world and must be protected. Hence at the time of birth, a Lama is called to the family's house to conduct a prayer which protects the infant's health. The prayer starts by speaking some mantras and ends by performing a name ceremony in a traditional way. Towards the end of the ceremony, the Lama examines birthmarks on the child's body and blesses him/her by giving him/her a virtuous name. The name given to the child is based on his/her physical features, date of birth or the zodiac sign. Moreover, the initial of the name is chosen in accordance with the day of the week on which the child is born. The infant's wrists are tied with sacred threads in order to welcome the '*Khwan*', a spirit that looks after the new-born. The lama also briefs the family about the possible harms that the family must be aware of.

As per the existing literature, Tibetan Buddhists follow the ritual of sky burial to free the soul. The corpse is taken to a heightened mountain after a three-day ritual in which various prayers are performed. After being carried to the mountain; the deceased body is cut and left open as food for the vultures. Buddhists believe that human body is just a vessel for the soul and by the meat being eaten gives the soul a path to exit the body and continue reincarnation. After the ceremony has been performed; a needle is inserted in skull of the deceased in order to enable illusion of consciousness; after which the skull is splintered and fed to the vultures. Later on, the dead's house is purified by trashing the bricks into the river, on which the corpse was rested. However, in case of kids and lamas and masters of high spirituality are either buried or cremated. However, this ritual is not followed in Rumtek due to sentimental barriers. In Rumtek Monastery, when someone passes away, they perform a 49-days Pooja to pray the soul so that it can get some peace. All these days, different types of Poojas are performed. After these Poojas, it is believed that the soul has left the body. The last three days, some special Pooja is carried out and the corpse is brought back home. The last day, 49<sup>th</sup> day, is the most melancholic day as the soul troubles all the kith and kins. The soul then tries to walk and figures out that there are no leg prints. The soul then walks on the ocean and finally realizes that it has left the outer body. If the person died had did some good deed when he/she was alive, the should will definitely find a place in heaven and else it shall suffer hell<sup>7</sup>.

**Karma,  
Head Monk,  
Rumtek**

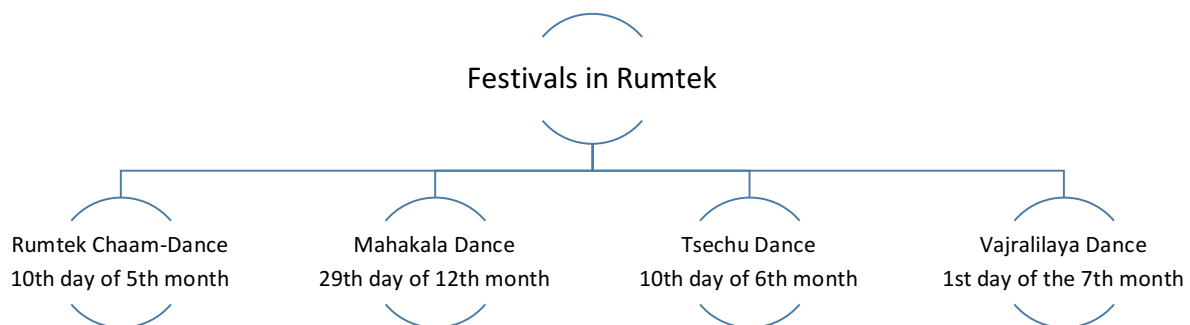


*“In Tibet, they feed dead bodies of monks to vultures but in India, due to sentimental factors, we cremate the body after conducting a 49 day Pooja.”*

#### 4.5 Festivals in Rumtek Monastery

With full of life and colours following are the festivals celebrated in Rumtek:

Figure 5: Festivals celebrated in Rumtek



<sup>7</sup> Research Interview: Karma Monk, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2017

Talking about the main festivals here, they celebrate the mask-dance festival, the Rumtek Chaam-Dance, twice a year. On this grand day, Sikkimese Buddhists pay adulation to Guru Padmasambhava, who first introduced Buddhism in Sikkim. In order to do so, a traditional dance, chaam dance is performed, which celebrates the various episodes from the life of Guru Padmasambhava and his battle against the forces of evil. This is then followed by a drama enacting his eight manifestations<sup>8</sup>.

Besides Rumtek Chaam, there are three main other Tibetan dances. Firstly, Mahakala (Lama) Dance, the monks perform every year on the 29th day of 12th month according to the Tibetan rural calendar. It falls under the month of February according to the Gregorian calendar. This festival marks the holiest occasion of Buddhism in Sikkim which clashes with Lord Buddha's birth and attainment of the *Nirvana*. On this auspicious day, the followers of Buddha go to the monasteries and offer butter lamps and revere the Almighty. A huge parade is carried out by monks, which goes around Gangtok with holy scriptures and prayer flags. Second dance is the Tsechu or Guru Padma Sabhava dance and the third dance is the Dhoop chain or Vajra Kilaya Dance. These dances depict that Rumtek is one of the very few Monasteries where the monks perform all these 3 significant Tibetan dances. Before they perform any of these dances, they conduct a 7-day long chanting in the courtyard outside the main shrine<sup>9</sup>.

#### 4.6 Nalanda Institute in Rumtek

Situated behind the Rumtek Monastery is the prestigious Nalanda Institute. In an interview Mr. Sulten Yuma, Head Master of Philosophy at Nalanda spoke about how this beautiful place came into existence and its history. The institute mainly belongs to the 16<sup>th</sup> Gwalior Karmapa Rangjung Rigpe Dorje. It is said that before he arrived in India he had a dream about this, where one great master came into his dream saying that he should build a great institute in India where he will come as a student and later teach life. The 16<sup>th</sup> Karmapa was in Tibet when he dreamt about it and thereon set on a journey to build the

**Monay Rai,  
Tour Guide,  
Rumtek**



*“Here at Rumtek, there are 4 main Tibetan dances. Before performing any of these dances, the monks carry out a 7-day long chanting in the courtyard outside the main shrine.”*

<sup>8</sup> Research Interview: Mr. Monay Rai, Tour guide, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2017

<sup>9</sup> Research Interview: Mr. Monay Rai, Tour guide, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2017

Monastery in 1961 and in 1966 after the completion of the monastery he started the construction on this place. The purpose of this was that through this Institute he can spread Buddhism to so many more students. He built this institute and tried his best to connect with Govt. of Indian in Varanasi, U.P. from where the students can earn *acharya's* (graduations) and he introduced subjects like Sanskrit, English, Philosophy and mainly history and Tibetan grammar so the students can pass on more information about the Buddha teachings all over the world. To accomplish this purpose came into existence what is now called Dharmashree Nalanda Institute.<sup>10</sup>

The student monks have to stay and study at Nalanda for 11-12 years to complete their graduation. Apart from the subjects mentioned above being taught the student monks have their own core values and rituals, lama dances and so many other old worship programs. To get admission in Nalanda Institute, there's a basic requirement of completion of 8<sup>th</sup> Standard and minimum age of 18 years. Kemburla also said that those you really want to join the institute need some basic requirements like those who can read Sanskrit, Hindi and of course English and Tibetan.<sup>11</sup>

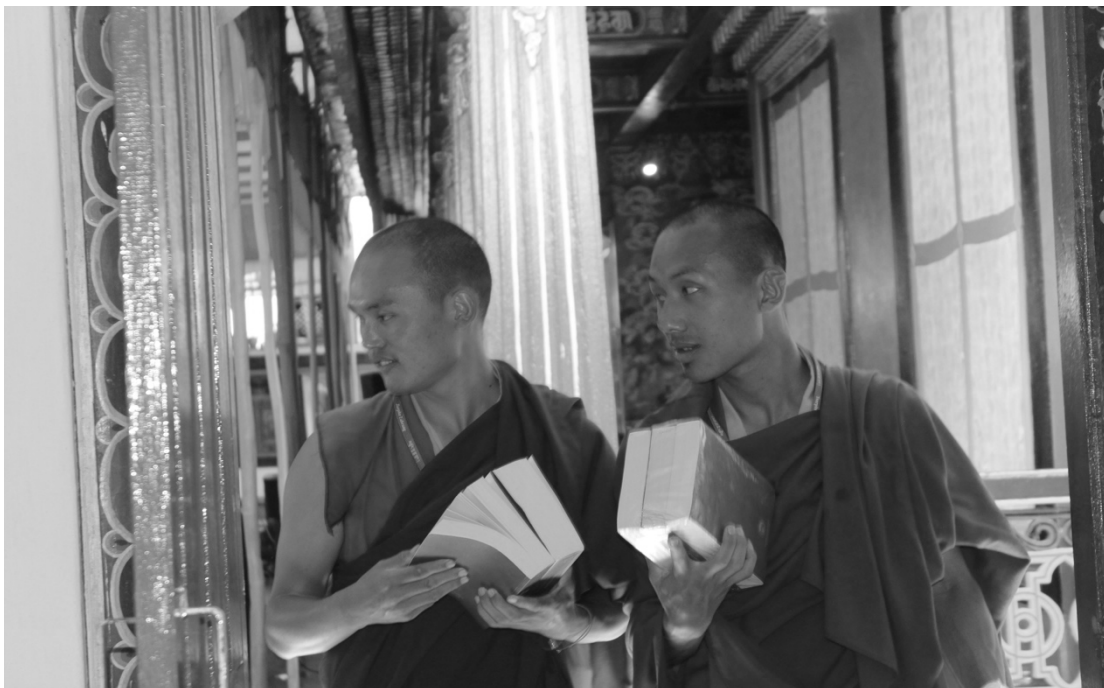


Image 9: *An image of two monks walking with books in their hands, inside the monastery*

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<sup>10</sup> Research Interview: Sulten Yuma, Head Master of Philosophy, 16th October

<sup>11</sup> Research Interview: Sulten Yuma, Head Master of Philosophy, 16th October

#### 4.6.1 Thangka Paintings

Kharma Khopi, a monk at Rumtek Monastery expressed his views on Thnagka paintings;

“Thangkas are of different kinds, for example, like for season guru yoga is a different practice and for four foundations it is different. In four foundation, we need to do 10,000 prostrations within two months, at that time we need different thangka. The thangka is specially for Budha when Budha was like 2700 year ago when some great lama used to give oral transmissions. Now we decorate the thankga of that lama. Thangka paintings are a kind of memory and is especially used for meditation practices. When we are meditating, for beginners, Thangka plays an important role in memorizing the qualities of Buddha and his nature. Those who become monks are explained about these paintings. Whenever a new monk comes, they see the paintings, and are guided by the teachers about these paintings. There are so many different ways to be guided about the thangkas. Like one of these thangkas shows Buddha and his two main disciples. In Buddhism, Thangka has everything to do with meditation. Some new monks when they understand these paintings, they get interested in art and paintings.”<sup>12</sup>

Apart from subjects the students are also taught how to make Thangka paintings as a part of their meditation practices. During the practice of Buddhism, the students need to learn about thangka. Different types of thangka that have different meanings. They also have to study about these things because if someone asks its significance, so they have to explain them. After finishing the graduation, the monks need to visualize things so for that they need to learn what is thangka and why there are so different thangka is Buddhism. So this is also a part of their course in the monastery.

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<sup>12</sup> Research Interview: Kharma Khopi Monk, 12th October 2017





Image 10: *An image of Thangka painting*

#### 4.6.2 Punishment and Discipline

During our interview with Mr. Sulten Yuma he was talking about various forms of punishments applied to discipline the students. He spoke about how there are 256 rules and if a monk or a student does not want to study or follow rules and regulation, they have different punishments. As an example, if a monk cheats or steals or gets involved in any kind of relationship, they are asked to leave the monastery. If a monk is accused for misbehaviour, he will have to resign from the monastery and if the students don't study, they have different punishments, they're strict at times and at times they are left with a warning or an advice.<sup>13</sup> Also, if a monk falls asleep during a Pooja, rice is thrown on him as a reminder or a warning so that the monk wakes up. Second time if he is still sleepy, the discipline teacher will be strict with him.

During their free time the student monks play sports and spend time in improving their Tibetan language. Tibetan language is quintessential and sometimes they show Tibetan drama in culture. The students are allowed to play sports as long as it is played for the benefits of the health. A few students also work at the student café situated in the Nalanda Institute during their free time. Unlike our usual Sunday holidays, they have a holiday every Wednesday

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<sup>13</sup> Research Interview of Sulten Yuma, Head Master of Philosophy, 16th October 2017.

where they are allowed to go out to the city with prior permission if they need to buy something and it is really important.

#### 4.6.3 Prostration

During our field research, we also attended the Mahakal Puja one evening where we observed a few student monks practicing prostration. Prostration is done every day by these monks. Prostration is specially to purify our bad deeds from our body and mind. Whenever they do prostrations at the monastery, specially they need some different positive imaginations. It is like a pledge that now I am just purifying my bad things what I have done and I promise that I won't do any mistake. It's to purify. Again like in Christianity, they read bibles, they make some confession. But in Buddhism the prostrations are a little different. Prostration is more like respect for them. One can see many Buddhist practitioners doing prostration. Sometimes whenever they meet their guru or master, prostrations are a form of respect to their teachers.

In this section, we tried to describe the significance of the cultural practices that take place in the monastery. The monastery conducts a wide range of ritual ceremonies which includes *taradebi Pooja*, which is carried out to fight 16 fears of life, *manjushi's puja* to impart wisdom, and *mahalaka Pooja* which is conducted one week before the Tibetan New Year. We also learned about the *Mahapuja* which goes on for two months, and its main purpose is to address the Buddha's teachings. We describe vividly the birth and the death ceremony of a Buddhist. At the time of birth, the naming ceremony is conducted and the child is blessed by the lama. Meanwhile, the demise of a Buddhist is followed by a 49 days long Pooja which is conducted to bring peace to the departed soul.

We also talked about the importance of the prayer flags which is a very significant cultural aspect in Buddhism. These multi-coloured prayer flags are embedded with Buddhist scriptures and are viewed as the source of purity and positivity. A strong conviction is held by the Tibetans which claim that the air is decontaminated when it touches the holy surface of the flags.

**Sonam,  
Manager Monk,  
Rumtek**



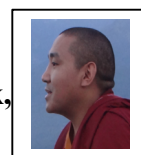
*“Prostration is specially to purify our bad deeds. It signifies the healing of our brain, tongue and the heart. It takes away all the sorrows and bad omen from one’s body.”*

Lastly, we talk about the Nalanda Institute which was established by the 16<sup>th</sup> Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje, with a motto to spread Buddhist teachings to the people. The subjects taught in the institute include Sanskrit, English, Philosophy, History, Tibetan grammar, and many others. In addition, they are also taught the art of making mandalas, thangka paintings, lama dance, and rituals. Some prerequisites to admit in Nalanda includes the knowledge of basic Hindi, English, Sanskrit, and Tibetan. The students who wish to take admission in the institute can fulfil these requirements by studying in a school till grade 8<sup>th</sup>. It has also been noted that not only Buddhist's children but people from around India and outside (Nepal and Bhutan), including Brahmins, join the institute as a result of their ardent faith in Buddhism.

The institutional hierarchy consists of the Director, Principal, Vice-principal, and a headmaster. Moreover, visiting faculties from various parts of the world, like England, also volunteer to teach English to the student monks. The institute also has a discipline teacher who helps maintains a certain level of decorum in the institution. They have a disciplinary rulebook which consists of 256 rules. Any student, who fails to abide by these rules are punished accordingly. The severity of punishment can vary from simple warning to rustication from the institute.

In order to maintain the pace with the fast-growing world, student monks hold the prerogative of modern technology which helps them to stay aware of the world's happenings. They use social media like WhatsApp, YouTube, WeChat and so on as the platform for educational purposes like discussions and debates. Along with this, the cultural practices are not such that limit monks from using technology. A student can return home without becoming a monk at their own will. Even a monk can go back if he does not wish to continue his life as in ascetic. Unlike many religions, They are not confronted with any social atrocities. We can say, in terms of cultural practices, Buddhism is developing and adapting to be a relatively modern religion.

**Karma,  
Head Monk,  
Rumtek**



*“Mandalas significance is impermanent. Once we finish the Pooja of a mandala, we just destroy it. In Buddhism, there is nothing permanent; everything is impermanent.”*

## Chapter 5

# Lifestyle



Image 11: *An image of monk standing at the door inside the monastery*

## **Introduction**

The life of monks at Rumtek Monastery revolves around discipline and simplicity. Their daily practices follow the path of Buddha's teachings. A monk at the monastery is involved in a variety of practices which not only include prayers and rituals but also several other activities such as teaching child monks, cleaning the monastery, cooking food, running different cafes and stores, managing administrative work and so on. The Nalanda Institute's structure and curriculum too, is designed and maintained by the monks themselves. Nalanda is an integral part of the monastery where the child monks spend most of their day learning, reading, debating and playing. Furthermore, they reside in the same building and strictly follow the schedule. Rumtek Monastery is not just a place of worship for the monks but their home where they undertake a plethora of responsibilities and duties. Their lives are not just about devotion to Buddha but much more than that. They have strict regulations on their food, education, prayers, leisure and all other activities that they undertake throughout the day. Being ardent followers and practitioners of Buddhism, however, there have been a few changes in their lifestyle with advancement and modernization, and they have implemented these changes, for instance; technology, in their lives. The existing literature and on-field research had very contradictory views on certain aspects such as technology and food which will be further mentioned in this chapter. Buddhist lifestyle has not encountered any severe transition but it has incorporated some changes that have not been discussed earlier. This chapter entails various facets about the lifestyle of Buddhist monks and an analysis of the data collected.

### **5.1 Nalanda Institute**

Nalanda Institute is one of the most significant part of the monastery that is not only an educational center for the student monks, but also their home. The student monks reside in the Nalanda building and almost all their daily chores are conducted there itself. The institute has been formally affiliated with Supernatant Sanskrit University of Varanasi, India, becoming an officially accredited institution. This enables Nalanda students to have certified qualifications acceptable to other universities and programs. The university governs the annual examinations, and, with KSNI, jointly awards the *acharya* (masters-level) degree.

<b>Timing</b>	<b>Schedule</b>
<b>5:00 am</b>	Wake up and exercise, get fresh etc.
<b>6:00 - 7:00 am</b>	Morning Puja for an hour
<b>7:00 am</b>	Breakfast
<b>8:00 am 12:00 pm</b>	Classes of 45 minutes each
<b>12:00 pm</b>	Break for Lunch
<b>12:00- 3:00 pm</b>	Classes resume of 45 minutes each
<b>Until 4:00 pm</b>	Evening Puja
<b>4:00 – 6:00 pm</b>	Debate session of 2 hours
<b>6:00 pm</b>	Dinner
<b>7:00 – 8:00 pm</b>	Mahakala Puja
<b>8:00 10:00 pm</b>	Self-study or meditation
<b>10:00 pm</b>	Suppose to Sleep

Table 3: *Daily schedule of a student monk.*

As seen above the student monks have a fixed daily schedule and are strictly required to follow them. When we were interacting and talking to few student monks there they said that their day generally starts at 4 or 5 in the morning after which they exercised, did some yoga or just prepared for the day. Once done with the morning prayer and breakfast, they proceeded to their scheduled classes or spent their morning in revising previous day's material and taking tests on them. Other than that their regular classes lasted up to 45 minutes each. Post lunch and other classes they also conduct debates for two hours every day. The debates in fact are the most interesting part of the day. Mostly the monks have to do debate on philosophy, about anything, about the phenomenon, permanent, impermanent, whether you can touch that or not, ultimately and conventionally. Mr. Karma explained it as,

“Actually there are 5 parameters, the 5 great sutras from Buddha's, the present Buddha Shakyamuni. The sutras are talking about all the phenomenon, for e.g., there are different kind of sutras, different books, first

we learn that and we get a teaching from that and after we finish our teaching and understand from that, we debate. On that topic the students have to debate whether it is correct or not and we have to use our own wisdom also then we can play the debate. Specially, to improve our philosophy.”<sup>14</sup>

Post dinner there’s an evening prayer that takes place in the Gumpa called the Mahakala Pooja which usually goes on for an hour.

### ***Life-story Of Chunkshu***

*Life of a child monk in Rumtek revolves around discipline and Buddhist practices. Right from waking up early in the morning to praying and continuing with their strict day routine. We on field, we encountered with a student monk- Chunkshu, who comes from a weak family background and is living in Rumtek since the age of 5. His parents are followers of Buddha and have admitted him at Nalanda Institute to become a monk. Chunkshu now is 16 years old and is studying at Nalanda and is learning different religious practices. He explained us the importance of the holy thread they tie around their wrist. He told us about the curriculum of Nalanda and the daily routine. The subjects offered at Nalanda are Philosophy, Tibetan, Sanskrit, English, Math, Tibetan Grammar and other subjects. Meanwhile he also told us about his interest in sports and playing musical instruments.*

### **5.1.1 Education**

In the institute, a monk has to stay more than 12 years to complete their graduation, after which they receive an MA degree in Buddhist philosophy. After the completion of the course, the student has the freedom to choose whether to continue pursuing to become a monk or go elsewhere to attain higher realization and knowledge of Buddhism. Besides having an institute for teenagers and adults; there is a school founded by His Holiness, which is not very far from the monastery. This school is for little children for basic schooling called *Karma Dharma Chakra Centre*; where they are made cognizant of basic Buddhist practices and teachings too, apart from their regular curriculum. Similar to students of Nalanda, they can

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<sup>14</sup> Research Interview: Karma Monk, 10th October

either opt to study further at Nalanda or they can choose to maybe join the monastery or discontinue Buddhist studies.

Nalanda is a very well organized institute having a very strict and rigid system designed for their students to evoke in them the true spirit of Buddhism. For the same, various implementations such as compact timetables, rigid course and extremely disciplined class decorum is maintained. At the institute there are several subjects that can be studied such as Sanskrit, Philosophy, English, History, Geography and Tibetan Grammar, at the monastery there are different cores like ritual learning, lama dance, various forms of worship programs. The philosophy and Tibetan grammar programs offered by the institute are the most important courses a student studies. While at the school, there is much more flexibility provided to the students in terms of their subjects. They have modules such as theatre, music and sports. Teachers from all over the world come to Nalanda to teach as mentioned by Sulten Yuma, Head Master of Philosophy at Nalanda,

“Every year we have teachers from Seattle, New York, England. They come here as a volunteer to teach English to the monk specially helping us in the accent. We have many different teachers from outside. Sometimes there are some Chinese teachers to teach Chinese also. This is what we call volunteer. But basically we have our own teachers. We have two Sanskrit teachers from Varanasi , one English teacher from Darjeeling, and we have many different professors in our institute.”<sup>15</sup>

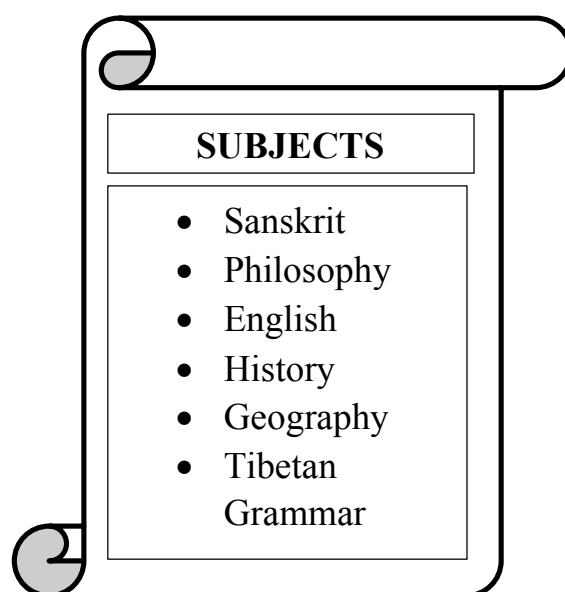


Figure 6: *Subjects offered at Nalanda*

<sup>15</sup> Research Interview of Sulten Yuma, Head Master of Philosophy, 16th October



Learning is also imparted among students at Nalanda in the form of debates and discussions on several worldly aspects to improve intellect and awareness. Students require some basic knowledge of reading and writing and therefore, they need to know the basics of Sanskrit, English and Tibetan. Students are taught using several forms of media. Another form of teaching is the use of various forms of online sources. They use YouTube for explanation of some religious texts. Besides an online live broadcast of the Karmapa's and Dalai Lama's teachings is shown to the students, from wherever in the world they are. Other forms of medias can't be used because of lack of access to good internet connectivity at the monastery. According to professor, Karma, the students are permitted to use technology if done with a "good intention". The student monks prefer using forms of social media like WhatsApp, Facebook etc. These forms of media, where chatting is a form of interaction, are used to do discussions, debate, *vad-vivaad*, they create a group on these platforms and discuss on subjects of knowledge especially history, philosophy, general knowledge, etc. for which they use WeChat and other forms of communication. They believe in staying updated with the modernizing world to broaden the horizon of their knowledge. They try preventing the student from any forms of distractions on social media. There could be several disadvantages along with the advantage of having a platform like this where it is very easy for students to stumble upon wrong data. In such a situation appropriate guidance is provided in order to gain the knowledge in the right way.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Research Interview: Wangshu Sharma, Student Monk, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2017

### 5.1.3 Leisure Time

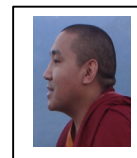
According to Karma Tupda, a student monk at the Nalanda Institute, “There are indoor games for small children, and elder boys play cricket and football. We also go to the city over the weekend”.<sup>17</sup> During the leisure time, students are allowed to play any form of sport and some other physical forms of activities such as yoga, martial arts etc. Monks who live at the monastery are also allowed to play football and cricket on the weekends along with the children for a few hours. This prevents them from getting distracted throughout the week. This is solely done for the betterment of the health hence, competitions are not appreciated and not conducted or permitted since it marks the presence of ego in a human being. The masters make sure that the play is accepted by all in a good spirit.<sup>18</sup>

The students, like the adults, are also allowed to go to the city frequently. On Wednesdays and weekends a visit to the city is permitted. There are some rules and regulations around the visit to the city. Prior permission needs to be taken for a leave and the students are obligated to adhere by the norms of the institute. The length of the leave needs to be mentioned before leaving. Other than these activities, during free time, a student can choose to visit the library, have a debate session, do chores, play games or do self-study.

### 5.1.4 Hierarchy and Structure of Nalanda Institute

There is a hierarchy that the institute follows. The Nalanda Institute is managed by Director and then the principal monk who looks after the administration, and various other departments at the Institute. There are other teacher monks who are given designations according to their experience, at and outside the monastery. Under the Principal, there is a vice-principal; under whom is the Headmaster for all the different modules and then teachers (support staff) under every subject. The monks who are involved in teaching are paid some remuneration for their services based on their courses. For instance, a philosophy professor is paid much more than any of the language professors.

**Karma,  
Head Monk,  
Rumtek**



*“During the free time (after all the prayers and studies), the Monks are allowed to do whatever they feel like. They can go out and eat, play games, use their phones, or even get some sleep.”*

<sup>17</sup> Research Interview: Karma Tupda, Student Monk, 11th October 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Research Interview: Karma Monk, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2017

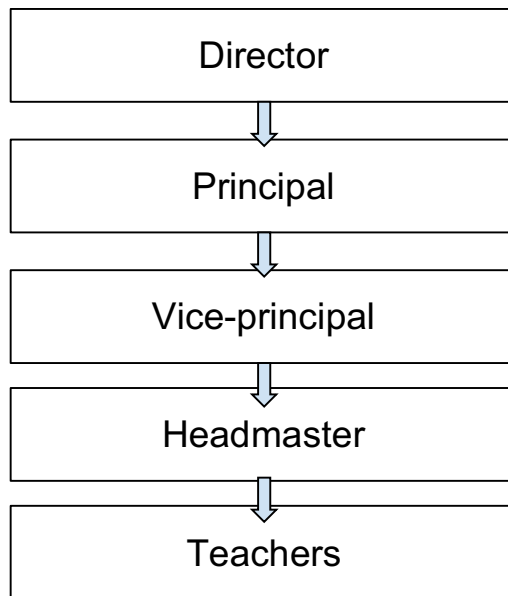


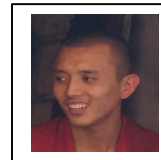
Figure 7: *Hierarchy of Nalanda Institute*

The admission procedure is exceptionally uncomplicated with doors open to one and all keen on devoting themselves to Buddha. There is no admission fee for the students. According to Karmapa, everything done for the welfare of the students is free. The education is entirely financed by the monastery.<sup>19</sup>

A teacher at Nalanda stated about the different possibilities available for a student after graduating from Nalanda.

“After completing 12 years course, some wants to continue in PHD’s in different place and some students want to join the meditation centres. We have different meditation centres specially for three years and once we join it then three years we cannot go outside especially to become a good lama or a good practitioner. Some students wants to go outside like Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore specially to get teachings about Buddhism. Some

**Sonam,  
Manager Monk,  
Rumtek**



*“We have a director, principal, vice principal and headmaster, who make their own rules that has to be followed by everyone. Discipline teachers themselves have around 30 rules and regulations.”*

<sup>19</sup> Research Interview: Sulten Yuma, Head Master of Philosophy, 16th October 2017.

students just love to help here to the teachers managers etc. Sometimes we can get a great opportunity to go somewhere else to teach Buddhism.”<sup>20</sup>

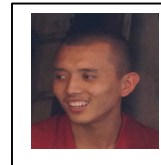
## 5.2 Reasons that drive people to join the monastery

Most of the people arrive at the monastery to find financial security whereas a few reach the monastery in search of enlightenment and some simply follow their family footsteps. When their family and ancestors believe in the Buddhist culture, they believe it is important that the children continue the lineage and take up Buddhist practice. According to them, if a child wants to practice Buddhist culture at a very young age, they believe that there is a deep connection between the Buddha and the child. Hence the parents feel obliged to send the kids to the monastery else it could be the parent’s willingness to send the child to a Buddhist monastery to practice Buddhism. In that case the child, once done with his education, gets to decide whether or not he wants to continue with Buddhism as mentioned earlier.

Once the monk has completed his education, while most people think that once they become a monk then their whole life they must be a monk, in reality; it is a total misconception, as mentioned by Karma,

“Actually some small monk, they become a monk when they were so young and when they grow old and they face the different situations with the different gap generations and they really don’t like to be a monk so they want to be back like lay people. Of course they are allowed to be like us there is no force and some monks specially when Buddha was in India that time mostly and basically the perfect age to become a monk is 20-30 because to become a sanyasi and the monk is a specially with a lot of regret and they really needed peace.”<sup>21</sup>

**Sonam,  
Manager Monk,  
Rumtek**



*“We use latest technology like WeChat, WhatsApp and Facebook for discussions, debate, etc. We make groups on social media to discuss and clear doubts on various topics especially history and philosophy.”*

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<sup>20</sup>Research Interview: Sulten Yuma, Head Master of Philosophy, 16th October 2017.

<sup>21</sup>Research Interview: Karma Monk, 10th October

### 5.3 Use of Technology at the Monastery

Discussions and debates on the use of technology are still on going. Our existing literature review claims that the monks don't have access to technology. But the on field research data contradicts this claim- The monks at Rumtek are facilitated with every necessity like clinic, post office, cafes, internet and Wifi, phones etc. According to Dubju, administrator at the monastery "The monks are allowed to use YouTube only for educational purposes and internet access is provided to them very rarely."<sup>22</sup> On observation, monks use technology in their day to day life to socialize and keep themselves updated with the world outside. Most of the Nalanda institute's teachings are on YouTube and a lot of live broadcasts are showed to the monks, the monks are also well aware of selfies and other social apps such as WhatsApp, Facebook etc. According to Acharya Diljing,

"Karmapa mentions that everything is interdependent and interconnected so for that reasons some monks, they definitely love to use technology but we have one limit. During the pooja and class and some programs at that time we don't really keep connect to technology and internet but some small monks, so young they have different experience with technology without any training or any course, they can use anything very nicely. Also, we believe that now he's smart enough to use it. It's very useful in the monastery in the future. For ex, right now here we are getting the oral transmissions from the guru, so we need someone who can translate that from Tibetan to English and of course in Hindi and Nepali, so also we have to use so many things also for this kind of thing we need some good lama who can use technology only because of these things."<sup>23</sup>



Image 12: *An image of monks using phones*

<sup>22</sup> Research Interview: Karma Monk, 10th October

<sup>23</sup> Research Interview: Acharya Diljing, Manager of Nalanda Cafe, 12th October 2017

## 5.4 Attire

The three level of Buddhism; Mahayana, Vajrayana and Vajriya; all have a different clothing. At Rumtek, monks follow the dressing of the Mahayana sect similar to the one followed in Tibet. Tibet is a cold place and therefore requires warm clothing. They wear a yellow vest and over that they wear a red coloured scapular suspending from their shoulders which gives them warmth. They wear a red coloured *dhoti* which they simply wrapped around their waist with a black belt around it. However, when Buddha lived in India, he wore the yellow dress worn by Hinayana followers which is now worn in Korea, Japan and Sri Lanka. Karma monk mentioned,

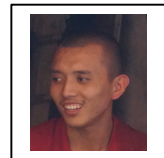
“In Tibetan there is a cold climate and they need some warm things and mostly Mahayana people wore this red dress. The dress I am wearing is the Mahayana dress. But in Hinayana they still wear the yellow dress like in Korea, Japan and Sri Lanka.”<sup>24</sup>

## 5.5 Food and Mess System

As per our on-field observation and several interactions, Rumtek monastery has 4 kitchens – where they follow the rules of Buddhism and prepare simple food. In Buddhism, people have the liberty to choose their diet but predominantly Buddhists believe in vegetarianism considering the purity of soul as one of the major factors. They believe that eating of non-vegetarian food is not only sinful since it involves killing of a living soul but also makes the human body contaminated reducing the lifespan of an individual. Only Theravada Buddhists accept consumption of pork, fish and chicken.<sup>25</sup>

All monks in Rumtek Monastery are vegetarians and this was certified to us by Karma Monk, one of the main lama at Rumtek Monastery and Nalanda Institute. However, they do consume eggs since they have been unable to determine whether eggs are vegetarian or non-vegetarian.<sup>26</sup>

**Sonam,  
Manager Monk,  
Rumtek**



*“Currently the monastery cooks’ food for 4000 people. There are four active kitchens with about 100-200 volunteers and monks who cook food every day.”*

<sup>24</sup> Research Interview: Karma Monk, 10th October

<sup>25</sup> Research Interview: Sonam Monk, Manager at Rumtek Monastery, 12th October

<sup>26</sup> Research Interview: Karma Monk, 10th October

The liberty to cook is given to anybody who is willing to cook and can volunteer and help the monks cook in the monastery. “In the monastery, the lamas read their scriptures everyday so we have to serve them tea and food. I cook along with others. We make breakfast and different vegetables and serve that.”<sup>27</sup> Baburam Thapa mentioned about volunteering to help cook food at the monastery. The monks are served 3 meals – breakfast which is served at 7:00 in the morning, lunch is served at 12:00, and dinner at 6:00 every evening. Breakfast is a simple meal. They are served Tibetan bread which is a thick bread-like roti with a boiled potato concoction. Lunch generally consists of rice with a type of vegetable (*sabzi*) and simple dal or cooked pulses. They keep dinner the lightest and have meals such as Tibetan noodles or Thukpa. Everyone is welcome to eat – tourists, guests, monks, student monks, people living and working outside the monastery etc. and they have a public mess for the same. They also get snacks such as tea and bread at 9:00 am and 3:00 pm. Karma monk mentioned,

“I don’t have any special diet but we are all vegetarian. Morning we have a Tibetan bread and some potatoes. In lunch we mostly eat rice and in evening dinner time we take a light and charming food and sometime we have Tibetan noodles and Chinese noodles and this kind of light foods. We are totally vegetarian. Sometimes on special occasion we have salads, some sweet dish and so many things.”<sup>28</sup>

Breakfast	7:00 AM	Tibetan bread, Potatoes
Snacks	9:00 AM	Tea and Tibetan bread
Lunch	12:00 PM	Vegetable( <i>sabzi</i> ), cooked pulses, rice
Snacks	3:00 PM	Tea and Tibetan Bread
Dinner	6:00 PM	Tibetan noodles, Thukpa, <i>Sabzi</i> rice, etc.

<sup>27</sup> Research Interview: Baburam Thapa, Helper to monks, 12th October

<sup>28</sup> Research Interview: Karma Monk, 10th October

## **The timetable of food at Rumtek Monastery**

The monks have several restrictions imposed on their lives since they are expected to live in a disciplined fashion. For the same, the monks have to eat whatever is served to them at the institute. They need to assemble at the mess for their meals, there is no option of skipping meals or having food in their respective rooms. However, ill monks are given exemption from eating at the mess, their food is served in their rooms. All the food brought in the monastery is funded by the donations made to the monastery by followers of Buddhism, locals, followers of the Karmapa, etc. Post the 6:00 o'clock dinner, monks have the permission and complete flexibility to go outside the monastery and eat whatever they want in case they feel hungry. However, at Rumtek Monastery, contradicting their very own principles; lamas are allowed to eat non-veg outside the boundaries of the monastery where there are many stalls which serve everything from chicken, to pork and beef and eggs.<sup>29</sup>

Outside the monastery, there is a market area which sells food items like Pani Puri, momos and Thukpa, curries and other Tibetan/sikkimese cuisine food. Although, the monks really do believe that vegetarianism is preferred. According to Acharya Diljing, the manager of Nalanda Café said to us,

“Earlier we used to prepare meat in the monastery. Then our 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa in 2004 explain to us how meat harms the human body. And not only the human body, also the animal that is killed. Our Karmapa noticed that people who followed vegetarianism lived longer, had calmer minds and headspace and were healthier. He gave a lot of teachings regarding this and so, Rumtek became a vegetarian monastery.”<sup>30</sup>

Although, egg is allowed and prepared in the monastery. On this, Acharya Diljing said, “Eggs are a conflict. It is debatable whether they are vegetarian or non-vegetarian and so they are allowed here.”<sup>31</sup>

Rumtek monastery provides every comfort for its monks and therefore, apart from having 4 kitchens (serves around 4000 people daily) and one mess <sup>32</sup>, it also consists of 2 cafes, namely, the Nalanda café and the Student cafe both of which serve various dishes such

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<sup>29</sup> Research Interview: Acharya Diljing, Manager of Nalanda Cafe, 12th October 2017

<sup>30</sup> Research Interview: Acharya Diljing, Manager of Nalanda Cafe, 12th October 2017

<sup>31</sup> Research Interview: Acharya Diljing, owner of Nalanda Café, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2017

<sup>32</sup> Research Interview: Dechchen Bhutia, 13th October 2017



as vegetable momos, paneer momos, cheese momos, tea, green tea, coffee, honeycomb, biscuits, wafers and chips, egg rice, schezwan rice etc. The Student café, which is a tourist attraction as well a server of great food, is run by the students of Nalanda University. Lamas who had come for the oral transmissions, lamas from the monastery, student monks and teachers and administrator monks were all seen strolling in and out of these cafes. The food was rather affordable and slightly bland. The Nalanda café is run by lamas themselves. On tasting the food inside the monastery, it is known that lamas are only allowed to have food with minimal spice. On encountering a dinner there, it was noted that their food menu includes items like potato *sabzi*, a green *sabzi* made from a local sikkimese root, a khimchi salad, bland dal and rice.

Although there is an open cafeteria and kitchen inside the monastery where the locals and lamas cook and serve food, only guest lamas and tourists eat here. The lamas and student monks assemble on the side corridors of the main prayer hall and sit on the floor to eat. They are served by other lamas who volunteer to serve food.

It was assumed that there would be severe restrictions on the monks and student monks living in Rumtek Monastery when it came to food. Surprisingly, it was noted that this was not the case.



Image 13: An image of child monks eating at the food stall outside



Image 14: *An image of child monk eating inside the monastery*

## **5.6 Hostel system**

Rumtek is a residential monastery and is home to 200-300 lamas.<sup>33</sup> On top of that, Nalanda Institute too, hosts student monks and teachers. During the transmission Pooja, the monastery was also home to hundreds of guest monks who had come for the duration of 2 months to attend the oral transmissions of Buddha's teachings. Inside the building of the Nalanda institute, there are dorms where the student monks stay. They have the facility of dorms, classrooms, a library, cafeterias and messes and a convenience store for their everyday living and basic needs. In Nalanda institute, in the hostels, student monks are taught everything from cooking to cleaning. There are quarters and rooms inside the monastery for other monks who work as teachers, as administrators etc. who live in the monastery. During the transmission Pooja, monks and nuns from all over the world had arrived to Rumtek for a duration of 2 months and lived in the monastery itself. The students and monks that were originally from Rumtek were accommodated in places such as the library, the classrooms and tents set up on the rooftop; the guest monks were given their original dorms and rooms. Many of the monks also reside at the old Rumtek monastery a couple of kilometres away from the new Rumtek monastery. Things that a monk would need for everyday survival at the monastery, such as food, water, shelter, basic necessities such as hygiene tools – soap, toothbrush etc. are given to them by the monastery. All these things are brought by the donations itself which are given by followers of the Karmapa, locals, followers of Buddhism etc. Thus we can see that monks and student monks lead a comfortable enough life at Rumtek monastery in terms of their food and living.

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<sup>33</sup> Research Interview: Dubju, In charge of Health Medicine and Astrology, 12th October 2017

In the quest to find answers to questions regarding the lifestyle of monks, student monks and people of Rumtek Monastery, we observed their day to day routine, conducted focused group discussions and took interviews to draw conclusions. The monks are well equipped with a clinic, post office, cafes and convenience store inside the monastery. Apart from this they have access to several stalls and food joints outside the monastery where they are allowed to eat and buy things. The major contradicting point is usage of technology and food habits, most of the monks in the monastery were seen using high end smartphones, laptops, watches and other gadgets at all given times. On crossing the monastery boundaries the monks are allowed to eat all that they wish to irrespective of veg or non-veg. It was further observed that the lifestyle of the monks is rather free and liberal compared to the assumptions made by one. The restrictions they carry as monks are their marital status- they cannot be married, clothing, working as a professional etc.

Nalanda Institute and its sphere of livelihood was also under observation on field and many conclusions were drawn on the lifestyle of student monks. The student monks are well equipped with Wi-Fi, gadgets, live streaming of channels etc. The monks are allowed to go on holidays, visit their families, eat whatever they like outside the boundaries of the monastery etc. but follow the teachings of Buddha.

On interacting with several vendors and taxi drivers, we realized that there was no discrimination in Rumtek. We observed that most of the vendors outside the monastery were looked after by women. A common thing among vendors and taxi drivers is their earning, they earn more during the peak tourist time. irrespective of their gender they are free to work and earn for their family. While the men have other jobs, the women run small stores to generate more income.

In summation, compared to our pre field study we noticed certain changes in the lifestyle of people living in and around Rumtek monastery. The lifestyle there in certain aspects is very different to ours. They are people who live to seek enlightenment and maintain a simple living.

## Chapter 6

# Socio-Economic



Image 15: *An image of vendors and their stall*

Post the loss of kingdom in 1970s, Sikkimese joined the Republic of India. Ever since, the people of Sikkim have been trying to define their language and culture distinct from the Nepalis, Tibetans or other people in the North East for a number of reasons. The following chapter examines the different social identities that reside in Rumtek, Sikkim and their source of income. The paper will emphasize on Rumtek Monastery and its economic structure. Considering the fact that monasteries gain heavy donations and sponsorships we will discuss other aspects which contribute the monastery's income.

### **6.1 Social Identities in Rumtek:**

Rumtek is primarily comprised of three tribe groups:

1. The Lepcha
2. The Bhutia
3. The Nepalis

The rest of the population is comprised of Hindus, Christians and Muslims in small proportions.

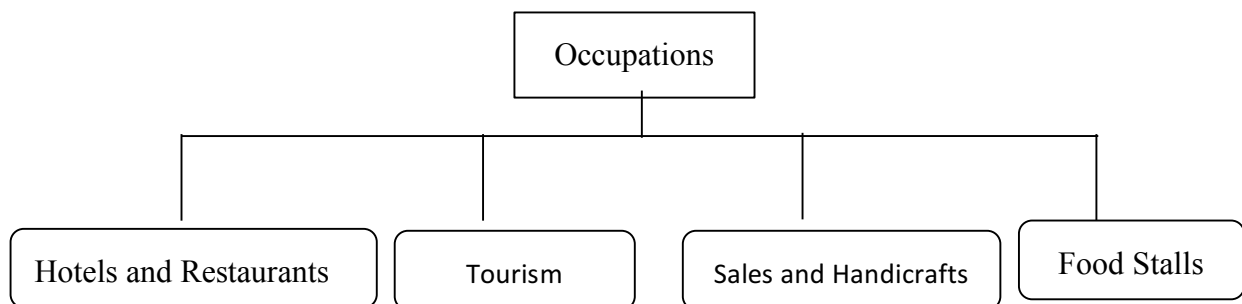
#### **Table of Tribe population**

<b>Tribe</b>	<b>Population</b>
The Lepcha	10%-15%
The Bhutia	15%-20%
The Nepalis	50-60%

**NOTE:** (Tribes living in Rumtek, % within Rumtek's population)

## 6.2 Livelihood

A place always affects its surrounding; just like Rumtek Monastery. One of the most important gap question encountered, was about the various forms of livelihood that prevail in Rumtek due to the monastery. On-field, the researchers had several interactions with the vendors outside the monastery indulged in different forms of occupations, such as sale of handicrafts and souvenirs, restaurants, hotels, food stalls and tourism. On talking with the the aforementioned vendors, it was observed that one major contribution that the monastery had was creating import opportunities for them.



*Figure 8: Occupations of People around the Monastery*

Rumtek monastery is one of the most famed tourist attraction in Sikkim. The amount of tourists it attracts, not only benefits the Sikkim government but also the vendors, tour guides, travel agents, cab services and hotels in the City. Walking down the monastery road one can notice number of cabs that provide transport services to city and other tourist attractions. Tilak Pradhan, a cab driver mentioned in his interview,

“The monastery plays a vital role in boosting up the tourism and definitely leads to an increase in their income, we manage to earn roughly 10,000 a month after cutting down on the maintenance fees. Our cab services are also availed by the monks which adds to our income.”<sup>34</sup>

Considering the diversity of occupations found in Rumtek, we also interviewed a tour guide, Monay Rai who gave us significant details about tourism in Rumtek. He stated that,

“February, May, June, October, November and December are the months when we earn the maximum due to the number of tourists visiting in. These are the peak months when the Buddhist festivals are conducted and many

<sup>34</sup> Research Interview, Interviewee: Tilak Pradhan, a cab driver on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2017

visitors and followers of Buddhism also pay us highly during the festive season.”<sup>35</sup>

The tourist season marks a substantial surge in the revenue of the hotel and restaurant businesses. The hotels and restaurants in Rumtek are reasonably priced, therefore, they don't get to earn as much as they do during the tourist seasons as stated by Vajra hotel owner, Karma. Moreover, in the recent two months of October and November; numerous people visited Rumtek Monastery for the oral transmissions being held which again increased their earnings by a great margin. These hotels and restaurants earn maximum revenues from the tourists, however, in the general course of time, their regular customers are the monks from the Monastery.

The monastery has certain architectural elements like the Thangka Paintings and other significant embellishments such as prayer flags, prayer wheels, bells, victory banners etc. are sold in the nearby vendor shops which generated abundant income for them. The vendors mentioned details about the trade practices in Rumtek. One of the shop owners, imports goods from Tibet such as Tibetan bells and jewellery and she also supplies few things to different parts of the country. She completely credited the profits of her business to the monastery. Rudra Pandey, a vendor outside the monastery had set up his stall just for a period of two months until the oral transmissions ended since the number of people visiting the monastery was much more as compared to in general.<sup>36</sup> This greatly depicts the increase the number of visitors during the oral transmissions.

“When tourists come to visit the monastery whatever little business happens is by that. Generally business happens when the tourists come because the locals are monks and they don't need these kind of fancy things”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Research Interview: Monay Rai, a tour guide, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2017 at the Monastery

<sup>36</sup> Research Interview: Rudra Pandey, Vendor, 12th October 2017

<sup>37</sup> Research Interview: Shanti Sharma, Vendor, 11th October 2017

### ***Life Story of Anil Kumar***

*Anil Kumar, a local street vendor, renders food services inside the monastery. Originally from Bihar, Anil moved to Rumtek at the age of 6 with his family in search of a job. His father established the business of selling pani-puri and other food items within the monastery. Anil was only 18 when his father passed away, and thereafter he carried on the business. Growing up in Sikkim, Anil inculcated the local languages of the town which are Nepalese, Sikkimese, and Tibetan which help him communicate with people from different cultures who come to the monastery. He lives with his mother and sister who supports him by doing supplementary activities like cleaning and cooking at the food stall. During peak seasons, the business runs well, and even in the off-season Anil manages to earn Rs. 500-1000 a day. When asked if he misses his hometown, Bihar, he simply claimed that life is much better in Rumtek, and the peace and serenity rejuvenates his wits and spiritual well-being. In addition, the place gives him a sense of security because as a migrant, moving to a new town comes with a great deal of casteism, violence, and most importantly a deep longing for one's homeland. However, the sacred city of Rumtek has no room for discrimination and people reside in harmony.*

Shanti Sharma, a vendor outside the monastery like others too agreed that tourism causes an increase in her business during the tourist months. Most of the vendors earn about 500-1000 per day. Anil Kumar, vendor states, “I earn 500 a day”<sup>38</sup> and Shanti Sharma too mentioned “ I earn decent enough to sustain my family, almost 1000-2000 every day.”<sup>39</sup> Similar to the handicrafts vendors, the food vendors make decent income by the end of the day. However, tourism does not have any special impact on the food stalls since the monks frequently visit these stalls.

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<sup>38</sup> Research Interview: Anil Kumar, Helper, 12th October 2017

<sup>39</sup> Research Interview: Shanti Sharma, Vendor, 11th October 2017



### 6.3 Gender

The most intriguing question we had before going on-field was about the gender roles existing in and around the monastery. There were many doubts relating to the absence of nuns in the monastery and whether the situation would be the same among the vendors and others living near the monastery. Initially when Buddhism was being propagated throughout the world, many females also expressed their interest in becoming nuns, however, Buddha did not appreciate this initially. Later on, Buddha's step mother chose to convert into a nun and Buddha accepted the devotion expressed by everyone and agreed to permit them the same. However, he had certain rules and regulations laid down. He did not permit the residing of monks and nuns together and asked them to build a separate monastery for the nuns and monks away from each other. This was done in order to prevent any kind of relationships between men and women.<sup>40</sup> Rinchen, a nun from Canada stated that,

“Before becoming a monk, one needs to take a vow of celibacy. Furthermore, if an individual is married before devoting to becoming a Buddhist monk or nun, they must renounce their marriage and only then they can become a monk or a nun. Buddhism does not encourage relationships since it is solely about renouncing everyone and everything in the world and simply dedicating your lives to discipline and the path of enlightenment.”<sup>41</sup>

Just a kilometer away from Rumtek Monastery, there is a monastery for nuns and though they aren't permitted to interact in general, they can converse during important poojas that requires everyone's presence. The oral transmissions had a lot of monks and nuns visiting Rumtek from all around the world. The researchers interviewed a lot of nuns from Canada, Germany, USA and Tibet. One can find a difference in rules in India and abroad. The monks and nuns stay together abroad since the number of monks and nuns are comparatively low. Talking about gender roles outside the monastery, situation is completely contrary to what is witnessed inside the monastery. The shops, hotels and restaurants are owned and run mostly by women. Women are given equal treatment and have an equal say in their homes and business. Also, there is no dependence of women on men, they are

Karma,  
Monk,  
Rumtek



*“According to the ‘laws of Buddha’, there should be a nun’s monastery near the monk’s monastery. So do we have one, down the lane. On special occasions, we meet and pray together. However*

<sup>40</sup> Research Interview: Karma Monk, 10th October 2017

<sup>41</sup> Research Interview: Interviewee: Rinchen, a nun from Canada, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2017

self-sufficient and free from any kind of biases. Vajra hotel owner, Karma, is the sole owner of her hotel and completely set up her business on her own. The same applies to most of the other women vendors. We also enquired with one of the cab drivers who clearly mentioned that women are treated equally in Sikkim and there are no instances of discrimination. Moreover, Rumtek is considered to be a very safe town amongst its locals for women. Buddhism follows an egalitarian approach and therefore all men and women are given equal treatment. This ideology is respected and practice

**Sujith,  
Local,  
Rumtek**



d by  
everyon  
e.

***Life Story of Shanti Sharma***

*Shanti Sharma is a localite of Rumtek who is involved in the selling handicraft and souvenirs within the monastery. Her family established this business way before the monastery was built, and carrying it forward with the help of her husband. The business is at the peak tourist season, and they manage to earn Rs. 100,000 per month. Moreover, she is well-versed with the local languages which are Nepalese, Tibetan, Hindi and English that helps her to communicate with the monks and the tourists. Shanti and her husband have an elder son who is 10 years old and the younger son who is 8 years old. Her family belongs to the Hindu community, but they also follow the footsteps of Buddhism. Shanti is heavily influenced by the Buddhist culture and being in Rumtek gives her an opportunity to inculcate the preaching's of the Buddha. In addition, Shanti wants to spend her entire life in Rumtek because it is a place where people live in harmony, it is a safe place for girls and equality is given the highest importance.*

*“The Sikkim Government provides the local farmers with financial support, seeds for farming and discounts on farming equipment in order to encourage organic farming.”*

**6.4 Rawatey Village:**

The nearest town to Rawatey is Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, which is 18 kilometers away. According to Mr. Sujeet, a local of Rawatey village now working at the Greenwoody

Jungle Camp, there are approximately thirty families with an average family size of four to five members in Rawatey village. The main occupation of the people in Rawatey is the agricultural sector, organic farming and government services such as education, health care, environmental protection, transportation and the banking sector. The main crops grown in Rawatey are beans and ginger. The Government of Sikkim provides seeds to the members of Rawatey village to sprout plants. They are also given ration cards by the government so that they can buy food at subsidized rates.

Despite the electricity problems, complete facilities are provided to all the houses in the rainy season. Clean drinking and tap water is provided, there are clean toilets, a proper drainage system and good roads. Education too, is provided at no cost to all children till the tenth grade with complete aid and assistance from the government. There is a link between Rumtek monastery and Rawatey village as Rumtek monastery provides employment to villagers. The villagers perform many jobs in the monastery such as that of cleaners, cooking personnel, gardeners, helpers to the monks and for any other arrangements required in the monastery. They live a very simple and harmonious life.

#### ***Life Story of Sujith Runhsun***

*Sujith Runshun is an inhabitant of Rawatey, a small village near Rumtek. He has been living here with his family for almost 12 years, and has maintained a stable lifestyle. Being born in a Hindu family and later converting into a Christian, he settled at being an Atheist. He says he does not believe in God anymore but believes that there is a Higher power. In the village, Sujith's family is involved in agricultural activities which is the main source of their earnings. Earlier, they used to grow beans, rice and ginger, but with the financial and technical aid from the State Government, they have switched to organic farming which allows them to grow high quality products. Sujith, himself works at the Greenwoody Jungle*

### **6.5 Tourism at Rumtek**

The drive to Rumtek offers you an enchanting view of rich green topography and misty mountains. Several small Sikkimese villages and beautiful paddy fields can be seen on the way. Throughout the monsoon, from July to September, these paddy fields are lush green.

During the drive through the foggy hilly terrains, the tourists often take a halt at the small food outlets to eat delectable Sikkimese food which includes Thupka, Momos, Phagshapa, Gundruk and Sinki. Some of the tourist attraction around Rumtek is the Nehru Botanical garden, Bhanjakri Waterfalls, Hanuman Tok, Ganesh Tok and many more. The state also offers a wide range of adventure sports such as trekking, rappelling and white river rafting. However, the main tourist attraction in the town is the Rumtek monastery, which is also known as the Dharma Chakra Center

The Rumtek monastery holds the seat of His Holiness the Gyalwang Karmapa of the Kagyu sect of Buddhist religion. Within the monastery, one can witness religious and cultural activities like chanting, meditation, prostration, tormas making, dance and music. Furthermore, the embodiment of intricate architecture makes the entire place come alive. The Rumtek monastery, being the largest and the most famous religious institution in Sikkim, attracts large number of tourists and pilgrims from around the world.

The state government has prioritized tourism in Sikkim to a great extent; in fact, this sector has become the major income generator for the locals residing in the cities and villages. From the information collected on field, we found that the government's contribution in the infrastructure development like building of flyovers, transportation and accommodation has boosted the Sikkim tourism, because now it has become easier to access remote parts of the state as well.

The government of Sikkim has also been very efficient in promoting the pilgrimage destinations. They have been successful in educating people about the tourism as the principle of sustainable development. Due to this, Rumtek has now become one of the most visited tourist spots in the state with the Rumtek Monastery being the major source of attraction. People from different parts of the world visit the monastery for varied reasons. While some of them visit the place solely for the purpose of exploration, others visit due to their ardent faith in Buddhism. Christine, one of the foreign tourists from Australia whom we interacted with in the monastery said,

“I am a Buddhist. I have been a Buddhist since 2013 and I have been studying Buddhism before that. I am

**Tilak Pradhan,  
Taxi Driver,  
Rumtek**



*“We earn a decent amount of money each day by taking trips from Gangtok to Rumtek and back. We make at least 2-3 trips to and fro every day.”*

Buddhist and that is why I am travelling, I am doing Buddhist science and teachings.’’<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, people find the monastery as a quiet getaway, a place where they can find a peace of mind. Tsering Dolma, another foreign tourist, said,

“When your mind arrives here, it becomes empty. These oral transmissions cleanse your body and soul. Life here is so much better and more peaceful than it is in Paris. I am away from the hustle bustle of the city and being here gives me a sense of inner peace.”<sup>43</sup>

Even the domestic tourists shared the same opinion as the foreigners, when asked about their purpose to the visit the monastery. MK Das, a visitor from Assam, said, “The peace and harmony of the monastery is somehow energizing.”<sup>44</sup>

Besides the tranquility offered by the monastery, the architecture and cultural practices are also tourist’s major areas of interest. The monastery owes its beauty to its intricate construct and design. The colorful Thangka paintings highly complement the structure of the institution, and tourists, especially the foreigners, are marveled by the same since they have not seen anything like this in their homeland. Alan Coachman, a foreign visitor said, “The architecture of the monastery interests me, especially the temples because they are so different to what we get in England. All we have are churches.”<sup>45</sup> Also, a travel agent, Tenzing Sherpa mentioned,

“As far as I know being a tourist manager, there is a golden stupa in the monastery. Most of the tourists come here to see the golden stupa. The presence of the golden stupa at this monastery makes it a bit apart from the other monasteries which makes it attract more tourists.”<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, the monastery conducts a puja every month that goes on for one-two weeks. The tourists, including the locals attend the enchanting ceremony with much enthusiasm. Losar, the Tibetan New Year, is celebrated by performing a week long ritual ceremony in the honor of Mahakal. In addition, ritual dances take place on the eve of Losar

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<sup>42</sup> Research Interview: Christine, Tourist from Australia, 11th October 2017

<sup>43</sup> Research Interview: Tsering Dolma, Tourist from France, 16th October 2017

<sup>44</sup> Research Interview: MK Das, Tourist from Assam, 13th October 2017

<sup>45</sup> Research Interview: Alan Coachman, Tourist from England, 11th October 2017

<sup>46</sup> Research Interview: Tenzing Sherpa, Travel Agent at Gangtok, 14th October 2017

and the performances are open to the public viewing. These ceremonies are simply spellbinding and the tourists get to learn a lot about the culture through these experiences, hence, they take back more than just photographs.<sup>47</sup>

Tourism in Rumtek has had a great economic impact over the past few years. It is now the major source of earning for people living in and around the monastery. Inside the monastery, there are several gift shops and food vendors who make money with the sale of handicrafts, souvenirs and by serving a variety of food items to the travelers. These vendors easily earn Rs. 1000-2000 on an average per day. On the other hand, people outside the monastery earn their income by providing local services which include transportation and accommodation. The local cab drivers and hotels are available just outside the monastery, which provides services at a negotiable cost and yet earn a decent profit per month. Various travel agencies in Sikkim offer customized packages to the domestic and international tourists and render excellent services by providing them the basic facilities like safe cab drivers, tour guides and a detailed itinerary to explore the place. Lali Gurooung, the owner of a travel agency and the president of the Sikkim United Tourist Organization (SUTO), said,

“Sikkim is a cultural place which is why it attracts many tourists from in and outside India. Rumtek is primarily famous because of the monastery, and the tourists, especially foreigners, come here to explore and understand the culture. Furthermore, they also enjoy the adventure sports, namely paragliding.”<sup>48</sup>

Hence, these service sectors are highly profitable, especially during the peak months, which are March-April and September-October. Tourism in Rumtek brings more than just financial aid to the city. It connects people from diverse communities and builds a platform for learning. It teaches people how to respect each other's culture and live in harmony. Furthermore, it provides the perfect setting for adventures and exploration.

### **6.6 Financial Structure of Rumtek Monastery:**

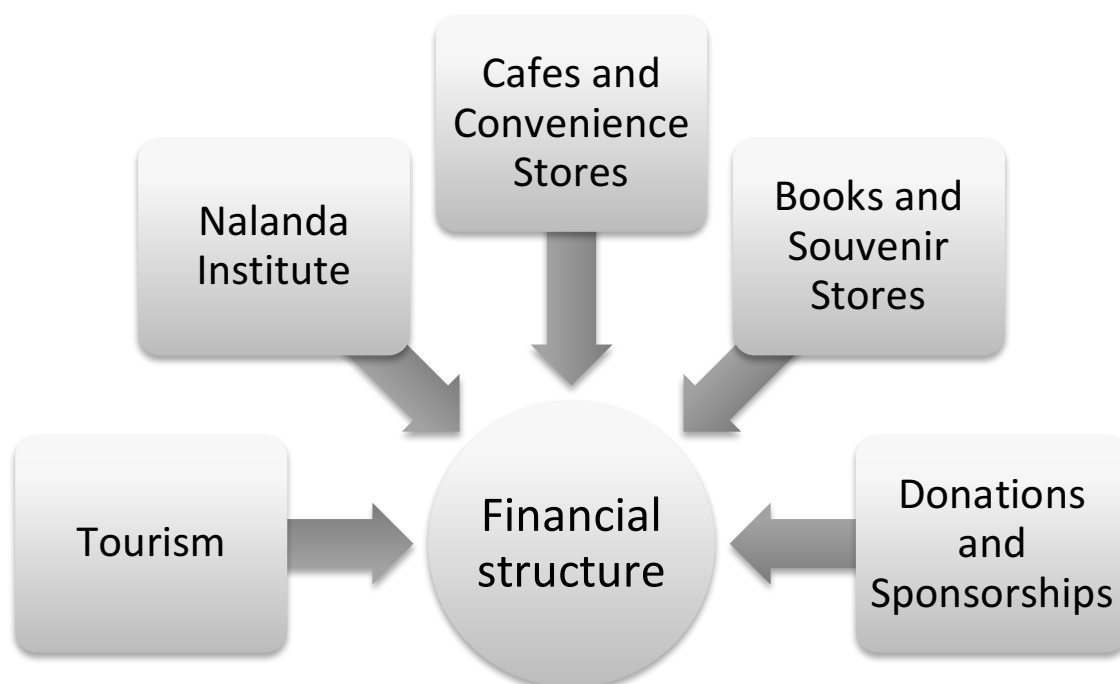
Like any other monastery or institute, even Rumtek Monastery is an institute; and for an institute to run it needs financial support. According to the Indian government, a maximum amount of India Rupees 5,00,000 per year is given for any monastery to operate. The financial assistance is also provided to Rumtek Monastery, Sikkim. It's given as a provision to promote

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<sup>47</sup> Research Interview: Chunksu, Student Monk, 13th October 2017

<sup>48</sup> Research Interview: Lali Gurooung, Owner of Travel agency at Gangtok, 14th October 2017

and build monastic education which is also called as study of Theology. Certain ways in which the Monastery grows financially are:



1. Tourism- Rumtek Monastery has joined hands with the tourism industry of Sikkim. The fusing of Buddhism with tourism is what makes Rumtek Monastery stand financially strong. The art and architecture of Rumtek Monastery interests a lot of tourists, which helps in collecting the entry fee. The main attraction of Rumtek Monastery is its culture of Buddhism and its practices. The entry fee collected contributes largely in the Monastery's income. A lot of tour guides, cab drivers, hotel owners etc. also earn a decent amount of money through this source. Ashish Lama a cab driver stated that, "tourism in Sikkim has relatively increased, this is mainly because of the Monastery and also due to the development Sikkim has now."<sup>49</sup> Most of the cab drivers drive down from Rumtek to Gangtok to show around tourists the main places.
2. Cafes and Convenience Store- There is a Nalanda Café inside the monastery which helps in generating income. Most of the tourist and monks access the café and the convenience store. According to Shanti Sharma, "a lot of tourists prefer eating at the Café since the

Lali Guroong,  
Travel Agent,  
Rumtek



*"The Rumtek Monastery runs on the funds received from the Foreign Countries and ones provided by Sikkim Government."*

<sup>49</sup> Research Interview: Ashish Lama, Cab Driver, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2017

monastery food is very bland in taste I earn about Rupees 1000-2000 per day, it's during the peak tourist time when I earn more.”<sup>50</sup>

3. Books and Souvenir Stores- Emphasizing on the fact that Rumtek in whole has a lot of tourists, there are many souvenir shops put up inside and outside the monastery. According to Sonam and Suresh,

“There are two souvenir stores inside the monastery which have sale of prayer wheels, prayer flags, Buddha models etc., the stores have a good turnover and generate some good income.”<sup>51</sup>

The Monastery also deals in selling books related to Buddhism and the ideology of enlightenment. They sell transcripts and copies of the oral transmissions that take place. They also sell books related to philosophy and other details regarding Rumtek Monastery such as its history, art and architecture etc. According to Kharma Khopi, “the sale of books contributes largely in generating income, the cost of each book varies from Rupees 150 to Rupees 1000 and above.”<sup>52</sup>

4. Donations and Sponsorships- Just like any other monastery even Rumtek Monastery financially stands strong because of the donations and sponsorships they receive. During the oral transmission the monks at the monastery said that they get twice the donations than that in general. According to Monay Rai, “maximum funds in the monastery are organized by donations.”<sup>53</sup> Also, Karma Dubju stated the same, “It is all from donations. From time to time we get donations from locals and now we also get from all over the world.”<sup>54</sup> Apart from donations there are several other organizations that help financially in keeping the monastery up. As mentioned earlier the government also has provisions made which helps the monastery, the people who generally donate to the monastery are people who believe in keeping up with Buddha's ideology and practices.

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<sup>50</sup> Research interview: Shanti Sharma, vendor outside the monastery, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2017

<sup>51</sup> Research interview: Sonam and Suresh, Store owners at the Monastery, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2017

<sup>52</sup> Research interview: Kharmpa Khopi, monk selling books inside the monastery, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2017

<sup>53</sup> Research interview: Monay Rai, Tour Guide, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2017

<sup>54</sup> Research Interview: Karma Dubju, In charge of Health Medicine and Astrology, 12<sup>th</sup> October





In this section, we have discussed the socio-economic aspects of Rumtek which encompasses the various social identities of the people and their source of earnings. We have also analyzed the economic structure of the Rumtek Monastery in great detail. The three major social identities in Rumtek are the Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Nepalis, in which the Nepalis are in the vast majority, occupying 15%-20% of Sikkim's total population. People from other religions like Hindu, Muslim and Christians also reside in small percentage.

We have also discussed the livelihood and the gender roles of the people residing in and around the Rumtek monastery. The monastery has a great influence on the livelihood of people in Rumtek. The vendors outside the monastery are indulged in different professions like handicraft, food stalls, and hotel. Being the most famous monastery in Sikkim, Dharma Chakra Centre attracts large number of tourists which provide financial aid to the aforementioned hospitality services. In the Tourism section, we have mentioned the various factors like, historical and cultural significance of the monastery which have boosted tourism in Rumtek to a great extent and in turn the earnings of the vendors.

We have also extended our research by covering Rawatey village to gain more insights into the livelihood of people. The villagers of Rawatey are involved in various jobs in the monastery such as that of cook, cleaners, gardener and many more to earn money. Moreover, the Sikkim government has provided them with basic household amenities and benefits like electricity, water, clean toilets and education.

Moving on, we have noticed a vast difference between the gender roles in and outside the monastery. The monks and nuns should have least amount of communication owing to

Buddha's teachings; moreover, nuns are living in a separate monastery which is few kilometers away from the Rumtek monastery. However, outside the monastery we have witnessed a completely opposite situation, where the females are given the prerogative of having an independent business of their own and equity prevails in every socio-economic aspect.

Lastly, we have studied the financial sector of the Rumtek monastery. As discussed earlier, the Sikkim government has funded hefty amount to the institution for its operational activities. Other factors that contribute to the monetary gains of the monastery are providing hospitality services to the tourists, providing educational facility to the student monks, sales of books and souvenirs and getting donations and sponsorships. Hence, we can say that from socio-economic point of view, Rumtek is developing and flourishing socially and economically.

## Chapter 7

# Conclusion

Religion leads to inspiration, meaning, and controversy and the transformation and formation of history, culture, and politics. None of these themes can be understood without the knowledge of religion. In this era where religion is always misrepresented for one's own purposes, it is interesting to know that even religion changes over time. It has been adapting adjusting to the needs of the people and changing society. Buddhism is one such religion that has been evolving and incorporating modern beliefs. As part of our pre-field research, we accumulated secondary data which gave us five major themes namely: History, Architecture, Lifestyle, Cultural Practices and Socio-Economic factors. Post the on-field research; we narrowed the themes to Lifestyle, Cultural practices, and Socio-economic factors. Rumtek Monastery is blessed due to its tremendous size, faith, impressive beginning, and the aesthetic Buddhist architecture. The cultural practices followed by the monks, their lifestyle and their unusual art caught our attention and persuaded us to investigate these aspects of the monastery. The socio-economic aspect includes tourism, trade, job opportunities and gender issues. Taking into account, all these details, we decided to study everyday life at a monastery and the effects of the monastery on its neighborhood.

The architecture of the Rumtek monastery is interesting and detailed. We found a lot of research on history and architecture of Rumtek monastery during our secondary research. However, an interesting thing that we recorded during the on-field research was the deviation from the secondary data about the old Rumtek monastery. We were inquisitive about the reason for the construction of the New Monastery, i.e. the Rumtek Dharma Chakra Centre. Earlier reports said it was due to the burning down of the Old Monastery, however, the truth is that the shift occurred due to the inability to accommodate all the monks and also to change the location of the old monastery since it is located in the forest.

Another thing about the old monastery that was very impressive was that the art and the architecture at both the old and the new monastery were very alike. The exterior and the

gate had similar paintings of the gods of the four directions and also represented the seven lions. The ceilings were decorated in a beautiful manner.

Another topic in art that we were interested in was about the Thangka paintings. And how the paintings have both artistic, as well as cultural significance. On one hand, the monks take special classes to learn how to make the paintings, on the other hand the painting helps them in meditation and visualization. The monks undergo years of training to learn the techniques to paint the Thangka painting. Apart from holding great significance among the followers in terms of rituals, the Thangka paintings also hold great artistic significance and convey teachings of Buddha and are used for various purposes.

Another deviation that was observed was a Buddha statue that we saw when we were on-field but did not come across during the pre-field research. This statue was built 2 years ago in the main shrine. It is behind a painted wall. The wall has a painting of Buddha which was painted when the monastery was being created due to lack of funds to make a statue. They did not break the wall to preserve the painting, and the statue generally goes unnoticed.

The monastery conducts a wide range of ritual ceremonies which includes *taradebi puja* which is carried out to fight 16 fears of life, Manjushri's puja to impart wisdom, and *mahalaka puja* which is conducted one week before the Tibetan New Year. The mahapuja was a major learning while we were on-field. This puja happens for two months and it includes the dictated teachings of Buddha or the Kangyur in the Tibetan language. Monks, as well as believers of the religion, come from all over the world to listen to these teachings read out by a high order monk. Other important and widely discussed cultural practices are the birth and death ceremony. At the time of birth, the naming ritual is performed and the child is blessed by Lama. Meanwhile, at the decease of a Buddhist, a puja is performed ensues for 49 days Pooja which is conducted to bring peace to the departed soul. The colorful prayer flags are inscribed with Buddhist inscriptions and are observed as the origin of chastity and positivity. A firm conviction is held by the Tibetans who claim that the air is sterilized when it touches the holy surface of the flags. Festivals form an important cultural practice in Buddhism. The main festivals celebrated in the monastery are the Rumtek Chaam-Dance, *Mahakala* (Lama) Dance, Tsechu or *Guru Padma Sabhava* dance and the *Dhrupchen* or *Vajra Kilaya* Dance.

The life of monks at Rumtek Monastery revolves around moderation and uniformity. Their daily practices reflect the path of Buddha's teachings. A monk at the monastery is involved in a diversity of applications which not only include prayers and rituals but also several other activities such as teaching child monks, cleaning the monastery, cooking food, running different cafes and stores, managing administrative work and so on. They have strict arrangements for their food, education, prayers, leisure and all other activities that they undertake throughout the day. In Buddhism, people have the liberty to choose their diet but predominant Buddhists believe in vegetarianism considering the purity of soul as one of the major learnings. However, it is necessary to have only vegetarian food within the bounds of the monastery, once outside; the monks are not restricted to the kind of food that they eat. We often saw monks having non-vegetarian food, in the same cafe where we had our lunch.

The Nalanda Institute was established by the 16th Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje, with a motto to spread Buddhist teachings to the people. The subjects taught in the institute include Sanskrit, English, Philosophy, History, Tibetan grammar, and many others. In addition, they are also taught the art of making mandalas, Thangka paintings, lama dance, and rituals. The required age of a student who wants to take admission in the institute should be 18 years and above. The other prerequisites include the knowledge of basic Hindi, English, Sanskrit, and Tibetan. The students who wish to take admission in the institute can fulfill these requirements by studying in a school till grade 8th. It has also been noted that not only Buddhist's children but people from around India and outside (Nepal and Bhutan), including *Brahmins*, join the institute as a result of their ardent faith in Buddhism.

The institutional hierarchy consists of the Director, Principal, Vice-principal, and a headmaster. Moreover, visiting faculties from various parts of the world, like England, also volunteer to teach English to the student monks. The institute also has a discipline teacher who helps maintain a certain level of decorum in the institution. They have a disciplinary rulebook which consists of 256 rules. Any student, who fails to abide by these rules are punished accordingly. The severity of punishment can vary from simple warning to rustication from the institute.

The daily schedule of a student monk includes various tasks that are similar to those a monk performs. The students utilize their free time playing sports for the health benefits. They also devote considerable time revising the Tibetan language through scriptures and Tibetan dramas. They are granted a holiday on Wednesdays when they can go to the city to

buy their common necessities. The students are taught the act of prostration which is practices to purify mind, body, and soul. In some cases, it is also a way of showing respect to the Guru.

In order to maintain the pace with the fast-growing world, student monks hold the prerogative of modern technology which helps them to stay aware of the world's happenings. They use social media like WhatsApp, YouTube, WeChat and so on as the platform for educational purposes like discussions and debates. Along with this, the cultural practices are not such that limit monks from using technology. Interestingly this was a contradiction to what we found as part of our on field research. Our existing literature review claimed that the monks don't have access to technology.

A student can return home without becoming a monk at their own discretion. Even a monk can go back if he does not yearn to continue his life as a hermit. Unlike many religions, They are not faced with any human brutalities. We can say, Buddhism is progressing and readjusting to be a relatively modern religion.

Rumtek is primarily comprised of three tribe groups the Lepcha, the Bhutia, and The Nepalis. The rest of the population is composed of Hindus, Christians, and Muslims in small proportions. There are various forms of livelihood that prevail in Rumtek due to the monastery. The vendors outside the monastery indulge in several forms of professions, such as handicrafts, restaurants, hotels, food stalls and tourism. Many of the vendors that we talked to were from outside Sikkim mainly from states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. However, we also met vendors who were Lepchas, Bhutia and Nepalis. Many of the vendors belong to the other backward caste category.

Another village close to Rumtek is the Rawatey village. There are roughly thirty families with an average family size of four to five members in Rawatey village. The main occupation of the people in Rawatey is the horticultural sector, and government services such as teaching, health care, environmental protection, transportation and the banking sector. A majority of the Rawatey population is Christian however, they are followers of the monastery. The residents of Rawatey support Rumtek village but supplying them with various products and services most important of them being the supply of milk.

Another important question that we wished to address was about the gender roles in the monastery. we were intrigued when we learned that the monastery did not have any nuns. In fact interestingly, for a very long time in history, women were not even allowed to renounce the world and become nuns. We learned that there was a separate monastery for

nuns and according to rules men and women are not allowed to live in the same monastery. A kilometer away from Rumtek Monastery, there is another monastery for nuns and though they aren't sanctioned to communicate in general, they can converse during significant poojas that require everyone's presence. The oral transmissions had a lot of monks and nuns visiting Rumtek from all around the world.

On interacting with several vendors and taxi drivers, we realized that there was not much separation in gender roles in Rumtek. We observed that most of the vendor stalls outside the monastery were looked after by women. Irrespective of their gender they are free to work and earn for their family. Women are given fair treatment and have an equitable say in their homes and business. Also, there is no subordination of women to men, they are self-sufficient and free from biases. While the men have other jobs, the women run small stores to generate more income.

Rumtek explores Buddhist practices and teachings which makes it a tourist destination. A few years back, tourism in Darjeeling and other parts of West Bengal was higher compared to that of Sikkim. But gradually, more and more tourists have started to visit Sikkim. Rumtek is a small place in Sikkim, which represents the vision and existence of Buddha and his teachings. The presence Rumtek Monastery helped Rumtek boost its tourism. A lot of people around the world come to visit the monastery to study about its architecture, beliefs, Tibetan Buddhism, Kagyu lineage etc. Coursing through the year, the peak tourism season is from March to June and September to December.

Increase in tourism results in increase in Rumtek's over-all income through sale of handicrafts, souvenirs, traditional food and other products and services. Rumtek being an hour away from Gangtok gathers a lot of tourists and locals who visit on regular basis. We on field found that people mainly travel from Gangtok to visit Rumtek monastery and witness its beauty and culture. People on visiting Rumtek are bound to try their authentic food and purchase souvenirs. We met a lot of tourists from England who had come down to study the unique Kagyu lineage followed by the monks in Rumtek. This results in gaining income through hotel costs, travel costs, tour guide's payment etc. the government is equally supportive and gives all the benefits possible to keep up with the monastery's image, this helps them in receiving income in return and increasing tourism rate.

The researchers on field, could not find adequate information about the financial structure of the monastery. The monks were quite diplomatic about sharing their incomes and

the financial structure. Meanwhile, the researchers also found certain sources which contributed to the financial structure of the monastery, they were cafés at the monastery, souvenir stores, sale of books and transcripts and other handicrafts. Although most of the contribution was through sponsorships and donations. People all over the world donate to the monastery. The government also helps in looking after Rumtek monastery. Another major contribution is by Nalanda Institute and also parents of children studying at the institute. the Sikkim government has also funded hefty amount to the institution for its operational activities.

In a society where people are moving towards cultural homogeneity, it has become important to preserve the diversity of Indian society. Ancient architecture, lifestyle and culture, all three of them equally play an important role in understanding the livelihood of people.

India has always been known for its diverse culture, lifestyle and rich architecture. The country is linguistically rich, having 31 official languages and 849 unofficial languages along with various cultures and religious practices spread across 29 states. It is quite imperative to preserve the nation's heritage so that the upcoming generation can inculcate in themselves the values, beliefs and customs of the nation. The cultural as well as architectural practices over time have led to the formation of a religious framework within the country.

The architectural remains along with their vast cultural practices, have had a high representation amongst all the religions across the country. The preservation and restoration of the same, represents a wide picture of the different societies from different times. It also instils towards the feeling of immense pride within the hearts of the citizens. Moreover, it also helps in aiding the economic growth through tourism and creation of employment opportunities for a vast majority of the population.





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## GLOSSARY

<b>S.no</b>	<b>Term</b>	<b>Description</b>
1.	The Three Jewels	1 the Buddha, the fully enlightened one. 2 the Dharma, the teachings expounded by the Buddha. 3 the Sangha, the monastic order of Buddhism that practice the Dharma
2.	Bhumchu	Buddhist festival, which on the Tibetan lunar calendar is held on the 14th and 15th day of the first month
3.	Lhabab Duchen	Lhabab Düchen is one of the four Buddhist festivals commemorating four events in the life of the Buddha, according to Tibetan traditions.
4.	Saga Dawa	Vesākha, also known as Buddha Purnima and Buddha Day.
5.	Loosong	Loosong is the Sikkimese New Year, of the Bhutia tribe, celebrated every year in the month of December.
6.	Losar	Losar festival, which has its origin in the 15th century, celebrates the Ladakhi or Tibetan New Year.
7.	Maghe Sankranti	Maghe Sankranti is a Nepalese festival observed on the first of Magh in the Vikram Sambat calendar bringing an end to the winter solstice containing month of Poush.
8.	Mahasamghika and Sthaviravada	Early Buddhist schools.
9.	Vipassana and Samatha	Buddhist meditation

10.	Vajrayana	Refers to the various Buddhist traditions of Tantra and "Secret Mantra".
11.	Lama	Lama is a title for a teacher of the Dharma in Tibetan Buddhism.
12.	Pravachan	Recitation of a scripture text.
13.	Sutra	a Buddhist or Jainist scripture.
14.	Thukpa	Tibetan Noodles
15	Shakya Clan	A clan of the late Vedic Period and are attested from Buddhist scriptures.





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