

An Ethnolinguistic Study of Memba: A Lesser-known Language of Arunachal Pradesh

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in

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by

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled **An Ethnolinguistic Study of Memba: A Lesser-known Language of Arunachal Pradesh** submitted by **Akanksha** bearing Registration Number **16HAPH05** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for award of Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Linguistics is a bonafide work carried out by her under our supervision and guidance.

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Abbreviations

1	First person
2	Second person
3	Third person
ABL	Ablative case
ACC	Accusative case
ADJ	Adjective
ADV	Adverb
ANM	Animate gender
ASSOC	Associative case
AUX	Auxiliary Verb
CAUS	Causative
CLF	Classifier
CMPR	Comparative
CNJ	Conjunction
COP	Copula
DAT	Dative case
DEM	Demonstrative
DU	Dual
EX	Exclusive
EXCLAM	Exclamatory
F	Feminine gender
FIN	Finite
FN	first name
FUT	future
GEN	genitive
HAB	habitual aspect
HON	honorific
IMM. PST	immediate past
IMP	imperative
IMPF	imperfect
IND	indicative

INDF indefinite
INF infinitive
INSTR instrumental
INTR intransitive
IPFV imperfective
LOC locative
M masculine
MOD modal
NPST nonpast
NEG negation, negative
NOM nominative
NUM numeral
OBJ object
OBL oblique
PASS passive
PFV perfective
PL plural
POSS possessive
PRED predicative
PRF perfect
PRS present
PROG progressive
PROH prohibitive
PROX proximal/proximate
PST past
Q question particle/marker
RECP reciprocal
REDUP reduplication
REFL reflexive
REL relative
SBJ subject
TR transitive
VOC vocative

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I bear complete responsibility for any errors or shortcomings this work may have.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The North Eastern Frontier hills of India are home to myriads of tribes with their distinct cultures and languages flourishing alongside the extraordinary biodiversity that characterises this region. It is in fact, one of the most linguistically diverse regions of the world, with the world's two biggest language families, namely Indo-European and Sino-Tibetan, converging here. Arunachal Pradesh forms the biggest of the seven North-Eastern states of India, sharing its border with China and Bhutan in the North, Myanmar in the East and Assam in the South. The state is inhabited by 26 major tribes and over 100 sub-tribes, who make up a population of 13.84 lakh (Census 2011) spread over an area of 83,743 sq km. and speaking about 90 languages, making it the most linguistically diverse state of India (Devy, 2016).

The present-day area of Arunachal Pradesh, was part of North-East Frontier Tracts of Assam during the British rule India, and was later renamed North East Frontier Area (NEFA) in 1954. It became a union territory in 1972, and in 1987 attained statehood. Owing to its remote location and rugged topography, Arunachal Pradesh remained fairly cut-off from the mainland; uncharted, inaccessible and beyond effective administrative control until a few years after India got independence. And even today, the state remains untouched by the forces of the mainland; its natural abundance conserved, its people undisturbed and its cultures preserved. Development in the state has been very slow and controlled and the entry of outsiders has been regulated through an Inner Line Permit (ILP) since 1873. Even though the ILP system was put in place to safeguard commercial interests of the British in India, it was retained after independence to protect the land, its indigenous people and cultures from demographic changes due to large scale influx of outsiders. Because of their long-term geographic and cultural isolation, the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh have retained a lot of their indigenous beliefs and

cultural practices, and even though Hindi and English have slowly made inroads into the hill state now, its indigenous languages continue to thrive. But the question one must ask here is how long will they continue to do so. As mother tongues across the world cease to be spoken in favour of major languages, it seems likely that the people of Arunachal will sooner or later switch to major languages and the linguistic diversity that the region boasts of, will eventually be lost. Modernisation and increased access to the outside world has led to a rapid cultural evolution, putting an end to age-old practices and resulting in loss of heritage knowledge, including language, and cultural identity. Given the inevitability of loss, it seems imperative to document and describe the heritage knowledge of the various ethnic groups before they are irreversibly lost.

This study attempts to describe Memba, one of the many languages spoken in the hill state of Arunachal Pradesh. Memba is classified under the Tshangla subgroup of the Bodish group of the Tibeto-Burman family of languages. The language has, thus far, only been very scantily described (Badu 2002, Goiba 2020) and the available literature, which is very limited, is replete with confusions over its genetic classification and nomenclature. There are even inconsistencies in the data ascribed to Memba found across the existing literature (Grewal 1997, Dutta 2006). The present study tries to fill in this research gap by addressing some of these issues and tries to create a comprehensive and lasting database that accurately represents the speakers of Memba and maybe useful for further research on the language.

According to the District Census Report (2011) Memba has merely 3505 speakers (Mother tongues of Arunachal Pradesh¹) residing in the remote regions of Mechuka of Shi-yomi district (formerly part of West Siang district) and Gelling and Tuting areas of the Upper Siang district.

¹ Retrieved from <https://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/C-16.html> last accessed on July 3rd, 2019

It may, however be noted that the two communities grouped together as Membas live in two discrete locations, far away from each other, and migrated from different places at least two centuries apart. The two groups bear little ethnolinguistic similarity, except for common Buddhist faith, and therefore, scholars argue, must not be thought of as a singular group (Billorey, 1997:2, Grothmann, 2012). The Membas of Tuting and Gelling area identify themselves as Tshangla or Changla and trace their origin from Bhutan, while the Membas of Mechuka area refer to themselves as Nehnangi or Bazashiriba and trace their origin from Tibet. The former is believed to have migrated from Eastern Bhutan in the 19th century in order to escape oppressive taxation (Aris 1980:9, quoted in Andvik 2010:5) while the latter had migrated to Mechuka by 17th century (Billorey, 1997). This distinction and the complexity and problems of the term ‘Memba’ will be elaborated upon later in the chapter. This study is confined to data collected from the Mechuka area only and the term Memba used in this study refers only to the Membas of Mechuka valley and their language, unless otherwise specified. The language data collected from Membas of Tuting area show almost no lexical similarity with data collected from Mechuka and corroborates the idea that the two are, in fact, two distinct communities. And given this distinction, one must reconsider the population data, which combines both the groups as Memba speakers and does not correspond to only the Mechuka Memba speakers.

The study will present a brief grammatical sketch of the Memba language along with an ethnographic account of the Memba community on the basis of data collected from native speakers of the Mechuka valley. A study of this kind runs a risk of generalisation and oversimplification of facts, which may or may not be acceptable to all members of the community. For example, there may be dialectal variations in the speech of different speakers, all of which may not have been documented. And there may be individual differences with

respect to ethnocultural practices described here. This work should therefore be considered in the light of these limitations, which result from the limited scope of the study, and the data included here does not claim to be all inclusive.

1.1. Language Endangerment: A Global Crisis

The last two decades have witnessed an increasing concern among linguists and various speech communities about the threat of extinction that a large number of world's languages face, as they cease to be passed down younger generations and English and other dominant languages take over (Brenzinger et al, 2003; Crystal, 2002; Krauss 1992). According to estimates, between 50% to 90% of the 6000 languages spoken across the globe may cease to be spoken by the end of the 21st century; some of them without even being documented or identified as languages (ibid.). These widely varying estimates arise from the fact that language vitality statistics are difficult to come by and may or may not be accurate. In the most remote and inaccessible parts of the world it is difficult even to find out what languages are spoken, let alone their demographics. The language-dialect conundrum also adds to the confusion, as a number of languages are not even recognised as languages in their own right, but bundled together as dialects of a major language, and sometimes inaccurately so (For a further discussion on problems of language statistics see Krauss, 1992:4-5). In any case, it is agreed that two generations from now, at least 50% of the world's languages will disappear. This severe crisis that the linguistic diversity of the world faces today calls for collaborative efforts between scholars of linguistics, language communities, governments and NGOs to take up the job of language description and support the development and maintenance of minority languages, as a matter of great urgency in order to preserve and perpetuate the endangered languages.

1.2. Language Loss: Why Should we Care?

Language endangerment may appear to be a matter of little significance to the uninitiated and one may wonder why we should even care if two thirds of the 6,000 natural languages of the world may cease to exist by the end of the century (Devy, et. al. 2016:2). It may be helpful to understand language as a cultural artefact and not simply as a medium of communication which may be replaced by another. The UNESCO spells it out the best when it recognises languages as the embodiment of ‘the unique cultural wisdom of a people; their unique cultural, historical and ecological knowledge, set of beliefs, practices and worldview achieved through centuries of civilisation’ (Brenzinger et al. 2003:1). The loss of any language is loss of a culture, a worldview, and therefore an irrecoverable loss for the entire humankind. A number of scholars often claim that linguistic diversity is to humankind what biodiversity is to plant and animal kind (Hale et al., 1992; Krauss, 1992; Nettle, D., & Romaine, S. 2000). Just like the extinction of any species is a great loss to the entire life on earth, the extinction of a language corresponds to a similar loss for the human race. The knowledge of any particular language, it is argued, may hold key to answering fundamental questions of the future and give crucial insight into structures of speech and cognition, human prehistory, historical movements across the globe. As for the community itself, the loss of its language may result in the loss of cultural and ethnic identity (Bernard 1992, Halle 1998, as cited in Brenzinger et al 2003:2). Language, after all, is the cornerstone of identity in the modern day; the basis of geographical organisation of the world into nation states and the distinctive feature among the different peoples of the world.

This present crisis has garnered a lot of international attention in the last two decades and hastened endangered language documentation and revitalisation efforts across the globe. UNESCO emphasises the need for language documentation, new policy initiatives and creation

of materials through engagement with language communities and appeals to language professionals, governments and NGOs to take these up.

1.3. Shifting Perspectives of Language Documentation

The field of language documentation and analysis has evolved over the years with shift in schools of thought in the discipline of Linguistics, and in line with the needs and concerns of the times. In its earliest phase, language documentation was mostly carried out from an administrative or missionary perspective, that is to enable the governance of a certain people or to facilitate the spread of religion. The scholarly love for languages (Philology, as it was then referred to) fuelled by colonial interests lead to the description, comparison, categorisation and classification of languages into groups and families. These language genealogies, although now sometimes viewed critically for their racist undertones, still form the basis of linguistic analysis and subgrouping and have since continually been referred to and improved upon (See for example, Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India). With the arrival of Structural Linguistics, the concerns of language documentation shifted to capturing the various structures and features found in languages spoken across the world. The shift in focus from comparative to descriptive and the availability of more reliable and unbiased data, helped reexamine and refine the genealogy of languages. Comparison of language structures lead to identification of language typologies and universals, which gradually paved way for the next phase.

With the advent of Generative Linguistics the focus of documenting languages shifted yet again to identifying language universals and to develop a comprehensive understanding of the universal human faculty of language with inputs from languages spoken around the world. The

documentation efforts in the last three decades have been informed by the rising concern about language endangerment. With the preservation of endangered languages in mind, the linguistic community has managed to collate a comprehensive catalogue of languages spoken in the remotest areas of the world. The last two decades have seen concerted efforts from language professionals in association with language communities to document and preserve languages from around the world, with special focus on endangered languages, ascertained by evaluative frameworks like Fishman's (1991) 8-level Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) and UNESCO's framework for evaluating language vitality. These efforts have led to creation of dictionaries, grammars, audio-visual recordings, primers, textbooks and other materials in formerly undocumented languages, with the intent to promote their use by native speakers.

Having created a vast inventory of linguistic data, Western scholarship, in the last decade or so, has already moved from efforts of preservation and documentation of endangered languages on to efforts of language revitalisation, that is to reverse language shift, and help create new speakers of languages that may be facing imminent extinction. In India, however, the field of language documentation is yet to see that shift. Due to the vast number of languages spoken across the subcontinent, improper classification and several other factors, the task of documentation is still not complete. There still remain areas and languages that are uncharted and undocumented. The interest in documenting the various languages of the country and preserving them has been there for a long time, however, the policy makers are only recently beginning to realise the importance of mother tongue in education and are slowly taking measures to empower efforts of language preservation. In the last decade or so, the government has funded the establishment of several centres for study of endangered languages across the country. The research being done in these institutes, in addition to the Central Institute of Indian Languages and their language documentation programmes such as the Scheme for

Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages (SPPEL) represent the current situation of language documentation in India which focuses on charting out at least a basic inventory of vocabulary and grammatical sketch of all the languages spoken across the subcontinent.

1.4. Background of the Study

1.4.1. Status of Languages in India

The Indian subcontinent is one of the most linguistically diverse regions of the world with 270 mother tongues and 121 languages (Language Census of India, 2011) spanning 6 language families, namely Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman, Tai-Kadai and Great Andamanese (Abbi, 2012). The official figures only represent languages that returned more than 10,000 speakers and exclude a lot of endangered languages, most of which have less than 10,000 speakers. Officially only 22 of the 121 languages are recognized as Scheduled Languages of India and spoken as mother tongue by 96.71% of the total population of the country. The others that have more than 10,000 speakers but are not scheduled languages are categorised as Other Languages, and constitute mother tongue to 3.29 percent of the population².

Language demographics are highly problematic, conflicting at times, and hardly manage to capture the true ground reality. The Ethnologue claims that there are 462 languages in India, out of which 14 are extinct while Krauss (1992:6) claims that there are 380. People's Linguistic Survey of India pegs this number at 780. This variability of statistics across sources demonstrates just how problematic and unreliable language viability data is. This inadequacy of data has also led to a lot of other problems, such as inaccurate historical classification of languages and confusion regarding the language-dialect distinction. Therefore, there is an urgent need to gather more systematic information about the status and degree of endangerment

² https://censusindia.gov.in/2011Census/C-16_25062018_NEW.pdf

of Indian languages, and reevaluation of their genealogical classification alongside documentation of these endangered languages.

1.4.2. Language Endangerment in the North-East of India



Map 1. Map showing languages of North-East India

(Source: Roger Blench 2013:77)

The seven states of North-East of India contribute more to the linguistic diversity of India than the rest of India put together (see, Map 1). The Eastern Himalayas are home to a number of small communities with their distinct languages, cultural traditions, faith and practices. Due to geographical inaccessibility and restrictions on conduct of research, however, the North-East has remained largely unexplored and mysterious. Whatever little is known about languages of this part of the world is insufficient to make generalizations and conclusions about them. And in cases where data is available, they have been studied by different researchers from different theoretical and methodological perspectives, resulting in a multitude of theories and narratives about the people of this region; their origin, identity, myth, rituals, language and culture. This includes perceptions of the local community about themselves, scholars native to the community or the region as well as foreign researchers, colonial and postcolonial scholars, narratives of the state and government agents (Blackburn & Huber 2012:2). As a result of these issues within Eastern Himalayan scholarship, a number of languages have remained undocumented or understudied while some are not even recognized as languages or are wrongly classified as dialects of other languages that they may or may not have any relation with (Blench & Post, 2014).

Memba is one such language spoken by a very small population and might soon be wiped off the face of the earth without much documentation, classification or even proper nomenclature. It is difficult to ascertain the degree of endangerment of the Memba language as there is very little data available on the demographics of the speakers and there is generally very little research done on the language. The present study does not concern itself with the task of determining the degree of endangerment of the language, however, endangerment must be

recognized as an important theme that warrants research on Membas, before their language is irrevocably lost.

The Membas, or Mombas as they are officially referred to, form one of the many small Tibetan-Buddhist groups that inhabit the entire stretch of the Himalayas from Hindukush in the West to Arunachal Pradesh in the East. This presents as a cultural contiguity that has its roots in the Tibetan plateau and has spilled all along the Himalayan folds, spanning international borders of Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan and China. This cultural contiguity can be observed in the way these communities live, dress, speak, facets of languages spoken by these groups, which are put under the umbrella term Tibetan (or Bhotia in India). As a result the language spoken by small groups, such as the Membas, have remained unclassified and under-researched.

1.4.3. Complexity of Nomenclature in Tibeto-Burman

A primary problem that one encounters as one approaches the Tibeto-Burman languages, is that of nomenclature. Most tribes and languages have multiple names, some of which may be used to describe other sub-tribes, groups and language families as well, leading to a lot of confusion in the literature. While most groups have their own classification, names for themselves, their language and their native land, in most cases, they are officially recognised by the name given to them by outsiders. These outsiders include researchers, surveyors, local officers or other societies and groups residing in the neighbouring areas, who first described the tribe in the existing literature. These names, which are exonyms, that are given by outsiders, in most cases have been adopted as the official names (Matisoff, 1996:xi, Post and Burling, 2017:216).

The language names are usually the same as the name of the tribe speaking them, and are mostly based on the name of the place the tribe inhabits or an observable physical or cultural attribute of the community. These attributes perceived by others, may not only be reductive and inaccurate, owing to prejudices and biases, but are often derogatory. For example, the Idu Mishmis of Arunachal Pradesh are quite popularly referred to as the Chulikatas (ETYMOLOGY: ‘chuli’ = hair & ‘kata’ = cut in Assamese), because of the distinct style in which they cut the sides of their hair. It’s important to bear in mind that these perceived similarities and differences by others gloss over many distinctive features that a language or tribe may have, and have lead to inaccurate labelling and classification of the Tibeto-Burman languages and their phylogeny (Blench, 2014; Blench and Post, 2014). The differences arising due to phonological variations and use of different orthographic conventions of researchers from different countries further leads to multiple spellings and multiple names (For further discussion, see Matisoff 1996:ix-xv).

This rampant polynymy in Tibeto-Burman languages offers a possible cue to unentangle the confusion surrounding the Membas and their language. The term *Memba* seems to be a phonological variant of *Monpa*, which is a generic Tibetan term ascribed to a number of communities in Arunachal Pradesh with little in common (Grothmann 2012:128) other than a supposed Sino-Tibetan affiliation (Blench 2014:1). Mön-pa, meaning ‘a person from Mön’ is a pejorative term first used by the Central Tibetans to refer to all the non-Tibetan speaking and non-Buddhist societies of Southern Tibet, Bhutan and neighbouring regions. Grothmann (2012:130) identifies Monyul as a region of Tibet consisting of the current areas of Bhutan and Tawang. The people of this region, referred to as Monpa, followed the ancient Bon religion and were considered ‘barbaric’ by the highly civilised Tibetan Buddhists. And even though these

communities converted to Buddhism in the course of time, the term Monpa is still used as a classificatory term for different groups living on the Southern and South-Eastern slopes of the Himalayas, including Eastern Bhutan and Tawang and West Kameng districts of Arunachal Pradesh (ibid.). Even though the term Monpa, and its various phonological variants, has generally positive connotations for people it refers to, most scholars advise against its use for classification as it refers to highly diverse groups of people (van Driem 2001:472, quoted in Blench 2014:1).

Over time and with usage, the term Monpa has gained currency as a designation for a number of communities affiliated to Tibetan-Buddhism. Numerous phonological variants of the term Monpa, such as Monba, Momba (used in the official list of Scheduled Tribes of India³) and Memba are also commonly, and sometimes interchangeably, found across literature. Owing to their origins in the South-Eastern region of Tibet and adherence to Tibetan-Buddhism, the Membas are identified as such, and the term ‘Membas’ is an exonym used by neighbouring non-Buddhist societies to describe them. The Membas among themselves, use the autonyms Nehnangi and Bajashiriba (also, Pachakshiriba) to refer to themselves. Both names originated in Tibet, where a lot of importance is given to the place of residence. Difference in name arises due to the distance of the place from the people who are describing it (Grothmann 2012:130). While the people from Lhasa call them Pachakshiriba meaning ‘one who lives in Pachakshiri’ which is the Tibetan administrative district they fall in, the Tibetan communities of nearby areas of Orong, Molo and Gacha that also fall under the Pachakshiri district use the name Nanang based on the supposed sacredness of the place (Tib. *gnas* ‘holy place’ and *nang* ‘inside’). Another name used for the Membas is Mijim Thangba or Tsari Mijim Thangba, which

³ The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Lists (Modification) Order, 1956 and as inserted by Act 69 of 1986

is the name of a village in the sacred south Tsari region (also known as Migyitun) close to where the Membas reside. The non-Buddhist Tani tribes also use the general term Nyema (variants Nyimak or Nyime) for Tibet and Tibetan people such as Memba and refer to Mechuka as Nyem Nyoku or ‘the place of women’ (Tamak, 2018:6). How the people of Pachakshiri came to be known as Memba is not known, even to the Memba people themselves. As per early British records the term Memba was first used to describe the Buddhist people of the Tuting area in Upper Siang district, also known as Pemako (Padma-bkod) by the Tibetans (ibid.).

1.4.4. Status of Memba Language

1.4.4.1. The Language of the Membas: Problem of Nomenclature and Classification

The identity of the Memba language suffers the same fate as many mother tongues of India, having less than 10,000 speakers, especially those of the Himalayan region. The various languages of the Himalayas are spoken by small groups and clusters of people who may have shared a common ancestry centuries ago, but have since been spread wide and separated by wide ranges of mountains. These languages have evolved over the years alongside the languages spoken in their new habitat, incorporating areal and other features. The identification and classification becomes even more problematic in case of Memba due to its origin which is traced back to Tibet and the fact that ethnic affiliation is often confused for linguistic affiliation (Post and Burling, 2017:217). Sorting out the inputs on the language from various sources is like putting together a 1000-piece jigsaw puzzle without a reference picture. The confusion of classification and nomenclature stems from a number of factors.

The problem begins with the identification of the two distinct groups of people, living in two discrete locations as one, that is the Membas of Mechuka valley and the Membas of Tuting and

Gelling. It is interesting to note that neither of these communities themselves identify with the name Memba. The Membas of Mechuka refer to themselves as Nehnangi or Pachakshiriba (alternatively Bazashiriba) while the so-called Memba people of Tuting and Gelling identify themselves as Tshangla or Changla and speak the Tshangla language. Tshangla or Sharchokpa (Eastern language), as it is known in Bhutan, is widely spoken in Eastern and Southeastern Bhutan and parts of Nepal, China and Western Arunachal Pradesh. The Membas of Mechuka, however, speak a different language that has very little lexical similarity with Tshangla, as confirmed in this study through data collected from speakers from both Mechuka and Tuting. The two communities are unable to understand the language spoken by each other. And even though the non-Buddhist communities of Arunachal assume the two communities to be culturally similar, they have wide differences in terms of how they dress, how they speak, the festivals they celebrate.

The Membas of Mechuka associate more with the Tibetans from the Southern province of Kongbo (or Kongpo), while the Membas of Tuting and Gelling find more in common with the Tshanglas of Bhutan. Bailey (1914:18) on his expedition along the far-Eastern Himalayan watershed between India and Tibet mentions of the people of Pachakshiri valley who spoke among themselves Monba, but speak good Kongpo Tibetan. A similar assertion is made by the people of Mechuka themselves⁴ who claim that they speak the language of Kongbo, which differs from Lhasa Tibetan, however they can understand the latter. Among themselves, Membas refer to their language as *Nyang Kha*, which may be derived from the name of *Nyang Chu* (Nyang River), the longest tributary of Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra in India), which flows through the Kongbo region.

⁴ Dawa Tashi Naksang and other elder members of the community

The clubbing together of the two groups inhabiting Mechuka and Tuting (100 kms apart) has created a confusion, expressed by a number of researchers, as the language data found under the name Memba varies across sources. And it is due to this common name given to both groups, that Memba spoken in Mechuka gets wrongly classified as a dialect of Tshangla by a number of sources (Grewal, 1997, as cited in Blench and Post, 2011, Eberhard et. al. 20205). Blench (2014:7) in his deliberations on Memba, asserts that even though the language has been aligned with the Tshangla language of Bhutan, there seems to be little evidence to support the claim. It is amply clear from review of existing literature as well as field studies that the two groups referred to as Memba, namely Tuting Memba and Mechuka Memba, are in fact, distinct ethnolinguistic communities and must be studied as such.

According to the official classification by the government, the mother tongue of the Membas is referred to as 'Bhotia', which is the old classification used to describe all dialects of Tibetan spoken across the Himalayas. Bhutia or Bhotia comes from Sanskrit 'Bhot' (or Bhut) which is the Indian name of Tibet (Klafkowski, 1981:171). Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India (1909:14) describes the term 'Bhotia' as the Hindu name for Tibetan having derived from Bod-pa 'A Tibetan' (Bod-yul 'Tibet'). He further mentions that the term was used by Indians to refer to groups of Tibetans living on the borders between India and Tibet and identifies various dialects and sub-dialects namely Bhotia of Tibet or Tibetan, Bhotia of Sikkim or Danjong-ka, Bhotia of Sherpa or Sharpa Bhotia, Bhotia of Bhutan or Drukpa (Lhoke), Bhotia of Ladakh or Ladakhi, Murmi or Tamang, Bhotia of Lahul or Lahuli, Bhotia of Baltistan or Balti, Bhotia of Spiti, Bhotia of Purik and other dialects. The Eastern varieties include Bhotia of Tibet, Bhotia of Sikkim or Danjongka, Bhotia of Bhutan or Lhoke, Bhotia of Sherpa or Sharpa Bhotia etc.

⁵ Ethnologue: Tshangla retrieved from <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/tsj>

(ibid.:14-15 & 1927:54-55). The term Bhotia, as used in the linguistic context, can be best understood as a language subgroup that refers to a spectrum of languages which share a Sino-Tibetan origin and includes the distinguished sub-dialects of Tibetan.

Even though the European understanding of classification of Trans-Himalayan languages has evolved and has become much more nuanced since, the government records continue to group together a number of languages with very little in common under the name 'Bhotia'. This includes the language of the Memba people. Memba children even learn a variety of Tibetan in schools, which is offered as the subject 'Bhotia' and differs from their mother tongue. Tibetan is considered the prestige language among the Membas even though it has little scope of usage apart from reading religious scriptures. Tibetan fashion and pop music is also popular among the Membas, especially among the younger generations, however, they do not understand the lyrics of the songs. The older Membas, due to cultural exchange and trade across the border can understand Tibetan, although their knowledge of Tibetan is also limited to certain domains and declining.

1.4.4.2. Origin and Classification

Most of the standard linguistic resources⁶ place Memba under the Tshangla subgroup of the Bodish group of the Tibeto-Burman family. Andvik (2017:418) defines Tshangla as 'a Tibeto-Burman language of the Bodish subgroup, close to but just outside the inner nucleus of Tibetic languages' and is primarily spoken in Bhutan. He estimates that about 5000-10,000 speakers of Tshangla are found in India as well. He identifies them as the Monpas of Dirang and Kalaktang, across the border from Bhutan, in Western Arunachal Pradesh and another 5000 in the Tuting and Gelling regions, across the border from Tibet (historically referred to as Pemako) in Central Arunachal Pradesh. While the language of the former group is referred to

⁶ Ethnologue: Tshangla retrieved from <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/tsj>

as Central Monpa (Das Gupta, 1968), the language of the latter is known as Cangluo Monpa (Zhang, 1986) or Motuo Monba (Sun et al. 1980, quoted in Andvik 2017). He does not mention the Memba of Mechuka in his list of Tshangla dialects. However, due to the common name ascribed to the two groups of Mechuka and Pemako, the former also gets classified as a dialect of Tshangla. Another reason why Memba of Mechuka seems to be put under the bracket of Tshangla is because of their history of migration through Bhutan and Tawang. While some scholars also suggest that they directly migrated from Tibet, there are at least a few clans among the Membas who migrated from Tawang about three centuries ago (Billorey, 1980:603) to the Mechuka valley. Blench (2014:7) suggests that passage through Tawang was a prestigious gloss in their journey due to the stature accorded to the Tawang monastery and therefore the Membas (who called themselves Pachakshiriba) did not object to being affiliated with the Monpas. This seems to have led initial accounts of the Membas of Mechuka (such as Bailey 1957, quoted in Tamak 2016:39; Matisoff 1996, 2003) to proclaim that they speak a dialect of Monpa, which they seem to have learnt from the people of Naksang clan who came from Tawang. All of these reasons stated above, in addition to insufficiency of data on Mechuka Memba may have led to its classification as a Tshanglic language. However, more contemporary researches (Blench and Post, 2013:95, Blench, 2014) question this classification of Memba as a Tshanglic language.

Comparative analysis of the lexicon (Andvik, 2010 & 2017) suggests that Mechuka Memba is not Tshanglic and instead shares characteristics of Tibetan dialects. Thurgood (2017:11) identifies two quintessential evidences for identifying a language as Tibetan: the first being the presence of the reflex of the innovated Tibetan word for ‘seven’ *bdun* and the second being innovated personal pronouns *khyo* for second person and *kho* for third person. Both of these

characteristics of the Tibetan subgroup are found in the Memba spoken in Mechuka while Thurgood points out the absence of these features in Tshangla (p. 15) and therefore argues that it is certainly not Tibetan. The Memba language does exhibit similarity with Tibetan, however there is a significant erosion of initials and finals, simplification of consonant clusters and marked influence of other Sino-Tibetan and Indo-Aryan languages.

The actual origins of Membas seem to be more varied than documentary evidence may suggest and their population more mixed. This in addition to similarities arising out of contact features, makes the genetic classification of their language very complex. In one of the latest researches on the Monpa languages, Blench (2014:7) which is based on primary data collected through fieldwork, finds Memba to be the closest to the Brokeh language of the nomadic Brokpa tribe of Tawang, which in turn is closely related to Tibetan. The Tibetan word for ‘seven’ *dun* is found in both

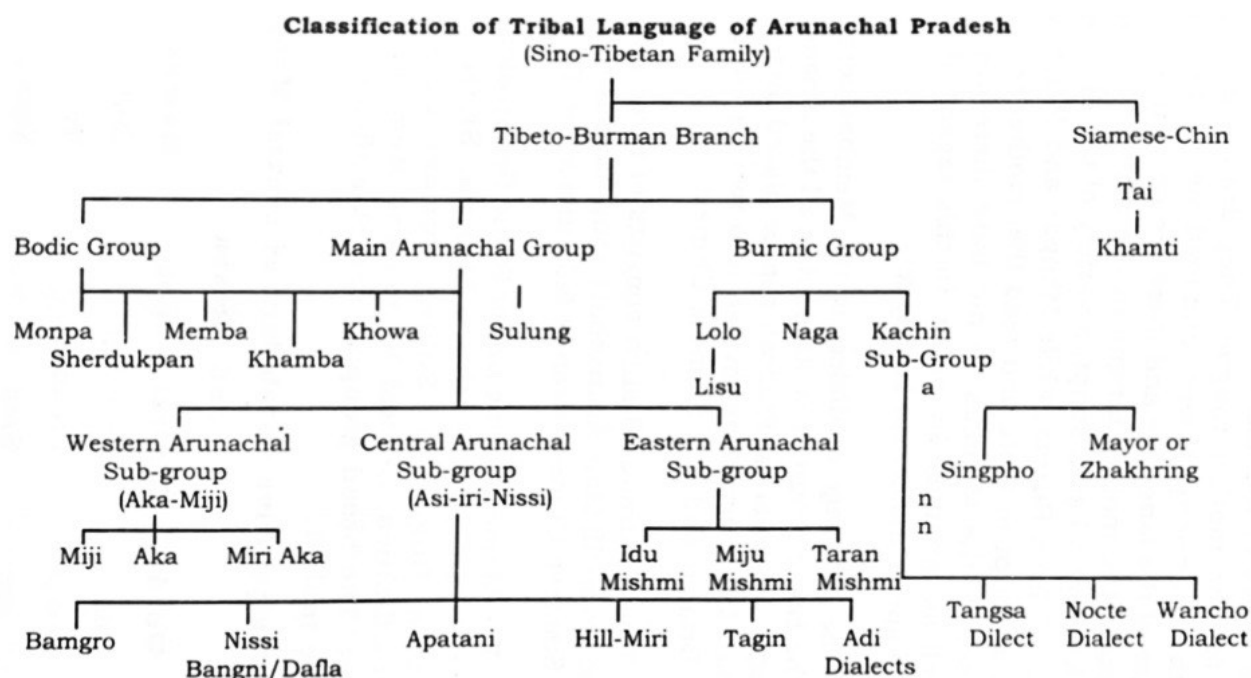


Image 1: Classification of languages of Arunachal Pradesh

(Source: Dutta, 2006:21)

Brokeh and Memba, which has been replaced by *ɲis* in Tawang Monpa and other related languages. He then goes on to postulate (ibid. 9) the existence of a Brokeh group of Bodish, which is closely related to Tibetic, but which has diverged too far from Tibetan to be called its dialects. He groups together under this cluster Senge, Brokeh and Memba and demonstrates through a comparison (ibid. 12) how they have identical forms for numerals and a significant erosion of final and initial segments from Tibetan. These features are unique to this group, and distinguish them from Tawang Monpa, Tshangla and other affiliated languages. The Brokpa tribe are a highly mobile group of yak herders spread over Bhutan, Tibet and Arunachal Pradesh and are referred to as Drokpa in Tibet. They travel along the snow-line from North to South on the Southern edge of the Himalayas, chasing after grazing pastures in winters. It is possible that the Brokpa language travelled to distant pockets such as Mechuka through the nomadic nature of the herders, however, given their mobility it is difficult to systematically study their language or even to say for certain that they all speak the same language (ibid. 8).

1.4.4.3. Alternate names

The previous section discusses in some detail the classification and identification of the language of the Membas as found in the existing literature. Apart from the languages mentioned in the previous section, there are several other names that have been associated with Memba, sometimes with confusing or insufficient explanation. For example, the Sino-Tibetan Etymological Dictionary and Thesaurus (STEDT) project describes ‘Membas as a tribe of Siang District in Arunachal, on the northern border of Nagaland; they practice the Tantric or Lamaistic form of Mahayana Buddhism... perhaps the same group (ethno-)linguistically as the various tribes and languages called Monpa’ (Matisoff et. al., 1996:61). While parts of that statement are true, Membas do not inhabit regions bordering Nagaland, and this makes one wonder how well informed these assertions are. The monograph further lists the following

languages which may be related to Memba: Khamba, Monpa-1, Northern Monpa, Southern Monpa, Central Monpa, Sherdukpen, Miji, But- pa, Lish-pa, Lish, Khoa. (ibid.). The Ethnologue, on the other hand, lists Memba as an alternate name of Tshangla, alongside Central Monpa, Menba, Monpa, Sangla, Sarchapkkha, Shachobiikha, Shachopkha, Sharchagpakha, Sharchhokpa, Sharchhop, Sharchokpa-lo, Tsangla, Tschanglo, Tshalingpa (Language code: ISO 639-3 tsj).

1.4.4.4. Script

The Membas are among the only 4 of 26 major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh to have their own script. These include Membas (Hikor script), Monpas (Bodic script), Khamptis (Mon-Tai script) and Khambas (Hingna script) (Showren, 2020:52). While most indigenous groups of the state prescribe to oral tradition, these Tibetan-Buddhist groups have scripts as well as written records of their ethnohistory. This differentiates the Membas from Tani tribes such as Galo, Nyishi, Adi, Apatani and Tagin etc. who trace their origin from the common ancestor *Abu Tani*.

1.4.4.5. Demographics

It is difficult to determine an exact number of Mechuka Memba speakers from the official records, due to all of the above discussed problems of classification and nomenclature. The closest possible accurate estimate of the population comes from the tribe-wise list of Mother Tongues of West Siang district in the 2011 Census. According to that data there are a total of 4495 Memba people, out of which 3504 identify 'Bhotia' as their mother tongue⁷. The total population of 4495 consists of 2170 male and 2325 female speakers. The original document listed the various mother tongues of Arunachal Pradesh district-wise and mentioned 'Memba'. However, the document was later restructured and presently counts 2306 'Bhotia' speakers in

⁷ Retrieved from <https://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/C-16.html> accessed on July 3rd, 2019

Mechuka (Row no. 4604)⁸ and does not mention the tribe name. Other sources suggest different estimates such as Badu (2002, p. i), according to whom there are 2002 Memba people in the Mechuka valley of West Siang. Grothmann (2008) pegs the number at close to 2000, based on the electoral list of the Mechuka region, to which one would have to add an unknown number of minors and expatriate Memba people, she contends (Grothmann, 2008:128).

1.4.5. Contact History and Language Policy in Arunachal Pradesh

The state of Arunachal Pradesh offers the highest level of phylogenetic diversity in the whole of North-East Indian region. The region, although autonomous through most part of history, has been on the crossroads of two major empires: the Tibetan and the Ahom. (Post & Burling, 2017:215) The state is home to at least 12 independent subgroups of Tibeto-Burman (Modi 2006, quoted in *ibid.*). According to the Census 2011, only 27.87% of the state's population of 13,83,727 speaks a Scheduled Language, while the majority 72.3% of the population speaks other languages. Some of the major languages spoken in Arunachal Pradesh and their speaker strength as reported in the 2011 Census data are listed below (C-16: Population by Mother Tongue, Census 2011):

Language Name	Number of Speakers	Percentage of total population
Nyishi	3,95,745	28.59%
Adi (including Galo)	2,40,026	17.35%
Bengali	1,00,579	7.27%
Hindi (including Bhojpuri and Sadri)	98,187	7.09%
Nepali	95,317	6.88%
Others	75,606	5.46%
Bhotia	62,458	4.51%

⁸ *ibid.*

Language Name	Number of Speakers	Percentage of total population
Wancho	58,450	4.22%
Assamese	53,951	3.89%
Mishmi	42,017	3.04%
Tangsa	36,546	2.64%
Nocte	30,308	2.19%

Table 1: Demographics of major languages of Arunachal Pradesh

(Source: Retrieved from <https://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/C-16.html>, last accessed March 4th, 2022)

Any small region of Arunachal Pradesh, like Mechuka, is like a microcosm of the entire state in that it offers a sample view of its great ethnocultural diversity. The immense linguistic diversity of the state also poses the problem of language policy which must ensure preservation of indigenous languages, encourage mother tongue education, and at the same time also enable proficiency in other major languages to guarantee equal opportunity to the people of Arunachal Pradesh throughout the nation. The language policy, in turn, impacts the dynamics of the different languages found in the state, and the socio-cultural identities associated with those languages.

The different tribes of Mechuka, and the rest of the state, all speak different languages, each named after the tribe that speaks it. The languages of the Adi groups fall under the Tani branch of Tibeto-Burman (TB) languages and Memba falls under the Eastern Bodish branch of TB. The languages spoken in Mechuka include Memba, Bori, Bokar, Tagin, Libo, Galo, Ramo, Assamese, Hindi and English. Since the Membas form the bulk of the population, their language is the most widely spoken in the Mechuka valley. Among themselves the Membas converse in their language, that includes in home as well as public spaces as the majority

population is that of Membas. Hindi is the lingua franca, used for conversing with people of other tribes and in neutral spaces like schools and offices. The older members of the community, especially men, have a functional knowledge of the languages of the Adi tribes as well, due to their trade with them in the past. With the decline in trade, the need for understanding each other's language also declined. Meanwhile a pidgin of Assamese and the indigenous languages of Arunachal Pradesh sometimes called Nefamese (from NEFA or North East Frontier Agency) arose as lingua franca in the state. Assamese was also the medium of instruction in educational institutions, until the NEFA was separated from Assam.

The extent of influence of Assamese language in the state of Arunachal Pradesh is a rather less discussed topic, especially since it has been replaced by Hindi now. The present state of Arunachal Pradesh along with parts of Assam, was a political division known as North-Eastern Frontier Tracts (NEFT) created by separating the tribal-majority areas of Darrang and Lakhimpur districts of Assam in 1914 under the British administration. After Indian independence NEFT became part of Assam and after undergoing internal administrative divisions came to be known as NEFA. It later became a Union Territory on 20th January, 1972 under Indian administration and its administrative headquarters were shifted from Shillong to Itanagar in 1974. It was on this historic day, the Golden Jubilee of which was recently celebrated with great exuberance across the state, that the state was renamed as Arunachal Pradesh 'the land of dawn-lit mountains' by Sri Bibhabasu Das Shastri, the Director of Research and K.A.A. Raja, the Chief Commissioner of Arunachal Pradesh of that time. Arunachal Pradesh attained statehood on 20 February 1987.

Assam holds a very significant geo-political position with respect to Arunachal Pradesh and acts as a gateway to the North-East of India. Arunachal Pradesh shares international boundaries

with three countries, namely, Bhutan, China and Myanmar, and within the country it shares the longest stretch of its boundary with Assam. Assam has been the gateway to the rest of India for the people of Arunachal for centuries, long before its modern administrative division under the British administration. The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh had been coming down to the plains of Assam to fulfil their basic needs since even before the Ahoms arrived in Assam in 1228. This interaction continued into trade, marriage and sometimes even into clashes between the hill tribes of Arunachal and plains people of Assam. As a result of their passage through the state, dependence on the markets of Assam, long sociocultural contact with the state and due to geographical isolation from each other, the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh failed to develop a common language of their own, and instead developed a pidgin of Assamese and indigenous Sino-Tibetan languages, that came to be recognised as Nefamese. Later when the region came under the British administration, Assamese became the language of local administration and official court language of the state. In 1948 when the first school opened at Doimukh in Arunachal Pradesh, Assamese was established as the medium of instruction after taking the consensus of the people, as it was the language understood by most people in the state (Bhuyan, 2013:15).

Following the 1962 war with China, Indian government sought a more direct administrative control of Arunachal Pradesh by making it a union territory (NEFA). Apart from stricter administrative control and strong military presence, the government also adopted the policy of cultural integration by introducing Hindi. Hindi was introduced as a compulsory subject under the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) curriculum which provided better job prospects as all government exams, including public services, were held in Hindi and English (ibid. 16). Slowly Hindi replaced Assamese and became the lingua-franca in the state. One of

the key reasons for the rise of Hindi is the lack of a majority indigenous language in Arunachal Pradesh. The tribal groups of the state have historically had differences among themselves and as a result any single majority language from within the state has failed to emerge as a lingua franca. Hindi fills in this gap by being a neutral contender for the position of lingua franca, while at the same time offering greater mobility to its speakers across the country than any other indigenous language could have.

From an administrative purpose, introduction of Hindi in the state served two key purposes. It increased accessibility of outsiders, in the form of administrators, central government employees and army, to this land of great linguistic variety where each of the 26 tribes and various sub-tribes have their own languages and dialects. Secondly, it opened up to the people of Arunachal a wealth of popular culture and media content in Hindi through radio and later television, making them feel integrated with Hindi-dominated mainstream Indian culture. Together these created a feeling of cultural affiliation among the people of Arunachal Pradesh, who were linguistically divided among themselves and were geographically isolated from the rest of the country. In addition to this, Hindi offered an alternative to Assamese, the growing influence of which the Arunachali people worried would subsume their distinctive ethnic identity. Teachers were brought in from the Hindi speaking states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to introduce the language through school education and Hindi quickly made inroads in the tribal state. In fact, as a result of its widespread usage, Arunachal has developed a distinct creole recognised as Arunachali Hindi which has features of Eastern Hindi, Assamese and indigenous languages of the state.

Meanwhile, the introduction of English in formal institutions has also impacted the linguistic dynamics of the state. English was made the medium of instruction in the state in 1972 after a

long standing demand from the local students' association. English was viewed upon favourably as it was key to secure central government jobs. However, while Hindi has been adopted and made their own by the people of Arunachal Pradesh, English remains a more formal and foreign language, especially for people who have stayed within the state and not resided in other states of the country for education or employment. The CIIL Report⁹ on Language Policy in Arunachal Pradesh (2012) sums up the domains and status of Hindi and English in the state as follows:

“Hindi is dominantly used at oral communication among the people in Arunachal Pradesh; whereas English is used as medium of instruction in schools and colleges as well as state official language. Functionally, however, except in a few exceptional cases, English has no space at home; children either use local languages or Hindi. Ideally therefore, Hindi can be said as lingua-franca of the state since it plays role both at home as well as in public places, but English is a foreign language to them till they begin formal schooling. Even though it is so, Hindi cannot be said as a native language. English, though foreign to the children till they join the school, has to play central role in their future career.” (p. 2)

The language policy of Arunachal Pradesh, coupled with development policies has ensured integration of the Arunachali people with mainland India while retaining their indigenous languages and cultures and without causing significant demographic changes in the state. The different languages of the state seem safe within their regional context, however, as people migrate out of the state in pursuit of a better life, and settle in other parts of the nation and even abroad, they have to switch to Hindi and English. This increasing usage of Hindi and English within the Memba diaspora also warrants the declining usage of indigenous language in the community.

⁹ https://www.ciil.org/Download/ProgrammeReports/Language_Policy_in_Arunachal_Pradesh.pdf

1.5. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The study follows the descriptive tradition as the principle theoretical framework in its attempt to describe Memba as it is spoken in the Mechuka valley at the time of this research. The literature for the research comes from a wide range of concerns. Most of the research carried out on the Membas so far comes from a cultural or historical perspective. There is very sparse linguistic data available on the Memba language. Therefore, the bulk of the linguistic data used in this study comes from the field, supplemented by the available vocabulary in already existing literature such as Badu (2002) and Goiba (2020).

In order to understand the distinctive features of Tibetan languages, literature on Sino-Tibetan classification, grammar and typology have been consulted. There has been a great deal of research in the area of Sino-Tibetan (henceforth ST) languages in the last two decades with new approaches and data from formerly inaccessible languages coming in. This has led to numerous theories of classification, historical reconstruction and disagreement among scholars with respect to subgrouping. In this regard standard Tibeto-Burman sources like Grierson 1909; Benedict 1972; Matisoff 2003; Handel 2008 and LaPolla and Thurgood 2017 have been referred to for the present study. While Benedict (1972) creates the foundation of our understanding of ST family, LaPolla and Thurgood (2017) provides a thorough and updated overview of genetic and areal groupings and typological features of Sino-Tibetan languages, and includes detailed descriptions of several languages of the Tibeto-Burman family. The chapter on Tshangla by E. Andvik in the volume is of particular importance in this regard, as many sources classify Memba as a dialect of Tshangla. While Thurgood's classification scheme for Sino-Tibetan has been used as the basic framework, criticism of the scheme has also been given due consideration in highlighting the issues of classification of Tibeto-Burman languages and how these factors play out in the case of Memba in particular (Blench and Post, 2013,

Blench, 2014). Blench's work is grounded in linguistic data from various languages and dialects of Arunachal Pradesh including Mechuka Memba, and therefore is more relevant to the present work. He does a detailed comparative analysis of languages which have formerly been grouped together and recognises new subgroups within the Monpa and Tshangla groups. His work is particularly important as it presents new data from previously undescribed languages and follows a bottom-up approach to grouping and classification.

Dictionaries and grammar of Tibetan have also been referred to, although sparingly, to make comparisons and to trace some of the grammatical features found in Memba. These include the digital database Sino-Tibetan Etymological Dictionary and Thesaurus (STEDT)¹⁰ and Jäschke's (1881) Tibetan-English dictionary.

Owing to their small population the Membas have received far less attention than the other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh as far as research is concerned. That said, however, there have been numerous efforts to document socio-cultural aspects of the Memba people 1970s onwards. The various studies have taken different approaches and studied the Memba people and their culture with varying concerns. Most of the earlier researches were carried out with a colonial perspective and form part of the larger projects, of documenting the various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, as very little was known about this part of the world and the people who inhabited it. The earliest accounts of the Membas include ethnographic sketches such as Singh (1994), Choudhury (2004) and Dutta (2006), notes on migration from Tibet in Billorey (1998), description of trade and commerce in the region as in the district Gazetteer (Choudhury 1994). While these works are mostly very old, they do have a lot of relevance for contemporary

¹⁰ <https://stedt.berkeley.edu/~stedt-cgi/rootcanal.pl>

research. They provide the necessary introduction and in some cases historical context to the Membas, thereby painting a basic picture to start with.

The latest publication on Membas is also an ethno-cultural account titled ‘The Rich Legacy of the Membas’ (Goiba 2020) and presents an updated account of Memba people, their culture and language. The book briefly touches upon a variety of topics including oral myths, social structure, folk songs and dance, cultural practices and rituals, arts and craft etc. of the Membas. As far as language is concerned, the book does not offer much on the grammar, however it offers a glossary of Memba words from certain domains and a list of proverbs with their meanings in English. The book offers an overview of Memba culture from a native perspective and intends to promote knowledge about this little-known community.

The most comprehensive and authoritative literary resource on the Membas comes from Tamak (2016). The unpublished doctoral thesis is a chronicle of the Memba people based on extensive field work in Mechuka. The work touches upon many aspects of Memba ethnography that were formerly undocumented and presents oral narratives as well as documentary records about their history, culture, customs and beliefs. Tamak is meticulous in his examination of literary resources and cultural artefacts associated with the Membas and makes it a point to validate the oral narratives by interviewing several informants and checking written records found in their homes. His attention to detail and authenticity of his sources makes his work one of the most reliable reference materials on the Membas.

Another one of the recent researches on Membas is carried out by Grothmann (in Blackburn and Huber, 2012). Grothmann’s work is anthropological in nature and focuses on the oral narratives of the Membas about their migration and history and compares them with those of

the Tuting Membas. She proposes differentiating the two groups of Membas identified as one, i.e. from Mechuka and Tuting area. Grothmann takes into account oral narratives as well as historical records to map out the migration routes of the two Memba groups, while identifying the various distinctive features of both. The study surveys and provides a thorough bibliography of reliable resources on the origin and migration of the Membas. Even though the central focus of Grothmann's article remains the origin and migration myths, the report provides a concise ethnographic account of the Membas while examining various aspects of their identity.

Other chapters in the volume (Blackburn and Huber 2012) also provide important inputs to the theoretical framework for this study. One of the important themes that the book elaborates upon, and is extremely relevant for the present study, is that of migration narratives in Arunachal Pradesh and how they shape up the identity of a certain ethnic group. Origin and migration narratives in this region serve not only as interesting historical anecdotes to tell the outsiders, but define the ethnicity and cultural identity of the numerous tribes that inhabit the frontier hills. The migration narratives help construct an idea of identity as a community with shared ancestry, cultural history and validate their claims to present geography. The tribes inhabiting the border hill regions occupy a unique geo-political position in the context of international relations. In our context, the Mechuka valley lies only 30 kilometers from the McMahon line and has always been on the crossroads of culture and trade. The tribes inhabiting the region may therefore be viewed either *'as people marginalized within states, or as strategic political and cultural agents who choose such remote hill areas to escape state enclosure and loss of autonomy'* (Scott 2009, quoted in Blackburn & Huber 2012:2)

This understanding is particularly important in the context of the Memba people, who associate themselves with Tibetan religion and culture and enjoyed trade and commerce across a very fluid international boundary until the 1962 Indo-China border dispute. The Membas were under the administrative control of the aristocratic Lhalu family of Gacha, who held the region as an estate and continued to collect taxes up until mid 1950s¹¹. The Membas had extensive trade relations with Tibet as well as the neighbouring Adi tribes of Arunachal (then NEFA). They were in fact intermediaries in international trade across the Indo-Tibetan borders. This gave them a unique, strategic position viz-a-viz the two nations, while maintaining their sovereignty.

The first linguistic research on Memba seems to be conducted in 1975 by Braj Bihari Kumar, as cited in Harald Hammarstrom's bibliography of resources on lesser-known languages of the world¹². The work has been described as 'Hindi-Memba Vocabulary' and seems to be a wordlist. The wordlist itself, however, is inaccessible. The other linguistic resource on the Memba language is a guide book written by Tapoli Badu and published in 2002. The book contains basic notes on grammar and a list of useful phrases and sentences in Memba. The grammatical sketch presented in the book is preliminary, to say the least, and may not be useful for scholarly consideration. The book however, presents a good inventory of Memba vocabulary and sentences which are extremely useful as data for further considerations on the language. The major problem with this book, as with the others in the series of descriptive grammars published by the local administrative research department, is that it presents the data in Roman script and hence fails to account for non-standard consonants and vowel qualities, contrastive features such as length and tone and other phonological features such as aspiration,

¹¹ Grothmann, 2012. p. 128

¹² <https://glottolog.org/providers/hh>

glottalization, intonation etc. Orthographic conventions also tend to simplify consonant clusters, some of which are distinctive features of the language.

1.6. Web Sources

New technology has made it possible to create and access diverse sources of data about the Membas. Although internet access within Mechuka is limited, it has enabled a variety of people to document and archive knowledge about the Membas. These include filmmakers, documentary filmmakers, celebrities, social media influencers, travel bloggers, scientists, nature and adventure enthusiasts. But the most important resources about the Membas can be alluded to the people of the community itself. A wide range of videos and vlogs about the Mechuka valley and the Mema community, created by the Mema people may be accessed on Youtube on channels such as GTL-Homestay Mechuka¹³. These videos highlight some of the Mema customs, rituals, festivals, dances, traditional crafts as well as a glance into modern life in Mechuka, their homes, initiatives, activities and adventure trips one can take around Mechuka and the natural beauty of the valley across seasons. These videos not only archive aspects of the oral tradition and ethno-cultural practices of Mema, but also provide a unique window into lives of the Mema people. Technology also enables the researchers in accessing primary sources of data and social media and Whatsapp can be used for collecting data, and staying connected with the language consultants.

1.7. Statement of the Problem

As it emerges from the review of the available literature, Mema remains a largely under studied language. The paucity of reliable data from the language and about the community in general has made it difficult to make any assertions about its classification. The imminent

¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCc0CZd98ij0l5KO9Q-GF1aQ>

endangerment that their language faces, as the speakers switch to other dominant languages, threatens the ethno-cultural identity of the people. Their language not only distinguishes the Membas from the other ethnic communities, but also holds key to the indigenous knowledge system that is unique to them. The present situation warrants for the documentation of the language to create a lasting resource of the heritage knowledge of the Membas.

1.8. Aims and Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to create a grammatical sketch of the Memba language as it is spoken today in the Mechuka area of Arunachal Pradesh through linguistic data collected from speakers who recognise it as their mother tongue. An attempt has also been made to chronicle aspects of the unique cultural knowledge and practices of the Memba community which forms part of their ethnic identity along with their language. The central idea is to analyse and describe the Memba language in its present geographical and ethnocultural context while exploring themes of diachroneity and contiguity with the larger Tibetan culture. The main aims and objectives of the study may be summarised as follows:

- i. To present a brief grammatical sketch of the Memba language.
- ii. To present an ethnographic account of the Memba community.
- iii. To document aspects of traditional knowledge of the Membas.
- iv. To offer insight into the structure of the Memba language to help resolve issues of classification and nomenclature.
- v. To create a comprehensive inventory of academic resources and linguistic data of Memba for further research.

1.9. Limitations of the Study

While efforts have been taken to paint a most authentic picture of the Memba culture and language as can be experienced by an outsider while living among the people, it must be admitted that such a study runs the risk of presenting only a very reductionist version of the culture and the people by failing to notice nuances that may only be very apparent to the natives. Also while making generalisations it is important to point out that any data presented here and theories propounded may not be representative of the entire population. The study should therefore be considered in the light of such limitations. The linguistic data collected may not be representative of all the dialects of Memba spoken in Mechuka, although there have been efforts to present the different forms and variations found among the speakers consulted for the study. It is also important to point out that since majority of the data was collected by translating Hindi sentences, which is widely used among the people, the sentence structure or word order may sometimes be influenced by the structure of Hindi.

The purpose of the present study is not to associate any value judgements to the choice of language preferred by the community or to prescribe and promote the use of their mother tongue. These choices may be spurred by completely unrelated or compelling concerns such as economic progress, social or geographical mobility. The present research does espouse the view that indigenous languages are repositories of traditional knowledge and therefore efforts must be made for their maintenance, however, it is really up to the community and their choices if they wish to shift to another dominant language or preserve their mother tongue. The scope of the present study is limited to only capturing a snapshot of Memba tradition and language as it exists today.

1.10. Methodology

The current study is a fieldwork-based documentation and description of the Memba language. The data for the study was collected during several field surveys conducted in the Mechuka area during the period 2017-2019. The first pilot study was conducted during May-June 2017 in Mechuka town area and data was collected using the Swadesh List¹⁴ and Basic Sentences List from Abbi (2001).

This includes linguistic and ethnolinguistic data which encompasses vocabulary from a vast range of domains, traditional knowledge, description of cultural practices, folk songs, myths and other forms of oral tradition. The data was collected through formal and semi-formal interviews with Memba speakers of various ages from 13-82. The Language Documentation Handbook prepared by the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysuru under the Scheme for Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages (SPPEL) has been used as the primary questionnaire. Apart from this, unstructured and unguided conversations and group discussions among the members of the community were recorded. These include discussions over day-to-day activities as well as special events and gatherings.

The data collected was then linguistically analysed to identify the structural features of the language in terms of phonology, morphology and syntax of Memba. The ethnolinguistic data is compiled using available literature and supplemented with data collected from the field.

1.11. Chapterization

The thesis is divided into five chapters, including this introductory chapter. The second chapter presents an ethnocultural description of the Membas and touches upon some of the unique

¹⁴ See Appendix 1 for Basic Word List of Memba including 100 words from Swadesh List

aspects of their identity. The third chapter deals with the phonetic and phonological aspects of the Memba language. The fourth chapter presents a grammatical sketch of the Memba language. The fifth chapter summarises and concludes the major findings of the study.

Chapter 2: Ethnolinguistics

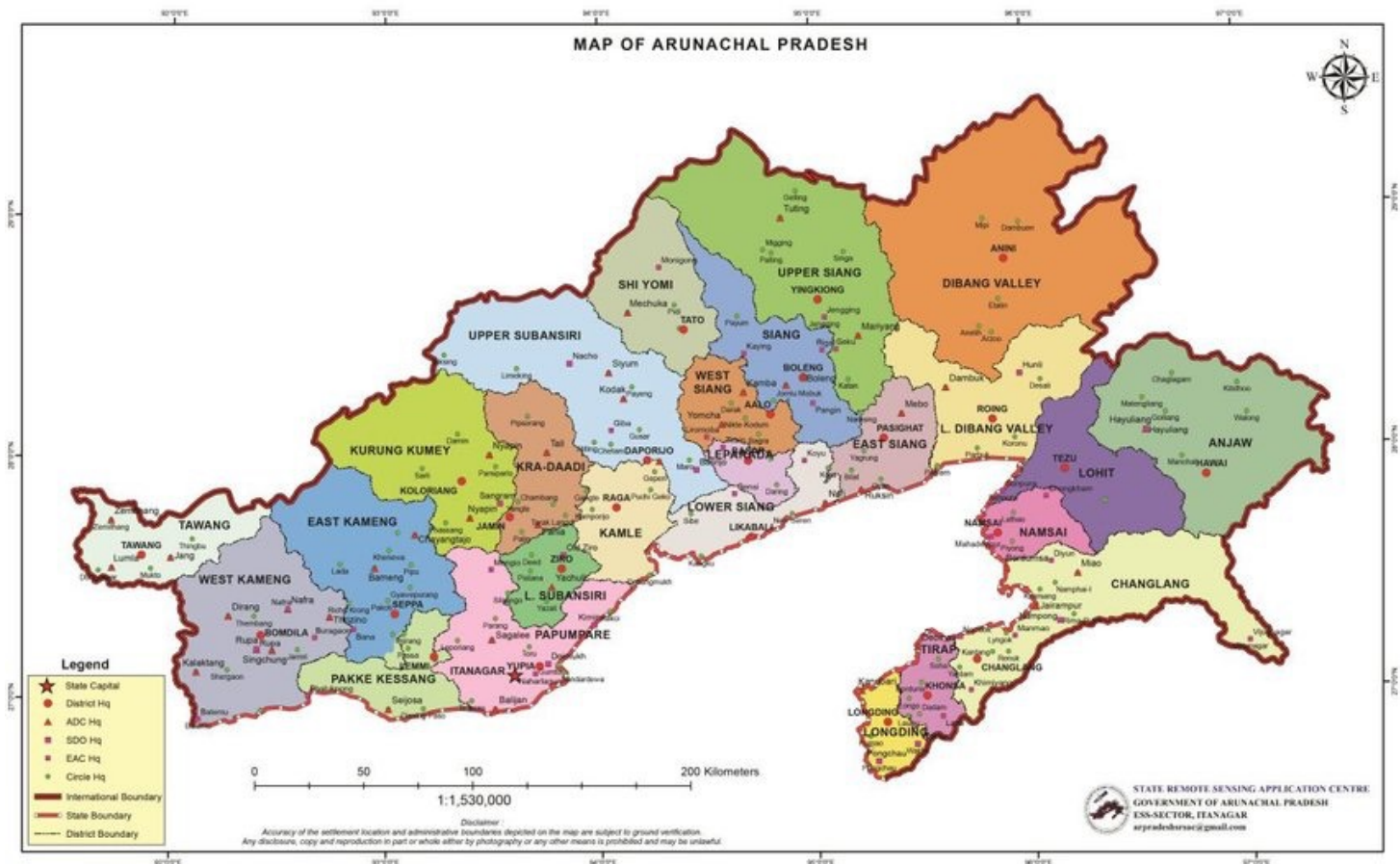
2.1. Introduction

The study of a language cannot begin without understanding first the socio-cultural context in which it is spoken; the people who speak it, the way their society is structured, their beliefs and practices, the geography, all of which distinguishes them from other communities and other languages. In addition to the present context, the oral history and migration myths of the people also provide key input to understanding the kind of experiences and influences they have had, which shape their unique language, culture and thought (or worldview). This chapter tries to provide some of this cultural context for the present study by drawing an ethnolinguistic sketch of the Membas of Mechuka valley. Ethnolinguistic descriptions like these run a risk of simplifying and generalising things and overlooking certain other things due to the researcher's own oversight and limitations. The present sketch does not claim to portray the Memba people in all their diversity, as no account of the Membas, or any community for that matter can claim to have captured all the nuances of their complex social structure. This sketch, at best, provides only a very small window to the Memba people and life among them, as experienced in the course of this research. The different sections of this chapter elaborate on various aspects of Memba ethnography.

There have been several studies on the Membas such as Singh (1994), Billorey (1997), Choudhury (1994), Dutta (2006), Grothmann (2012), Lollen (2012), Tamak (2016), Goiba (2020), however, most of these works are focused more on the past than the present. While they create a solid ethnographic sketch by archiving the historical narratives, cultural traditions and distinctive indigenous traits, the descriptions seem rather fossilized. These texts do not offer much insight on the present context in which the community lives today. For instance, there are

cultural practices and heritage artefacts that find no takers and hold little relevance among the Memba people in the current times, and other new practices that may have emerged in response to changing times. And reading ethnographic sketches that are archaic in nature, gives a somewhat skewed sense of the people and their life. The current chapter tries to draw focus on the Memba culture and language as it exists among the people today, and as observed from field study, while presenting an account of their heritage culture and history.

2.2. Location and Topography



Map 2: District Map of Arunachal Pradesh

(Source: http://www.arunachalipr.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/IPR_2019.pdf)

Mechuka is a high-altitude, valley town in the newly formed (2018) Shi-Yomi district in the mid-North of Arunachal Pradesh. The area of 790 square kilometres that constitutes the

Mechuka administrative circle is bound by China administered Tibet in the North, Upper Subansiri district in the West and Upper Siang and West Siang districts in the East. Located at an altitude of 1829 meters and 29 kms from the Indo-Tibet border, along the banks of the Yargyab Chu river, the valley is surrounded by the Shinjong la and Damchen la mountain ranges. The Mechuka town forms the administrative headquarter of the vast administrative region referred to as the Mechuka circle. It is located South of the Mc Mahon line, across the Lo la pass from Tibet Autonomous Region of China and comprises of 34 villages spread along the length of the Yargyab Chu river (See Map 2). The origin and migration myth of the Membas describes how each of the villages was named, which will be elaborated in a later section in this chapter. Mechuka subdivision has 1439 households with a population of 8838, consisting of 4589 males and 4249 females (Census 2011).



Image 2: View of Mechuka valley from Dzogchen Samten Choeling Monastery

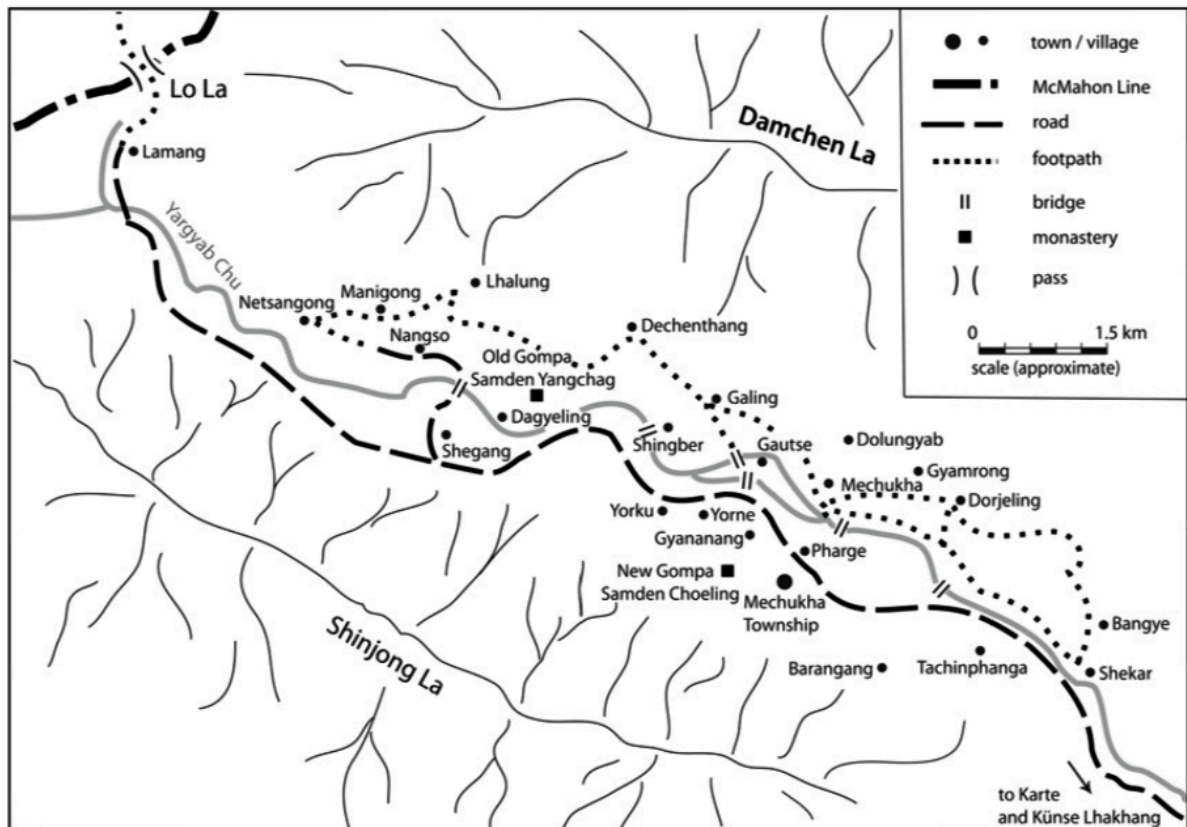
(Source: Akanksha. Picture taken on 17 May, 2018)

The Mechuka valley is known for its characteristic topography and rustic natural beauty and is flocked by tourists all round the year. The rough and rugged topography of the neighbouring regions makes Mechuka stand out with its flat meadows that remain lush green through the summer months and turn a rusty brown in the winters. The climate is cold throughout the year and especially harsh in the winters with heavy snowfall. The mountain ranges encircling the valley grade from high snow clad peaks with little vegetation on the outside to thick alpine forests on the inside. The hills and forests are abounding in most life sustaining resources like rocks and timber and other minor forest products and home to a wide spectrum of flora and fauna. The Yargyab Chu river is bounteous with water and fish throughout the year. The natural topography and biodiversity of the Mechuka valley not only created a physical barrier separating and protecting the valley dwellers from the outside, but also provided for a safe, self-sufficient and sustainable ecosystem, the road to which was only inaugurated in 2002. This, in addition to the fact that it shares a border with China administered Tibet and was an important centre for border trade with Tibet until the Indo-China border dispute, accords a strategic geo-political importance to Mechuka.

While the Mechuka valley is richly endowed with natural resources, it is immensely deprived of development and infrastructure facilities. Road connectivity, transport and mobile network are really poor in the region, ameliorated by complex geography and extremities of climate. The road connections often get severed for days due to heavy rainfall, flooding and frequent landslides in the monsoon season which lasts for 5-6 months. While the paucity of infrastructure is generally the norm in the state, remote areas such as Mechuka are further disadvantaged and remain in primitive stages of development. Due to these factors Mechuka valley remains mostly rural. According to the district wise population data (2011 Census), of the 4495 Memba people, 4066 are rural and only 429 are urban. Even the town area is still in

preliminary stages of urbanisation, as a significant population still dependent on agriculture. However, other sectors of employment are rapidly opening up in Mechuka, as eco-tourism is gaining popularity and accessibility is increasing.

Until recently there was only one state owned mobile network tower in the entire Mechuka area. The only petrol station in the valley is owned by the army and inaccessible to the civilian population who have to get their vehicles fuelled from local vendors. The local shops are need based and cater to a wide range of demands from groceries to vegetables to fuel to farming equipment to adventure gear. These items are procured in very limited quantities from bigger cities and towns, transported with much difficulty and over long stretches of time due to the poor road connectivity. The people are extensively dependent on the forests and agriculture to sustain life in Mechuka. Life in the valley has improved greatly with development of road networks, but still continues to be very hard.



Map 3: Map of Mechuka Valley

(Source: Grothmann, 2012:142)

2.3. The Memba People: An introduction

The Membas are a Tibetan-Buddhist people of Mongoloid race settled in the Mechuka valley of the Shi-Yomi district of Arunachal Pradesh. They are believed to have migrated from the Southern slopes of the Tibetan plateau at least three centuries ago, during the reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngwang Lopsang Gyatso (1617-1682) (Billorey, 1997:3). Local literary and oral sources credit him for helping the early Memba settlers by sending seeds from Tawang and providing expenses for the construction of a Buddhist temple at Mechuka (ibid.). The earliest colonial record of Mechuka and Memba people comes from the accounts of the British spy Nem Singh (disguised as Lama Serap Gyatso) who was sent out to explore the region and spy on Tibet in 1878-1879. During his visit to the Orong and Gacha (or Gaza) area, he reports of

his encounter with people who called themselves Pachakshiriba of Pachakshiri or Baechakshiri (Tamak, 2018:6).

Culturally and linguistically, the Membas bear resemblance to the people of the Kongbo area of Tibet, in the Kham district of the formerly sovereign Tibet and stand out among the Tani tribes of the Siang valley. Blackburn and Huber (2012:6) describe the Membas as ‘a small, strongly Tibetanized population who were formerly active on both sides of the Mc Mahon Line prior to modern Indian and Chinese state formation along this highly contested Himalayan frontier.’ The Membas hold a distinctive ethno-cultural identity and a crucial geo-political position due to their historical affiliation and cultural association with Tibet which continued until recent years.

2.4. Religion and Identity

The Membas are followers of the Nyingma-Pa sect of Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism with traces of animistic Tibetan Bon practice. Their religious practices include performance of elaborate tantric rituals and symbolic sacrifices. The Membas are a humble, non-violent and deeply religious people, so much so that being a Memba is almost synonymous with being Buddhist. For the Membas, religious practices manifest as day to day rituals, observance of religious ceremonies for every big and small occasion and in festivals and pilgrimages that are celebrated across the year. In fact religion is inextricably intertwined with culture and perception of self-identity among the Tibetan-Buddhist societies and is manifested in their art, architecture, traditions, lifestyle and worldview. It forms an essential part of the ethnic identity of the Tibetan-Buddhist communities living all along the Himalayas, inspite of the geo-cultural differences among them. It not only brings the Memba people together as a society locally, but

also binds them to the larger unity of Buddhist communities within the state and the Tibetan Government-in-exile in India (Grothmann, 2012:147-148).



Image 3: Flags and incense burner at a Memba home

(Source: Akanksha. Picture taken at Dorjeling village on 18 May, 2018)

The religious identity is also used by the community to set themselves apart from the majority of tribes in Arunachal Pradesh, who follow the animistic faith of Donyi-Polo or Christianity. The Membas consider themselves culturally superior to other neighbouring tribes by virtue of having a script and an organised religion. Religion is generally an important identity marker for the people of the state and most families put flags and other cultural artefacts outside their house to indicate their religion and cultural affiliation. The Memba houses all bear the characteristic set of three or five Tibetan prayer flags or *dardzo* (Tib. *Darchog*) representing the five elements and the *sankang*, a large stone incense burner built at the entrance of the house.

Religion is also an important factor in determining the official status of a scheduled tribe in India, and thereby determining the socio-political rights and access of the group. The Membas, for example, do not consider themselves tribal or backward, especially in comparison with their neighbouring tribes, and do not like their official classification as a Scheduled Tribe (ibid.). This feeling of being distinct from the other tribes can majorly be attributed to the religious affiliation of the Membas and the way of life associated with Buddhism.

Another important manifestation of religious influence among the Membas is the holy stature accorded to Mechuka valley and themselves as dwellers of this holy land. This sentiment runs deep in the consciousness of the Memba people and in turn reflects in their moral principles and their association with their native land. The Membas share a very sacrosanct relationship with their surroundings which includes the forests, rivers, mountains, flora and fauna and follow a sustainable lifestyle despite their dependence on them for important life-sustaining resources. The idea of being the residents and custodians of a sacred valley inspires the Memba people to take care of it and conserve its rich biodiversity.

2.5. Relations with Other Tribes

The Mechuka valley is not only home to the Membas, who form the majority population, but groups of Adi tribes (formerly called Abors, which is an Assamese exonym) namely Ramo, Bokar, Tagin, Bori, Pailibo and others from nearby districts have also been settled here for over two centuries. According to Dunbar (1915:291) the Membas and the Abors are the last groups of people to arrive in Arunachal Pradesh from Tibet, pushing the central Arunachal tribes southwards. Dunbar may be speaking exclusively of the Membas of Tuting and Gelling in Upper Siang district, whose migration is estimated around the twentieth century. However this

may be true for Membas of Mechuka as well in, who seem to have arrived later with respect to the central Arunachal tribes such as Galo, Nyishi, Apatani etc. The theory also explains why these groups, i.e. Membas and Adis are settled closer to the Tibeto-Indian border and the fact that some Adi tribes, such as Bokars, can be found on the Chinese side of the border as well. The Ramos are the immediate neighbours of the Membas and are settled in the villages of Gapo, Pauk, Padusa, Lipusi, Hiri, Purying, Rapum, Charung, Rego and Kart Bumjipang, Barang Gang, Shorang Dhem. They moved to Mechuka valley from the Monigong area, following dispute with the Bokars. The Chukla clan of the Membas is said to have helped them escape and settle in Mechuka around 1898-1900 CE, under the endorsement of the Memba chief (locally referred to as *Deb*) Mane Dorjee (Tamak, 2016:161). The patronage extended to the Ramos by the Membas, established a new political alliance between the two communities and they continued to help protect each other's interests against other communities. The Memba took help of the Ramos to raid the neighbouring Tagin area to capture slaves in exchange for protecting them from being raided by other communities (ibid.). Over time, however, the relation between the communities deteriorated and continued as a limited need-based arrangement. There were also incidents of animosity between the two groups at times, due to isolated incidents of theft, misunderstanding and other differences arising due to difference in culture.

Culturally the Membas differ from the Adi groups and regard themselves as rather civilised and superior in comparison. They refer to the Adi people as *Lopa* or *Loba* (also *Lhoba*), which is also what they are known as in China, where they are recognised as one of the 56 ethnic groups of the country. Lhoba is a label which comes from Central Tibet to refer to groups residing in Southern Tibet and also includes other ethnic groups such as Nyishi, Galo, Tagin, Na and Mishmi, that are excluded in the term Adi. According to Grothmann (2012:136) *Lopa* is a

derogatory term which means ‘barbarians’ and is a reference to their animistic faith and oral tradition. The Membas consider themselves more cultured as they are the only people of the region who have their own script and an organised religion. According to the Mema legend, all the people of the Mechuka valley were once uncivilised and without script or religion. They received these as teachings from Tibetan Buddhist Lamas. While the Membas wrote down their learnings on stones, the ‘Lopa’ people wrote them down on animal hides. One day when the Lopas were hungry and there was nothing to eat, they boiled the animal hides and ate them. And that is how they lost their script as well as their religion. It is through such folklore that Membas define their identity as Tibetan-Buddhists, differentiating themselves from the non-Buddhist tribes of the region.

It is due to such perceived sociocultural differences among themselves, apart from topographical barriers, that most ethnic groups in Arunachal Pradesh have remained inward looking and inter-tribal relations are limited to very specific domains. Although they have cohabited the Mechuka valley with the Adi groups for over two centuries, their interactions have mostly been restricted to trade and commerce. The settlements of non-Buddhist tribes of Mechuka are restricted to small clusters in a few villages and certain areas of the town and periphery of the valley while the Membas form the majority population. One of the main reasons for the animosity between Membas and other Adi tribes was linked with the practice of human sacrifice for curing epidemics by the latter. Tamak (2016:161) describes the practice of *melo panam* prevalent among the Ramo, Bokar and other tribes where human flesh was soaked in alcohol and the consumption of this alcohol was believed to cure deadly epidemics such as cholera, small pox and dysentery and to immunize the healthy people against infection. Most of the Adi groups were interrelated through marriage, and therefore refrained from killing each other to obtain the human flesh for making the medicine, and the Membas, who did not marry

outside their community, became the natural victim of this practice. The locals report of incidents of raid, abduction and arson due to such practices and other inter-tribal feuds.

Despite their differences, and sporadic incidents of violence, the Membas have always relied on different Adi tribes for many different things and they have found ways to peacefully coexist. Historically speaking, they would barter different commodities with the various neighbouring tribes for their own use and to trade across to Tibet. One of the many important things in that the Membas sourced from the Adis was hides of animals which were used in their traditional fur lined robes essential for the cold climate, and which they themselves could not obtain as they refrained from hunting due to their religious principles. Even today the meat shops in Mechuka are mostly owned by Adi people as Membas avoid killing animals, even though they consume it. Such dependencies and transaction between different ethnic groups over the years has lead to ethno-cultural exchange among the tribes, including that of language. The Ramos, for example have been greatly influenced by the Memba culture, due to their historical alliance and trade relations. For example, the use of dairy, which is not so prevalent among the Adi tribes, the Ramos learned from the Membas (Choudhury, 1994:125)

2.6. Lifestyle

The Memba people have a very simple, pastoral, agrarian, rural and active lifestyle. As a result of their relative isolation from other places and communities historically, the Membas are a very inward looking community. Harsh climatic conditions and lack of access to basic life sustaining resources and amenities has toughened them to cope with hardships and made them self sufficient, hardworking, enterprising and innovative. This is reflected in their active and simple lifestyle, zeal to perform any kind of job and the smart indigenous tools and technologies that are part of their cultural heritage. The fact that the Membas migrated from a

progressive and highly developed civilisation is demonstrated by their rich collection of cultural artefacts and historical manuscripts and their skill in traditional arts and crafts. The traditional Memba watermill called *enda* that harnesses the power of gushing streams using a water turbine to run a grinding machine, is a fine example of a highly evolved ancient technology developed by the community centuries before the advent of electricity. The heritage knowledge, religion, skill and inventions not only set the Membas apart from the neighbouring communities, but also foster their self-perception of being highly civilised in comparison to the other tribal groups. The Memba people have a deep respect for their cultural traditions and values and preserve them in their practices and maintain a strong emotional attachment with their culture, religion and their land.



Image 4: Water mill or *enda* at Dechenthang village

(Source: Akanksha. Picture taken on 23 May, 2018)

2.7. Cuisine

The traditional Memba cuisine predominantly follows the culinary traditions and practices of Tibet, which are marked by a great knowledge of wild edible plants and a wide variety of preparation and preservation techniques. Memba food culture also has influences from India, China, Bhutan and Nepal, and has adapted according to the climate, geography and availability of resources. Since the Mechuka valley is warmer and lower in altitude than most areas of the Tibetan plateau, a number of crops and animals found in Tibet are not found in Mechuka. For instance the yak which is prevalent in Tibetan cuisine and even in high-altitude regions of Arunachal Pradesh such as Tawang and Dirang are completely missing in Mechuka due to the warm climate. It is said that Lama Yap Dorjee Gebu and Tarden Chojelingpa who lead the final expedition to Mechuka valley, brought along with him yaks, horses, pigs, goats, hens and other poultry. However, the yaks could not survive in the warm summers of the valley.

According to the Memba legend, the earliest settlers of the Mechuka valley (then called Neh Bazashiri) survived on wild fruits, nuts, tubers and roots available in the forests, however they soon ran out of food and started to starve. They managed to send word to the then Dalai Lama (Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso 1642-1682) that they were starving and wanted to return to Tibet. The religious leader then consulted an astrologer who predicted that the land in the valley was fertile and the suitable crops for the climate could be found in Tawang. The Dalai Lama sent word to the Tawang monastery and three men of Naksang clan were sent bearing seeds for cultivation in the Bazashiri valley. The Memba cuisine includes a variety of grains such as rice, wheat, millet (*kodo*), maize, barley, buckwheat and amaranth, some of which are high altitude crops and distinctive to the Tibetan plateau.

The staple food of the Membas is millet flour which is milled from roasted grains of millet, which is prepared as *tēmi pa* (or simply *pa*), a savoury porridge scooped into characteristic elliptical serving portions to be had with *tʰemi* (chutney) or *tʰorɔp* (cheese curds). Millet flour is also mixed with butter tea (*dʒa beɸ*) and had as a drink. A variety of other grains like barley (*nezəm*), amaranth (*sok mənɔdo*), buckwheat etc. are consumed in a similar manner, that is, roasted and milled and their flour (*tsəm*) mixed with butter tea. This usually serves as breakfast in Memba homes. Some people even mix the flour into *tʰaŋ* (millet beer) and have it as a meal in between meals. Other items that are staple accompaniments to tea in Memba households are *oʃum pitʃi* ‘dried, roasted and pounded corn kernels’, *dre pitʃi* ‘roasted rice kernels’ and *tʰorpi* ‘dry cheese’. These along with the roasted flours (*tsəm*) are prepared periodically in batches and stored in traditional wooden jars and kept handy for anyone to reach out to when hungry.

The everyday Memba meal consists of rice, dal, vegetable fry, meat or boiled egg and chutney. Most of the elements of the meal such as vegetables, meat, egg are homegrown. The Membas consume a variety of meat from domestic and wild animals, but most commonly, chicken, mutton, pork, beef. These are eaten in various forms such as boiled, fried, dried, stewed, roasted, minced, and curried. The Membas are distinct from the other Adi tribes of the region in their usage of oil in cooking. While most of the tribes mostly eat boiled food due to the unavailability of oil in the past, the Membas have always cooked their food using oil churned from locally available red seeds of a tree called *lam fiŋ*. As a result of availability of resources such as dairy and oil, and the influence of Tibetan culture, the Memba cuisine has developed to be different from other cuisines of the region.



Image 5: Traditional keg for making *tfay* or millet beer

(Source: Akanksha. Picture taken at Galling village on 20 May, 2018)



Image 6: Digi Sona brewing *tfay* or millet beer

(Source: Akanksha. Picture taken at Dorjeling village on 21 May, 2018)

2.8. Marriage and Family Structure

The Membas are a very small and close knit community, and due to the small population of the Mechuka valley almost everybody seems to know everybody else or may even be related distantly. The Memba society is patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal. Polygamy is commonly practiced in the Memba society, however, with increasing interaction with other societies and financial independence of women it is becoming a less socially acceptable practice. Customary laws put onus on the men to provide for their wives and their children even after they have abandoned them to start another family through a second marriage. Therefore, it is not very common for men to take more than one wife, except those with wealth, who can afford to take care of two families. It is not common for widows and women whose husbands have left them to marry another woman to remarry. Polyandry is not unheard of, but not acceptable in the Memba society.

The Membas mostly follow endogamy, in the sense that they marry within the various Tibetan Buddhist communities of Arunachal Pradesh, but never within the same clan or among people who share a paternal ancestor. Matrimonial alliances happen between different linguistic communities as well, but usually within the same religious community. The marriage customs involve payment of bride price by the groom's party, which is fixed in the course of arranging the marriage by both families, and the cost of the wedding ceremony is also borne by the groom's family. Matching of horoscopes or *ki:gar* of the prospective bride and groom is very important in arranged marriages. Earlier the Memba boys and girls would marry very young, that is, soon after attaining puberty. However, these patterns of matrimony are in rapid transition among the younger generations, who have more agency and avenues to choose their partners due to modernisation, access to education and migration outside of their native land.

Traditionally the Memba families are joint families, with the eldest male as the head of the family. However, as more and more people migrate out to bigger towns and cities for education, employment and better living conditions, the families have now become smaller or nuclear. The community people maintain good relations and closeness with their relatives, neighbours, family and friends and help each other out in every small or big way. Even the expatriate Membas form strong ties among themselves and provide support to each other.

2.9. Status of Women

As in all patriarchal and patrilineal societies, Memba women are accorded a relatively less prestigious position than men, especially if we consider their rights, representation and decision-making ability in social, political and economic spheres. However, the status of women in the Memba society is changing rapidly with the changing society locally as well as globally. For understanding the status of women, their participation and role in different aspects of the Memba society have been taken into account. These include roles and responsibilities within the family structure, status of education, engagement in the economic activities, taboos and restrictions and the degree of freedom to make important personal choices and decisions within the family. Theoretically there are no regulations and restrictions on what a woman can and cannot do, or even the demarcation between gender roles, however, conventionally their roles have come to be defined within the society.

In most Memba households, women take care of the domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, nursing and feeding of infants etc. Apart from the everyday chores there are several other responsibilities that keep them engaged through the day. These include tending to the fields and kitchen garden, pounding and husking, preparing *tʃaŋ* (millet beer) etc. These responsibilities were conventionally understood to be women's jobs while the men go out to

earn, perform roles that require physical strength and take care of the family's property. In younger families, however, the situation seems to be very different as girls also receive formal education and young, educated Memba women also go out to work in shops and offices. Younger men are also more involved in household chores and there is a much more equitable distribution of work. However men still enjoy a superior position in family and society and the supreme authority in important matters concerning the family, property etc. is still reserved with the men. Even in administration and politics there is limited representation from women and these sectors remain largely dominated by men.



Image 7: Memba women of three different generations

(Source: Akanksha. Picture taken near Dechenthang village on 23 May, 2018)

While the Memba women may have less agency as compared to the men, they do enjoy a very liberated and respected position in society as compared to women in a majority of communities

in India. Memba women face no restrictions when it comes to pursuing their education and career and their families, including the in-laws support them to achieve their goals. Women do all kinds of jobs, including those that are conventionally men's jobs, such as physical labour, shopkeeping. There is very little crime against women, except few cases of domestic violence, and women can freely move around feeling safe.

2.10. Slavery

The Membas are extremely strong and industrious people who do not shy away from any kind of work involving physical labour, although they do have a history of capturing slaves, a practice that was abolished by the Indian administration in the 1960s. The different tribal groups settled in the Mechuka valley shared acrimonious relations with others and it was common for them to invade and capture slaves from each other's territory, and even purchase or trade slaves with neighbouring tribes. As per the accounts of the elders¹⁵, people of Tagin tribe settled in the Mechuka valley were brought in as slaves over the years from the adjoining Upper Subansiri district by Memba people with the help of the Ramos. Tamak (2016) gives a detailed account of the history of inter-tribal feuds, invasion and slavery in Mechuka. He also refers to the practice of human sacrifice which was common among the tribal groups for the cure of deadly diseases such as measles, chicken pox etc. and for the prevention of outbreak of epidemics. This was also one of the reasons which lead the invasion and capture of people from other tribes.

Even now it is prevalent among the Membas to hire full time labour for assistance in farming, chopping firewood, tending to animals, transporting heavy loads and other domestic chores.

However this may not be considered slavery as it used to be practiced in the older times.

¹⁵ interview with Dawa Tashi Naksang of Taching Panga village conducted on May 25th, 2017

Historically slave trade was an important part of Tibetan economy and considered as an indicator of social status in the Tibetan society. It was common practice among the Tibetans to invade and capture slaves from the bordering areas of the Tibetan plateau. Slaves were also traded as part of economic transactions, forging alliances, paying bride price and dowry and settling contracts and conflicts. As a consequence of this, slavery was widespread in Mechuka, especially among the more wealthy and powerful clans. The slaves acquired through capture or barter served as domestic help, agricultural labour as well as soldiers on the battlefield (Goiba, 2020:53).

2.11. Memba Economy

2.11.1. Border Trade

Having survived for centuries in a rugged and thickly forested terrain with limited resources, the men and women have been hardened to cope with their circumstances. The Membas were traditionally traders and businessmen who traded across the now closed Yorlung-Lamang Lola pass from Tibet to Mechuka. These traditional trade routes to Tibet, served as lifeline for tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, who were isolated from mainland India. Apart from the tribes of Mechuka, the Yorlung-Lamang Lola pass catered to Ramo, Galo, Bori, Pailibo, Minyong, Padam and other tribes of the Siang valley in central Arunachal Pradesh. The Membas would barter with their neighbouring tribes and carry heavy loads across long and difficult mountain routes that took them through dense forests and sometimes months of remaining stranded due to snowfall. While the men were primarily involved in trading, the women took the major responsibility of the home, farms and cattle. As the Indian administrative control was established after independence, trade and commerce with Tibet declined and abruptly stopped after the 1962 Indo-China war.

The closing of the traditional trade route was a setback to the Memba economy, which depended completely on trade with Tibet and other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. And the Membas, who were skilled tradesmen, were forced to turn to other means of livelihood. The markets of Tibet and China also provided survival essentials, such as salt and wool, to Membas and other tribes of the undivided Siang district. With trading avenues shut and scarcity of food resources, the Membas took to subsistence agriculture and animal husbandry as their primary occupation. After the war only very few Membas continued with trade, as it required finding new avenues on the other side of the border, made even more difficult by the absence of roads in these parts. For almost four decades after the trade with Tibet ended, the Membas survived the cold and harsh climates of Mechuka with limited resources and almost complete self dependence. In the absence of motorable roads, they would frequently trek down to their nearest town, Aalo (180 kms), the district headquarter of West Siang, to replenish supplies, get medical assistance and other essentials. Traditional Tibetan articles such as clothes, ornaments and religious items were procured from Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal and other places. The Membas also maintained close correspondence with other regions of the state such as Tawang, Dirang, Bomdila, Tuting, Gelling etc. inhabited by other Buddhist communities, bound together by shared history and cultural affiliation, trade, marriages and other relations.

The construction of the road from Aalo to Mechuka in 2003 ushered in a new era of civilisation. It was now possible for people to buy things readily from the market, without having to make or grow them on their own, as they had to for about four decades. This provision led to a decline in traditional occupations, including agriculture, which were labour intensive and low yielding. It started a wave of urbanisation, and the traditional Memba society

rapidly started changing. With the new road new avenues opened up and a significant Memba population started to migrate to more developed towns and cities for education, marriage, livelihood, business and many other pursuits. Even the people who did not move out of the Mechuka valley, slowly moved to the Mechuka town, leaving behind their farms and ancestral property in the villages. This outward movement of the Memba people from their native settlement has stirred up a whirlwind of changes in the economy, culture, society, dressing, language in less than two decades of opening up. The ‘rich legacy of the Membas’, as Cheeden Goiba (2020) calls it, is already waning out and is only exhibited as historical artefacts on festivals and special occasions.

2.11.2. Agriculture

Agriculture and animal husbandry are still the primary occupations of the people, especially in rural Mechuka, where there are vast expanses of cultivable land. However, the soil in Mechuka is rocky, not very fertile and climate not conducive for high yields of staples like rice, which are much easier to procure from the market. The Membas, like most hill societies of Arunachal Pradesh, followed Swidden cultivation (slashing and burning or *jhum*) and hunting-foraging. The primary crops of the Membas include millet (Hindi:*kodo*), rice, maize, barley, buckwheat, amaranth, oilseeds, pulses, potatoes, garlic, chilli and leafy green vegetables. Apart from the staples, the land is also home to unique herbs and medicinal plants, such as highly valued *Taxus baccata*, used in preparation of cancer drugs, and the rare and highly valued caterpillar fungus (*Cordyceps Sinensis*) or *yartsa gunbu* in Tibetan, a powerful aphrodisiac and the most expensive fungus in the world.

Agriculture is an extremely labour intensive process in Mechuka due to rugged terrain, rocky soil and absence of mechanised tools and equipments. The Memba men and women are all equally involved in farming as it the most fundamental line of work for most of them. Other employment opportunities such as public service, private jobs, contractual civil construction, teaching, banking etc. are very limited and only a very small percentage of the population are engaged in those. The roles played by the men and women in farming are different and demarcated according to the amount of physical strength they require, however there is no restriction on anyone to do any job as long as they can manage to do it. The men mostly take care of jobs such as chopping of trees, tilling and heavy lifting, while women look after the sowing, weeding, harvesting, collecting etc. Even the young children provide all the help they can in the fields.



Image 8: Kodo Millet ready for harvest

(Source: Akanksha. Picture taken at Dechenthang village on 2 Oct, 2019)

2.11.3. Urban Professions

As a result of increased accessibility, education, modernisation and cultural integration into the mainstream, the traditional occupations of Membas have become obsolete. There is a gradual shift from complete dependency on agriculture. With enormous areas of land at their disposal but no major development in the region, a lot of Membas are faced with no choice but to move out to bigger towns and cities in pursuit of education and employment. The employment opportunities available to the educated and semi-educated people of Mechuka include government jobs, teaching, military service, private businesses, contractual work, social work and trade. Many business families of Mechuka travel seasonally to trade goods across India. These include woollen products, Tibetan-Buddhist holy ritual items, handwoven carpets, paintings and other handicrafts.

The government craft centre at Mechuka town offers courses in some of the traditional Tibetan-Buddhist arts and crafts with the aim to conserve and perpetuate them among the younger generations. These include wood carving, carpet making, painting, weaving etc. Some of the traditional crafts such as wool making, dyeing, weaving, tailoring, metallurgy etc. are slowly getting lost and only very few people of older generations still practice them. Apart from these traditional professions, the Membas also find employment in the various infrastructure development projects being carried out in the region, which includes construction of roads, bridges, hydro-electric power plants etc. Jobs in various government departments and schools etc. in Mechuka are very few and the most sought after.

2.11.4. Tourism

Owing to its natural beauty, enterprising nature of the people and with support from the government, tourism and hospitality is the fastest growing industry in Mechuka. The music

cum adventure festival held annually draws a slew of tourists every year to witness the scenic beauty of the valley and undertake numerous adventure activities on offer while experiencing the slow life among the warm and hospitable Memba people. The festival acts as the cornerstone of the modern Memba economy, as has given rise to several small businesses within the valley. In the last couple of years, since the beginning of the festival, there has been a mushrooming growth of homestays all over Mechuka to accommodate the tourists, while offering them a glimpse of the local culture and cuisine. Businesses involving adventure activities such as trekking, camping, river rafting, paragliding etc. and shops selling the equipment required for these have also come up in a short span of time. One may be surprised to find modern, state-of-the-art adventure gear on sale in the shops of an otherwise rustic Mechuka town, but it only goes to show how enterprising and skilled businessmen the Membas are.

2.11.5. Monastic Professions

Due to the strong religious inclination, a very respectable profession among the Membas is that of a monk (Lama) and many families send their boys at a very young age to the various Buddhist monasteries in various parts of India to pursue their studies. Each sect of Tibetan Buddhism differs in their philosophy and practice and the Namdroling Monastery (also known as Golden Temple) in Mysuru (Kushalnagar) is the biggest learning centre of the Nyingma-pa sect in the world, and draws students from all over India. Membas being followers of the Nyingma-pa lineage mostly send their boys there for their education. Another monastery of the Nyingma-pa tradition within the state of Arunachal Pradesh is in Dirang, and a lot of Memba children go there as well as to the revered Tawang monastery in West Kameng district. Tamak

(2016:97-100) describes in detail about the education system of the Lamas and the process one has to go through to be inducted into the Lamaist order.

These monasteries act as great centres of learning, of not only religion but the wide array of traditional arts and crafts in Tibetan-Buddhist culture. These monasteries, found in different regions of India, serve as havens of Lamaist order and Tibetan culture in exile and draw a significant number of Tibetan-Buddhists from all over the country, including the Membas. These act as centres of networking, cultural exchange and trade of traditional Tibetan goods. Some of the crafts that can be learnt at these institutions include wood carving, painting, thangka painting, carpet making, weaving, sculpture making, mandala art etc.



Image 9: Lama P. C. Kigar performing a special ritual in a Memba house

(Source: Akanksha. Picture taken at Bumjipanga village on 25 May, 2018)

2.12. Administration in Mechuka

Tibetan-Buddhist communities living along India's border with the Tibet Autonomous Region of China often find themselves caught in the Sino-Indian boundary dispute. However the Membas remain fairly autonomous and undisturbed amidst the international politics and disagreements over their boundaries. The Memba elders interviewed for the study¹⁶ narrated first hand accounts of the 1962 war, when the Chinese army invaded their lands and remained there for a couple of months, until they were ordered to retreat following truce between India and China. Even though they were active on both sides of the border before the war, the Membas have remained firmly resolved in their allegiance to India, particularly since the Chinese annexation of Tibet. Since the 1962 war with China, Mechuka valley has remained heavily militarised but peaceful. The locals maintain close co-operation with the police, military and administration and help them in every possible way to ensure maintenance of law and order in the valley. The war marked the end of Tibetan administration and the dominance of traditional tribal authority.

The administrative control of Mechuka is carried out through the Office of the Additional District Collector. Mechuka is one of the four subdivisions of the Shi-Yomi district, and the District Headquarter is located at Tato. The district was carved out of the former West Siang district and gets its name after the Tibetan name for Siom river which flows through the district. Before the advent of the Indian administrative system, the head of local political and administrative control in Mechuka was known as *Deb*. The position of Deb was sanctioned by Tibetan overlord from Gacha or *Gaza Deb*, who maintained authority of Mechuka remotely through this system of local chieftains. The *Deb* was chosen from among the local clans and had the supreme authority on maintaining law and order in the Mechuka valley. He was

¹⁶ Dawa Tashi Naksang of Taching Panga village interviewed on May 25th, 2017

responsible for collection of taxes, settlement of intertribal feuds and conflicts within the community, according to local laws and customs. Even today, the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, including the Membas, have their own set of local customary laws enforced by the traditional village council. These traditional village councils are authorised by the state and district administration to settle certain civil and criminal matters falling under their jurisdiction. The indigenous tribal laws function within the official administrative and judiciary framework and comprise of an elaborate set of rules and regulations on matters relating to marriage, property, inter-tribal feuds, complete with a list of penalties and punishments for every offence. This indigenous form of local self-government is like a precursor to the Panchayati Raj system, which has been in place for centuries and has now been sanctioned by the government to deal with cases requiring interpretation of customary laws.

The Indian Army has a significant presence in Mechuka, and the army personnel, constitute a large part of the valley's population, other than the native communities. The Army and Air Force have served as the only link between the indigenous populations of these regions close to the border and the rest of the Indian subcontinent up until 2003, when the road to Mechuka was constructed. Prior to this the Advanced Landing Ground (ALG), an airstrip located in the heart of the Mechuka town, was used to transport vital supplies including medicines, food items, groceries and other essential items for the locals. These services were necessary for survival of the populations in the harsh climates of Mechuka, especially during the winters when the valley turns almost barren leading to food insecurity. The ALG is also used for civil aviation purposes and a bi-weekly helicopter service. The The army has also played a pivotal role in infrastructure development in these parts, which includes construction and maintenance of roads and bridges. Due to heavy rainfall and frequent landslides, the roads frequently get blocked, severing communication with the mainland. The army and airforce again play a

crucial role in managing crises like these and restoring the road links. Together the army and air force have ensured provision of security, essential commodities and emergency services to the people of Mechuka. One of the informants¹⁷ narrated a first hand account of how he was airlifted by the Indian Airforce and taken to Tezpur in Assam for a medical emergency. Given the the army and police maintain close watch on anybody who visits Mechuka, which is slowly becoming a popular tourist destination. The presence of the military has created several employment avenues for the local people, in an otherwise desolate area.

2.13. Languages Spoken by Membas

Most Memba people are multilingual and almost all of them speak at least Memba and Hindi. In addition to these, the older speakers speak other Tani languages spoken by other linguistic groups residing in the region, while the younger school educated generations speak English. The linguistic scenario of Mechuka can be viewed as consisting of two different phases. The period before the 1962 war was a distinct era, when trade and cultural exchange flourished freely across the borders without a lingua franca available to the various tribes. This left the people of different linguistic groups with no choice but to learn each other's language or to make do with a pidgin of Assamese (also known as Nefamese). It is due to this that Membas of older generations¹⁸ residing in the valley understand Adi languages even if they do not speak them or have lost proficiency in them over time. Having coexisted in the same area for centuries, these languages continue to influence each other and borrow from one another vocabulary as well as grammatical features. The younger Memba people use Adi words for several things without realising they are borrowed and that they have an equivalent for the same in their own language. The linguistic scenario changed starkly after the introduction of

¹⁷ Dawa Tashi Naksang of Taching Panga village interviewed on May 25th, 2017

¹⁸ inputs from Dawa Tashi Naksang of Taching Panga village

Hindi and English through school education. The opening of schools and offices in Mechuka opened new avenues of interaction between the different communities of the region. The usage of Assamese reduced as the usage of Hindi grew and eventually became the lingua franca in the state. This coupled with the termination of trade put an end to the need of the tribes to learn each other's language. English is not widely used and its usage remains limited to the young and educated members of the community, and in formal settings. However the global dominance of English is undeniable and even among the Membas it is greatly valued for the access it provides to better employment opportunities and upward social mobility.

In addition to these languages, the Memba people are also exposed to Tibetan and other Bodish languages due to the close contact they maintain with other Tibetan-Buddhist communities in the state. It is common for Membas to marry into other Buddhist groups like Khambas of Upper Siang and Monpas of Tawang etc. who speak their own distinct languages. In such cases the woman, generally, learns the language of the community she is married into. The older Membas, due to their trips across the border, are well acquainted with Tibetan of the far Eastern Kham region, while the younger Membas are acquainted with contemporary Tibetan pop culture. They listen to modern Tibetan songs and follow the latest fashion and trends even though they do not understand much of the language.

2.14. The Nomenclature of Mechuka

The name Mechuka, or Menchukha (phonologically men^huk^ha) as referred to by the locals, comes from a village of the same name in the Mechuka valley which was famous for its hot springs. These hot springs that emanated from snow clad mountains, were known for their therapeutic value, and were believed to cure ailments and provide relief from the biting cold of the valley. As a result, the village came to be known as men-chu-kha (ETYMOLOGY: men

‘medicine’, chu ‘water’ & ‘kha’= snow), meaning medicinal water that flows from snow. While this is the more common myth, there is another explanation of the name Menchukha that some natives often quote. They believe that the natural springs made a chant (mantra) like sound and the ‘men’ (Tibetan for mantra) in Menchukha refers to this ‘chant’ of the water. Some locals can even hear the Buddhist mantra ‘Om Mani Padme Hum’ in the gurgling of the water. Whatever myth one may choose to believe, fact remains that Menchukha was the name of a village, a small part of the entire region now known as Mechukha. When the first representatives of the Indian administration landed in the area, they first reached the Menchukha village, and attributed the name Menchukha to the entire region inhabited by the Memba and other Adi tribes. Menchukha became the official name of this region, and with time Menchukha became Mechuka.

In Tibetan societies, a great deal of significance is accorded to the place of origin and residence and most communities derive their name and identity from the place they inhabit, i.e. toponym. It is in this context that one must understand that Mechuka was the given name of the place and it was earlier referred to by the inhabitants as Tsari Nehnang (or Tseri Nehnang) or simply Nehnang (or Nyang) or Bazashiri (Tib. ba-chags-shingri). These names come from the legend of the hidden lands in Tibetan Buddhism, which will be elaborated upon in the section on History and Myths later in the chapter. The Membas believe that Mechuka was a holy land, a part of the prophecy attributed to Guru Padmasambhava (8th Century), and refer to it as a pilgrimage. The name Nehnang means ‘inside the holy land’. Tsari or ‘pure crystal mountain’ (also called Dakpa Sheri or Takpa Shiri) falling on the border between Migyitun town of Tibet and Upper Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh is one of the three holiest sites in Tibetan Buddhism, and was a major pilgrimage on the way to Mechuka (See Huber, 1999). It is probably due to its proximity to the sacred mountain and the fact that Mechuka itself was

considered a pilgrimage site, that it is referred to as Tsari Nehnang. Another meaning of the word *tseri* is ‘up’ and the high altitude of the Mechuka valley is another purported reasoning for the name Tseri Nehnang or Tseri Bazashiri. The name Bazashiri (Alternatively, Baechakshiri or Pachakshiri or Baza Shingri) which was the Tibetan name and translates to ‘a hidden treasure’.

2.15. Myths of the Membas

As mentioned in the previous chapter, migration narratives of the Himalayan tribes are crucial in defining their identity as an ethnic group. However, a few important things must be borne in mind when discussing the issue of migration. Migration must not be conceived of as referring to a singular event of en masse movement, but a diachronic process involving gradual movement of small groups of people over time, which in the case of the Membas began about three centuries ago (Childs, in Blackburn & Huber 2012). Burling (2012) points out, that people migrate all the time, but tribes rarely do (p. 50). This statement is significant for two reasons. Firstly it suggests that migrations happen in a staggered manner. Secondly, it implies that the people in question do not start out as a tribe when they begin moving, but attain that identity of a tribal group with common origins only upon reaching the destination. Therefore, as we shall see in this case, that different clans of the Membas trace their origin in different parts of the Southern Tibetan region including parts of Tibet, Bhutan and Tawang, and at different points in time. It is only after they come to settle in the Mechuka valley, that they get recognised as Memba by others and Nehnangi by themselves, which is a reference to where they live, i.e. inside a pilgrimage.

Another significant aspect of migrations in the Himalayas relates to political borders, which were mostly carved out centuries after most of the migrations and settlement happened. People migrated across what are international borders now. And even much after international boundaries were created by the governments, such as the Mc Mahon Line which was the demarcation between Tibet and British India agreed upon in 1914, they continued to be extremely porous for the people who inhabited these regions. One may sometimes find the same tribe on either side of the borders, who were historically the same people living on opposite sides of an imaginary line that they were not even aware of, until the administrators of their respective nations came to define and secure their territorial limits. So for centuries socio-cultural exchange thrived between India and Tibet in these regions along with trade and commerce across the fluid borders. In case of the Membas, Mechuka continued to be ruled by the aristocratic Lhalu family of Gacha in Tibet, until the 1952 and completely stopped after the border conflict between India and China (Grothmann, 2012). Oral narratives of origin in Tibet and migration thereafter are employed by the Membas to negotiate 'their current identity vis-a-vis Tibetans in the North, who have a history of viewing them pejoratively, and their immediate Tani-speaking neighbours, whom they perceive as potential competitors within an Indian state system that has allotted them all official ethnic category labels connected with rights and access to resources' (Blackburn and Huber, 2012:6) .

As is common with myths of different societies and ethnic groups, the tales of origin and migration of the Membas are also grounded in religious faith and interspersed with supernatural elements. While Indian scholars such as Billorey (1997) contend that oral narratives of origin and migration, the different cultural groups should suffice in lieu of historical documentation, Western scholars have often criticised such a methodology as uncritical, unscientific and unreliable (Burling. p. 50 and Huber. p. 84 in Blackburn and Huber,

2012). They suggest a more systematic and thorough enquiry into the issue of migration, considering all reliable historical records and taking into account the fact that the stories of origin and migration as told by a community are shaped by a combination of their tradition, understanding, beliefs and socio-political ambitions as a group and how they may want to project their identity to others. It is through these narratives that a community asserts its territorial and cultural belongingness. These scholars also point out that the deliberations of a certain community on where they came from and how they came to be in their present geography mostly emerge as a result of enquiry by outsiders and is used as a strategic resource to create a favourable identity for themselves (ibid.).

The story of origin and migration of the Membas is one such account which is so deeply intertwined with mythical elements that it is difficult to separate the imaginary from the real. What some scholars such as Billorey (1997) and Grothmann (2012) have done is to make abstractions based on the narratives and present a logical explanation for the fantastical elements in the story, while taking references from authentic historical records wherever available. A similar approach has been followed in this study in making sense of the ethnographic accounts of the Membas. While primacy is given to the oral accounts as shared by the local people, an effort has been made to provide references wherever possible to written sources and to provide logical explanations of the supernatural elements in the stories.

The myths of the Membas consist of facets of culture and religious stories drawn from both Tibetan Buddhism as well as the Bön religion of the Tibetan plateau. These mythological stories feature a variety of characters including gods, deities, demons and spirits etc. and form the bulk of the religious scriptures found in the monasteries of Mechuka as well as in the homes of the Memba people. The scriptures are written in Tibetan using the Hikor script and

also contain stories of origin and migration of the Memba people. Most Memba people cannot read the scriptures, except the monks, and these religious and cultural myths are passed down to younger generations orally and through rituals. They are preserved in traditional arts and crafts such as carving, painting, sand art, mandalas, butter sculptures made for religious ceremonies, folk songs, dance etc. as well as cultural beliefs that manifest in the way of life and as ideas of righteousness, morality, superstition etc. Elderly members of the society and Lamas are regarded as the custodians of the oral history and mythology of the Membas and Tibetan Buddhism. The numerous festivals and pilgrimages to different sites in the Mechuka valley that happen through the different months of the Tibetan year, are key to preserving and celebrating the religious and cultural history within the community.

2.15.1. Creation Myth

The Memba myth of origin is not unique to the Membas only but common to the Tibetan people. The names of characters may, however, differ slightly due to phonological variation. The Tibetan creation myth does not elaborate upon how and when the world was created, as origin myths generally tend to do. They believe the world was created by God along with all of nature and its forces; the plants and animals, wind, fire, water and earth. This world existed long before humans inhabited it, whose origin they trace from the apes.

The Membas trace the origin of human life on earth to a place in Tibet called Samye, from the mythical monkey father Pha Zomzhu Sumbo (Alternate spellings include Pha Zamju Simbo¹⁹, Pha Jomju Samba²⁰), and the mother Ma Dro Sumbo (Alternatively Mada Simbo), an

¹⁹ Goiba 2020: 14

²⁰ Dawa Tashi Naksang of Taching Panga village

incarnation of Djizin Drolma or Maa Tara. Some versions of the story identify the mother as an ape too, while some others identify her as a demon who inhabited the forests of the great Himalayas in North India. The two are said to have mated and had thousands children, thereby giving rise to the Tibetan race. Some versions of the oral narrative claim that they had only six children and the six brothers are represented as the six red bands on the Tibetan flag, who spread out into the world. Since the mother and father lacked agricultural skills they could only feed their children maize and other crops that were readily available in their natural environment. It is believed that due to eating these grains their tails fell off and the hair on their bodies became shorter until it fully disappeared (Tamak, 2016:17).

Soon they exhausted all the food that was available around them. The children grew up and had more children of their own. Due to the lack of food and the skills to grow more food, the children started to move out in different directions in search for means of sustenance. As they spread far and wide on the Tibetan plateau, they slowly evolved and learned skills of making fire, making tools, hunting and gathering, and later evolved to living in social groups, settled agriculture and animal rearing. People lived like this for thousands of years and eventually spread out to different parts of the world, and not just Tibet. According to some local oral narratives, it is believed that three of the sons came to India and settled in parts of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. Different groups of Tibetan-Buddhists trace their descent from the different children of Pha Zhomzhu Sumbo and Ma Dro Sumbo. Interestingly, this story of origin coincides with Darwin's theory of evolution and what we know of early life of primitive humans.

Another version of the story identifies two sons of Pha Zhomzhu Sumbo and Ma Dro Sumbo, in particular; Tani and Taro (Goiba, 2020: 14). While the Buddhist tribes of Tibet trace their

descent from Taro, who they claim was the wiser of the two brothers, they associate the non-Buddhist people to Tani. This is one of the many ways in which Tibetan-Buddhist tribes distinguish themselves from the other tribes of the region who follow animism. In the beginning they were all followers of animistic faiths but some communities adopted Buddhism in the due course of time. In fact religious intolerance was one of the reasons for the earliest migrations.

2.15.2. Migration Myths and History of the Membas

Historical narratives of the Membas are complex and various sources, literary and oral, tell a slightly different story as to how they came to settle in the Mechuka valley. Regarding the Tibetan-Buddhist tribes of the Himalayas it is said that they found themselves ‘caught in the dynastic and sectarian rivalries between powers of Tibet and Bhutan (Blackburn, 2003:45). Torn amidst this power struggle and fear of persecution, groups of people from this region migrated to and settled in neighbouring regions of Arunachal Pradesh. Information on these migrations can be found in Tibetan historical records kept in the local monasteries. According to documentary evidence, the Membas are believed to have come to the Mechuka valley at least by the time of the fifth Dalai Lama, Ngwang Lopsang Gyatso (1617-1682), who helped the migrants by sending seeds from Tawang and financing the construction of the local monastery (Billorey, 1997:3).

Blench (2014:7) traces the origin of the Membas in Dakpa Kongba (Kongbo) in South Eastern Tibet to Bhutan, then to Tawang and then to their present settlement in Mechuka. Some sources suggest that the Membas, followers of the Nyingma-Pa sect of Tibetan Buddhism, were driven away from Tawang, which was a stronghold of the Geluk-Pa sect by the 17th century and was

directly administered by Tibet (Dutta and Ahmad, 1995:195; Dunbar, 1916:93, quoted in Blackburn 2003:45). Other literary and oral sources, however, suggest they migrated directly from Tibet during the 17th and 18th century following persecution at the hands of the dominant Geluk-Pa or yellow sect (ibid.). Some other scholars are of the opinion that while the former may be true for the Tshangla speaking Membas of Tuting and Gelling in Upper Siang district, the Membas of Mechuka consist of mixed Tibetan populations indicating more complex origins (Toni Huber, quoted in Blackburn. 2003:45).

Some sources also mention oppressive taxation in East Bhutan that prompted two groups of people to migrate to the legendary 'hidden lands' (*Beyul*, and *sbas-yul* in Tibetan) of Tsari and Padma-bkod (Pemako), considered to be most sacred sanctuaries in the South of Tibet, in the 19th Century (Aris, 1980:9, quoted in Andvik, 2010:5). The present day Mechuka valley is believed to be one of those hidden lands and was known as *Tsari Nehnang* in the Tibetan world, while the other hidden valley, Padma-bkod is traced down to the present day region of Tuting (Grothmann 2012). It is interesting to note that the Membas of Tuting area speak a language closely related to Tshangla spoken in Eastern Bhutan and claim to be able to communicate easily with the speakers from Eastern Bhutan (Andvik, 2010:5, also confirmed through interviews conducted with Tuting Membas). However, the Memba people of Mechuka valley do not share such linguistic similarity with the Tshangla people of Eastern Bhutan, or with the Central Monpas of Tawang region. This goes on to strengthen the argument that Membas of Mechuka valley do not have a singular migration route. Different clans among the Mechuka Membas claim their origin and migration from different places. The people of the Naksang clan, for instance, are said to have arrived from Tawang bearing seeds for cultivation in Mechuka, upon instruction from Dalai Lama Ngwang Lopsang Gyatso in the seventeenth century (Billorey, 1997:3).

Oral narratives of the Membas add another spin to their origin history by associating with it mythical elements and ascribing to Mechuka the legend of Beyul, or hidden land. Tibetan manuscripts known as *Cheik* kept in charge of the head monk of the Old Gampa (Samten Yongcha monastery) at Mechuka supplement and corroborate these oral accounts. As mentioned earlier, the Membas do not have a singular migration narrative, as different clans trace origin in different places in Tibet and a different migration route to Mechuka. The common thread that ties these narratives together, however, is the myth of the ‘hidden land’ or *Beyul* (Tib. *sbas-yul*) and its discovery, an important concept in the Nyingma-Pa sect of Tibetan Buddhism.

The Nyingma Pa sect of Tibetan Buddhism was founded by Padmasambhava (also known as Guru Rinpoche or the ‘precious master’ and Guru Pema Jugne) in the eighth century. The followers of the sect believe that on his journey from India to Tibet, Padmasambhava hid his teachings or *terma* in several secret valleys along the Himalayas. These hidden places, spread across the Himalayas, are like safe havens that can be discovered and opened only by the most powerful Buddhist masters known as *tertons* (Tib. *gter-ston*) or ‘treasure revealers’ for seeking peace and refuge in times of famine, natural calamities, religious intolerance or socio-political conflict. One of the most legendary Beyuls is the lotus shaped Pemako (Tib. *padma-bkod*) valley in Arunachal Pradesh, located at the site where the Brahmaputra enters India. Beyuls are places of great beauty and biodiversity and considered holy lands by Tibetan Buddhists. Even the people who inhabit the areas in and around these hidden valleys are held in high regard. The total number of Beyuls is estimated to be 108, out of which some have been discovered and inhabited, others occasionally visited by pilgrims and adventurers while some others are yet to be discovered.

Mechuka, or Neh Nang, as its inhabitants call it, is considered to be one of the many Beyuls. According to the Memba myth, the Mechuka valley was one of the places Padmasambhava visited on his journey to Tibet. It is believed that the valley was then inhabited by evil and dark spirits who would not allow any human presence in the valley. They would constantly disrupt all efforts by humans to settle in the area and demolish any structures they would construct. According to the local accounts²¹ Padmasambhava spent a lot of time meditating in caves of the valley to tame the natural spirits and demons and establish peace with them for future civilisations. The caves in which the Guru meditated are revered holy sites of the Mechuka valley, documented in local Tibetan manuscripts called *Nayek* (Tamak, 2016:16) and pilgrimage to each of these sites is held in different months of the Tibetan year for maintaining peace and prosperity in the valley. After having unlocked the region for future settlement, Padmasambhava is believed to have closed it through powerful tantric magic and hidden the key for a future seeker, before he proceeded to Tibet. The central purpose of the Beyuls was to provide refuge to Buddhism and its followers in the times of religious intolerance, and to spread the faith among the non-Buddhist people of the area. According to Tibetan texts these hidden valleys are situated at the intersection between the civilised Buddhist world and the uncivilised tribal world. The Beyul, once discovered, must be opened, made habitable and civilised by converting its existing populations from their tribal faiths to Tibetan Buddhism (Grothmann, 2012:136).

The concept of Beyul emerges from the rich Nyingma-Pa tradition of respecting and conserving natural sites. A Beyul is considered to be sacred; a place where the physical and the spiritual worlds overlap (Baker, 2006:544) protected and preserved by the forces of nature.

These forces of nature are worshipped as deities by the inhabitants and pilgrims of the Beyul

²¹ P.C. Kigar of Mechuka interviewed on 25th May, 2018

for maintaining peace and sanctity and to prevent natural calamities. The followers of the sect ascribe spiritual importance to geographical features such as hills, waterbodies, trees and animals that inhabit the Beyul and observe strict codes of conduct with respect to hunting, chopping of trees, fishing and using up natural resources. It makes perfect sense as most of these valleys are high altitude, ecologically sensitive regions and these restrictions are mandated culturally to ensure sustainable co-existence of humans alongside nature. These rules and regulations also inform the cultural traditions and religious doctrine of the Membas, who fear god, respect their land, bow down to forces of nature, abide by rituals, and sincerely practice their 'dharma'. This translates into everyday practices and observance of rituals and values and beliefs, and are reinforced through teachings of elders and monks in the community. These values exhibit differently in people of different generations and have diluted over time, but they still remain very relevant to the Memba community as a whole.

According to the oral accounts, the story of migration and settlement in the Mechuka valley begins with the quest for Beyul. A number of expeditions were sent from Tibet to seek the hidden valley of Bachakshiri (also Vheza Shingri or Bazashiri) meaning 'a hidden treasure' as described by Padmasambhava. Some accounts mention Lama Kardu Sange Rinchin, as the first to set out on a mission to seek this legendary location (Dutta, 2006:9). After completing a long arduous journey across the Lola pass through snow laden mountains and dense forests, he is said to have reached what we now call the Mechuka valley. However, the guardian deity of the place did not allow him to stay. While the common myth is that the place was full of evil spirits who turned him away, a more likely explanation is that he was met with a harsh climate and an inhospitable terrain. Although he was unsuccessful in finding a land suitable for human habitation, his attempt encouraged others to follow his quest.

Years later a second laudable attempt was made by two monks namely Lama Lorde Gyamtso of Tibet and Dukthop Thongong Gebu of Monigong (in the adjacent Upper Siang district). Having resolved to find the hidden treasure both started their journey towards Mechuka (Billorey, 1997:4). They decided to go back, only with the promise to return and settle in the place they had found. It is said that Lama Lorde Gyamtso's health suffered due to the difficult journey and he died at Molo on the way back. Years later, it is believed, that he was reborn as Cheeje Lingbo in Gacha, who along with his followers is credited to have opened the Mechuka valley and helped people settle there for the first time. He is also credited to have arranged for the construction of the Old Gompa (Samden Yangchak Monastery) and sent word to Tibet about the newly discovered hidden site. The holy stature accorded to a beyul made Mechuka known as a pilgrimage across Tibet and drew people from different parts of Tibet as pilgrims, traders, as well as settlers.

2.16. Memba Clans

As stated earlier, Membas migrated to Mechuka valley in small batches over several years from different regions of the South Eastern Tibetan plateau at various points in time. The different batches identify as different clans and trace their origins to different parts of Tibet, Bhutan and Tawang. The clan is a crucial organisation unit of the Memba society, as it is among many other communities of the world, and forms an important aspect of their identity. The clan name is borne as the last name by all members of the clan, which is conceived of as a big family. It is the moral obligation of the clan members to support each other and to try and resolve any conflicts arising between members within the clan, before taking it to the village council. Tamak (2016:56) opines that the importance accorded to the clan system in Memba society emphasises that the individual is nothing without the clan. This reflects in the social structure of the Memba community, which is extremely close-knit, and in cultural practices like

prohibition on marriage within a clan. The twenty three Memba clans, and the place from where they migrated (Billorey, 1997:4-5, Tamak, 2016:56-59) and are summarised in Table 2. As both the sources present different names for the places of origin for some clans, the abbreviation B and T are mentioned in parentheses alongside the place name to indicate Billorey and Tamak respectively.

Clan Name	Place from where they migrated	Remarks
Chukla/Chugla	Basam (B)/Kongtadokha in Kongpo, Tibet (T)	
Sharjo/Sarjo/Sharchok	Ngabhi/Ngobi	
Onge	Yamdokarmaling/Yamro-Dighu	
Mane/Maney	Tabo (B)/ Kham (T)	
Sona/ Tsona	Yegomukhangsar/ Yegongkhangsar in Tibet	
Gyana	Tabo (B)/Yae-Chodi, Tibet (T)	
Ombu/Ongbu	Yamdokarmaling (B) or Kham, Tibet (T)	
Goiba/Geba	Thenla (B)/ Horb (T)	The Goibas were originally salt traders and Horb was a place where salt was found in Tibet. They used to trade at Molo before moving to Mechuka.
Phillee/Phelley	Gyarbumdir/Lhagyari	
Kigar	Ngabhi/Ngobi	Exact place of origin not known, but they came to Mechuka with the Sharjos
Dorsum/Dorsom	Tabo (B)/ Dukp, Bhutan (T)	
Dabo	Dhak-Poh, Tibet	
Buru	Leh-lung, Tibet	
Dale-Gumbu/ Dalgomba	Phae-Rong, Tibet	
Chegong/Chhejong	Tabo (B)/ Digong, Tibet (T)	

Clan Name	Place from where they migrated	Remarks
Gellong	Digong, Tibet	People of Gellong and Chegong clans consider themselves as brothers and sister as they believe Gellong is the son of Chegong.
Nyajung	Not known	
Lam-Sang	Changb, Tibet	
Norbu-Chombey	Chen	Chen was an important market place in Tibet located close to Tawang
Gom/Goum	Tabo (B)/ Goum-Kang-Shar, Tibet (T)	
Chena	Chen	Chen was an important market place in Tibet located close to Tawang
Naksang	Men-Chaksom, Tawang	Known to have migrated from Tawang
Lobin	Not known	

Table 2: Memba Clans

(Source: Billorey 1997:4, Tamak 2016:56-59)

2.17. Villages of Mechuka and how they got their names

The migration myth of the Membas also describes how the different villages in the Mechuka valley (See Map 3) were discovered, made suitable for inhabitation and how they got their names. Most villages started out as small settlements inhabited by groups of people who migrated from different places and at different points in time, now identified as different clans of Memba people. Some villages still have as few as 3-4 houses while others have upto 25-40 houses, depending on the terrain, connectivity, availability of natural resources and the population of the clans that inhabit them. The naming of the Memba villages is ascribed to Lama Lorde Gyamtso, who discovered and opened the valley for the first time about 400 years ago. It is important to bear in mind that the Lama travelled from Tibet and therefore the names

he gave to the places are Tibetan names and are often associated with concepts from Tibetan-Buddhism.

According to the Memba migration myth, when Lama Lorde Gyamtso along with his followers entered the Baza Shiri valley for the first time after an arduous journey, they were awestruck by the beauty of the valley and named it Lhalung, which means ‘the place of God’ (Lha ‘God’ and ལྷ ‘place’), and that’s how the northernmost village of the Mechuka valley got its name. The people now refer to it as Holung as well. As they proceeded further South into the valley, the party stopped at a spot on the bank of the Yargabchu River and constructed the Samten Yongcha Monastery, the first ever *gompa* of the Mechuka valley. The monastery was to serve as the centre for propagation of Buddhism in the region and the lamas along with their followers settled at this place. The settlement came to be known as Dubu, or the place of meditation, where the lamas would meditate and perform rituals in order to tame the evil spirits and pray to the divinity to make the valley habitable for their own people. The cave in which the lamas meditated came to be known as Pemajeling, or Pema Shubu as the people call it (derived from Padma meaning lotus, a polysemic and recurrent divine symbol in Tibetan-Buddhism), one of the most revered pilgrimage sites in Mechuka.

Having established the dharma centre, the Lama and his party started surveying the surrounding lands in search for habitable lands. They reached a ball like place, which they named Dorjeling. The Tibetan word ‘dorje’ means thunder and is also an important ritual object (one of the eight auspicious symbols) in Tibetan Buddhism, a club with two spherical heads which symbolises indestructible power (comparable to the Hindu *vajra*). The suffix ‘-ling’ is frequently used in Tibetan to refer to a large territory or country. Etymologically it means ‘continent’, ‘part of the globe’ or ‘division of lands’ (Tamang, 2009:270). Dorjeling literally

means ‘the land of thunder’ and the ball shaped appearance of the land is purported to have inspired the lama to name it after the holy instrument. Upon reaching the village now known as Galling, the lama felt a positive energy and he named it Gawaling or ‘the land of happiness’. As he proceeded further through the hilly terrain, the lama was delighted to chance upon a large clearing of flat land. He named the land Dechenthang, which is derived from Tibetan *dechen* meaning ‘great bliss’ and *thang* which meaning ‘unfolding’, and describes the feeling the lama felt upon discovering this precious expanse of flat land amidst the rocky landscape. Close to Dechenthang is the village of Singber, the shape of which resembles a pot and therefore named so.

2.18. Architecture



Image 10: Memba houses

(Source: Akanksha. Picture taken at Pharge village on 6 June, 2017)

Mechuka valley is a visual treat for sore eyes with its mountainous terrain, peaks lined with pine forests and the Yargab Chu gushing through its heart, neatly dividing the valley into two halves. Both banks of the river are lined with tiny, colourful houses pitted against lush meadows and contrasting against the snow clad mountains in the backdrop. Memba houses are traditionally made of wood and stones, however, few people have switched to concrete structures in the recent years. Modern construction materials are, however, difficult to procure in the local markets and are expensive to transport over from bigger towns and cities. Which is why most Membas still prefer the old architectural style as the raw materials for construction are all naturally available in their vicinity and provide natural insulation against the cold climate. The roof of the houses, however, are invariably made of tin sheets, which are much more durable than the traditional wooden ones. The traditional raw materials and tools have been replaced by modern equipments wherever they offer a low-cost and low-maintenance alternative. The construction of a Memba house, in fact, offers an appropriate metaphor for the evolution of Memba culture which is in transition from the traditional to the modern; keeping the traditional practices wherever possible, while slowly embracing the modern where it offers comfort and convenience.

The construction of a house, traditionally, used to be a community affair where people would gather up to help in the building process accompanied by singing and dancing. There are traditional songs in the Memba language that are sung specifically on the occasion of building construction. The host, whose house everyone is helping build, in turn provides food, drinks and refreshments for everyone. All the people gathered also bring along packets of rice, grains, butter, meat, *tʃaŋ* (homemade millet beer) cold drinks, chips or vegetables from their garden to support the host in feeding the entire gathering. It is a common courtesy for people to carry eatables and other little things, anything they can afford, when visiting someone's house.



Image 11: Sitting area of a modern Memba house

(Source: Akanksha. Picture taken at Pharge village on 14 May, 2018)

Pine wood is most commonly used for construction, as the region is teeming with pine forests and one can always find planks of pinewood stacked neatly outside every Memba house for construction and repairs in the house. The foundation of the house was laid using stones in the older days, upon which rested the wooden frame. The Membas use a special technique of interlocking brackets to hold the wooden planks without the use of nails or screws (See Image 11). This art of building elaborate houses without the use of a single nail, is something that the Membas take great pride in. Although modern houses incorporate modern construction tools and techniques, including the use of nails, most Memba houses, especially those in the villages, are old and have no nails. Even the planks used in the construction are carved smooth and flat by hand by traditional carpenters.



Image 12 (Left): Interlocked wooden planks in the walls of a typical Memba house

(Source: Akanksha. Picture taken at Bumjipanga village on 29 May, 2018)

Image 13 (Below): Prayer room inside a Memba house

(Source: Akanksha. Picture taken at Dechenthang village on 22 May, 2018)



2.19. Kitchen Utensils and Other Domestic Tools

Every Memba household, depending on their socio-economic status, have an elaborate range of distinctive pots and vessels made from a variety of materials like brass, copper, pinewood and bamboo. Each kind of utensil serves a specific purpose, like churning milk, making tea, storing water, brewing alcohol, etc. These utensils were either acquired from Tibet or made from locally sourced materials and have immense antique value. One of such heritage items found in a Memba household is the large brass vessel used for storing water in older days. These brass vessels are embossed with delicate and elaborate designs, showcasing the fine smithery and metal craftsmanship of the Membas. These brass vessels, traditional silver and stone jewellery, exquisite swords and other are precious heirlooms in Memba families. Some families, in times of economic crisis and sometimes due to ignorance about the true worth of their handcrafted indigenous artefacts, sold them to foreigners and other non-natives who visited Mechuka for very little returns.



Image 14: Wooden container for churning butter

(Source: Akanksha. Picture taken at Galling village on 20 May, 2018)

The Membas are largely dependent on agriculture and dairy they locally produce. Harsh climatic conditions make the landscape barren in winters and large reserves of food need to be preserved to be consumed in the cold months. That explains the need for so many different kinds of utensils and containers to collect, grade, sort, process, preserve, cook and store different kinds of agricultural and animal products. Apart from this a vast number of indigenous measuring tools are also found in Memba homes, an overview of which may be found in Akanksha and Arulmozhi (2021). Although the Membas differ from other Tibetan-Buddhist tribes, in that they have no restrictions on consumption fish and meat, as they earlier practiced the animistic Bon religion before converting to Buddhism. However, they prefer not do the hunting and slaughtering themselves, and obtain meat from their Adi neighbours (Dutta, 2006:77)



Image 15: Phinjo Topke Sona exhibiting how to use traditional Memba weighing scales

(Source: Akanksha. Picture taken at Galling village on 20 May, 2018)

2.20. Birth Rituals

The birth of a child is considered very auspicious in the Memba culture and is followed by many small ceremonies and rituals to mark the birth of a child. Some of the rituals related to childbirth are mentioned below.

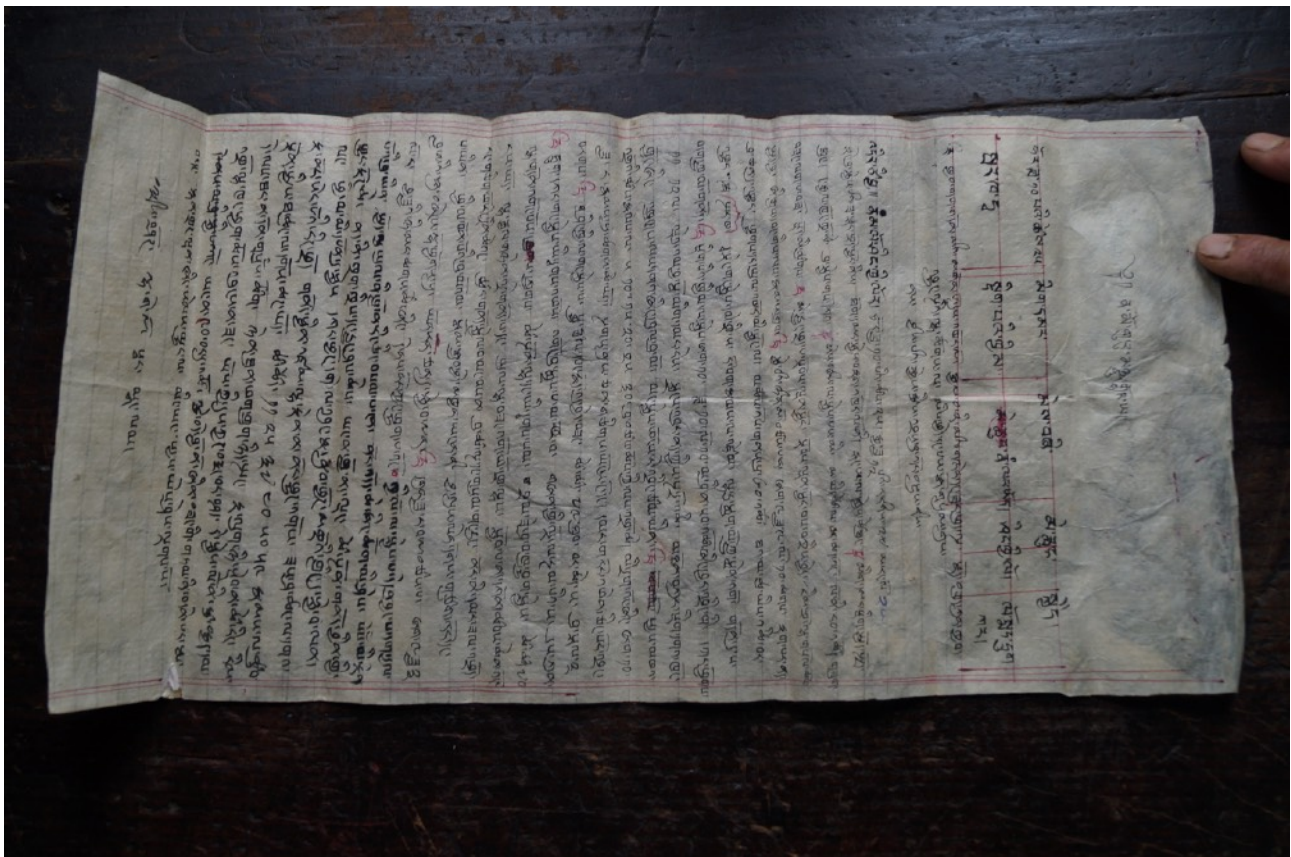


Image 16: A Memba horoscope or ki:gar

(Source: Akanksha. Picture taken at Mechuka on 20 May, 2018)

Bansang: Birth Ritual

The ceremony is held 3 days after a child is born for purification of the child and the house. 3 Lamas visit the house and perform rituals and the parents of the child request the Lamas to create the horoscope of the child. The horoscope or *ki:gar* is considered a very important document and is supposed to contain information about the fate of the child. The Lamas take about a month's time to prepare the horoscope of the child, which is then consulted throughout

his/her life, especially for important life events like marriage, job and death, etc. On the day of *bənsaŋ* the relatives of the family come bearing clothes, eatables and other gifts and a party is thrown in the honour of the child.

Kemor: Feeding Ceremnoy

Depending on when the child is born, an auspicious day is selected by the lama after consulting the calendar. Child is fed solid food for the first time.

Tobi Beengan - Hair cutting ceremony

The child's maternal uncle cuts his/her hair for the first time.

2.21. Naming Convention

The naming of a child in Mechuka is usually done by a lama, and performed alongside other rituals done for the child. Memba names follow the Tibetan naming tradition, followed among several Tibetan-Buddhist groups and reported in resources such as Childs (2003) and Modi (2022). Most Membas have common Tibetan names that are based on a religious idea, a desirable characteristic quality or a mythical or celestial object. While most Tibetan societies do not commonly use surnames or clan names, most Membas tend to use them.

Tibetan name	Indic equivalent	Meaning
Dolma (sGrol ma)	Tara/Tārā/	‘one who liberates others from sufferings’
Dorje (rDo rje'i sde)	Vajra/vajra	‘indestructible’
Rinchen (Rin chen dpal)	Ratnashri/Ratnaśrī/	‘glorious jewel; esteemed jewel’
Dawa (Zla ba)	Chandra/Candra	‘moon; one who brings light; Monday’

Table 3: Some popular Memba names and their meaning

(Source: Modi 2022)

2.22. Marriage Rituals

The commonly followed traditional Memba marriage system was an arranged marriage system, with an elaborate set of rituals, starting from the process of proposing the marriage by the families to the conclusion of the wedding ceremony. However as individuals, especially women, gain more autonomy in deciding who they want to marry, these rituals are slowly becoming obsolete. It is becoming increasingly common for families to refrain from organising extravagant wedding ceremonies and feasts to formalise the marriage of a couple, instead have a small affair on a mutually agreed date to send the girl off to live with her husband with the blessings of her loved ones. The traditional wedding ceremony with all the rituals and a grand celebration is practiced only by few, mostly affluent, Membas. There are other

The traditional wedding rituals of the Membas begin with the groom's family visiting the prospective bride's family to propose the marriage of their son with their daughter.

2.23. Death Rituals

Societies differ in the manner in which they dispose of the dead, governed mostly by the religious regulations. Since the idea of transmigration of spirits and reincarnation is very fundamental in Tibetan-Buddhism, death becomes a singular most important event in the life of a Memba. It is believed that death releases the soul back into the world to be transported to the heavens to wait for rebirth, leaving the body an empty vessel which serves no purpose and must be disposed of as soon as possible, with proper rites and rituals. The Tibetan-Buddhist funeral rites consist of a sequence of complex rituals, that vary across different ethnic groups residing in different geographical regions of the Himalayas and the various sects of Tibetan-Buddhist philosophy. The age, gender, social status and wealth of the deceased as well as cause and manner of death are parameters that determine the rituals to be performed at their funeral. The rituals performed for the benefit of the departed soul are crucial in ensuring its comfortable

passage to heaven and securing a fortunate rebirth, one that leads to enlightenment. The Memba death rituals comprise of four stages: immediately after death, disposal of the body, immediately after disposal of the body and the days following the death.

There are primarily two ways in which the Membas part with the dead, which are, burial or *rod̥or* and cremation or *p^hoŋbə ɡɪnse*. There used to be a third way, the traditional Tibetan custom of Sky Burial or *p^hoŋbə tsəp*, in which the dead body is chopped up into pieces and exposed to the elements (in this case, immersed in the river) to be consumed by scavengers. However, this method of disposal of dead bodies was discontinued among the Membas a few years ago when the person who used to disassemble the dead body passed away and his son refused to continue doing the job. Since then the custom of sky burial is no longer followed among the Membas. The exact date, time and manner in which a dead body is put to rest is determined by monks, after careful deliberations about age and manner of death and other factors. Depending on these assessments, the lama declares if the dead body may be buried or cremated. While cremation was earlier reserved only for the people of elite and noble classes in Tibet, that is no longer the case. A person may even choose to convey to her or his family members what they would like should be done with their body after death. The place where a dead body is cremated or buried is marked by placing a wooden fence and white prayer flags around it.

2.24. Festivals of the Membas

Festivals are an important part of any community as it brings together the people of the community to celebrate and rejoice. Memba festivals are agriculture related and mark either the beginning of plantation or harvest. Memba festivals are celebrated by thanking the deities for a bountiful harvest and praying to them for peace and prosperity. This section describes a few of the Memba festivals.



Image 17: A group of Membas transplanting millet saplings

(Source: Akanksha. Picture taken at Galling village on 20 May, 2018)

The occasion of Bam Nyis marks the end of the millet sowing season. The finger millet is a staple food grain of the Membas and every family allocates the largest chunk of their agricultural land for the cultivation of the crop. In pre-modern times, when the access to markets was limited, Membas would rely majorly on their annual millet produce to ensure food security, through the harsh climate of Mechuka valley. The cultural significance of the crop can be comprehended from the fact that even the Memba people who have moved away from their village homes and agricultural lands, make it a point to return to their lands and plant their annual share of millet. Every Memba house has a granary built outside the house to store the millet harvested for the year. The threshing of millet is a traditional ceremonious activity done

using a special indigenous tool and performed as a synchronised dance by men and women on festivals and special occasions. The harvested millet is processed through traditional methods such as malting, fermenting, roasting and stone grinding, and used in traditional food and beverages.

The word *bam* refers to the small 15-20 days old saplings of millet that are grown in raised nursery beds and later transplanted into fields. Nyis means 'rest or sleep' and refers to the period of resting and celebrating after working hard for weeks in the fields. The plantation of millet is an extremely labour intensive process, which entails preparation of the field and transplantation of saplings after being raised in seed beds. A seed bed about one twelfth of the area of a field provides enough saplings for sowing the entire field. Having limited access to modern agricultural tools and technology the entire plantation is carried out manually by the Memba people. While the preparation of the field is mostly done by the men, the transplantation of seeds is mostly done by women by manually planting each sapling into neat rows in prepared wet fields. The entire process requires the involvement of family members, relatives, neighbours and friends, who participate either by toiling in the fields or by cooking food and refreshments for those who are working in the fields. Just before the start of the monsoon season, the entire community comes together to help each other in the plantation by working in groups in each other's fields. Bam Nyis is celebrated at the end of the season when the party is done with the plantation on all the members' fields. The entire season is marked by social gatherings that happen at the place of the person whose fields are being sown that day. It is general politeness among the Memba people to carry gifts, food and other useful items when visiting each other's house and the host also generously feeds the guests.

2.24.2. Sonam Losar Festival

The Sonam Losar is an auspicious festival which marks the end of a year and the beginning of a new year. It is the most important and extravagant festival of the Membas and is celebrated by praying to the deities and seeking their blessings for a healthy, happy and prosperous new year. It is celebrated every year in the month of January or February, in accordance with the Buddhist lunar calendar. Goiba (2020:26) explains that the underlying philosophy of Sonam Losar is to reinforce the relationship between God and men and bring harmony and brotherhood among all living beings on earth.

People prepare months in advance for the festivities on Sonam Losar. A slew of rituals are performed on the occasion, food is prepared and offered to God, to cleanse the house of evil spirits and ward off negative energies and make room for clean and positive energy. The festivities, which last for three days, are performed by the entire family with each member taking up different responsibilities. The rituals are mostly performed by the men of the house. A special altar is set up for the Losar rituals on which the deities are positioned and all offerings are kept. People visit each other's houses to wish them on the occasion and eat, drink and celebrate with their friends and family. There is festivity everywhere and a strong sense of community runs across the people as they gather together to cook up a feast while chit-chatting and enjoying each other's company.

People also visit the main monastery to seek the blessings of the deities and celebrate together as a community. Women and men turn up in their traditional attire and celebrate together by singing, dancing, performing dramas and playing traditional games. The temple premises and all the small stupas (*thorsten*) around the valley are decorated with buntings of Buddhist prayer

flags. In the evening gatherings for Losar celebration are organised by local authorities, politicians and cultural groups. Popular local singers, dancers and celebrities are invited to perform on the occasion. It can be considered the most important festival of the Memba people and is celebrated with much grandeur. The Sonam Losar festival offers a glance into the tradition and culture of the Memba people and attracts a large number of tourists each year.

2.24.3. Yongdup Shabden or Yongruk Pooja

The Yongruk Pooja is a harvest related ritual that is performed after the harvest of kodo millet or *temi*, the most important crop of the Membas. The ritual is performed to thank God and the forces of nature for a good harvest and to pray to be blessed with prosperity and wellbeing. The pooja is performed annually in the months of September and October individually in every house. Depending on their availability, the Lamas are invited by their patrons to perform the ritual in their house. The rituals which last three days involve worshipping of cattle, grains and wealth. Goiba (2020:31) estimates that about 75% of the Memba people conduct this ritual in their house every year, and spend over 1.5 lakh rupees for organizing it.

2.24.4. Adventure@Mechuka

Adventure at Mechuka or Mechuka Adventure Festival is not a traditional festival of Memba people but the grandest of all events that is organised in Mechuka. In the recent years the festival has played a pivotal role in shaping the economy of Mechuka by attracting tourists and adventure enthusiasts from all over the world. It is the singular most important event that happens in the Mechuka valley and acts as a lifeline to the local community. The Memba people prepare extensively all through the year and wait eagerly for the 3-day long ecotourism festival which offers its patrons adventure activities along with immersive cultural experience

served with a scenic backdrop of the North-Eastern Himalayas. It is a unique festival which aims to bridge the modern technological era with the ancient world. The festival goers have a wide range of adventure activities to choose from, such as, paragliding, mountain-biking, trap-shooting, rappelling, competitive angling, rafting, trekking and rock climbing. They can also glimpse into the ancient world of the Memba community; traditional ways of hunting and trapping animals, traditional dances and cultural artefacts.

Chapter 3: Phonology of Memba

3.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the phonology of Memba, as spoken in the Mechuka valley. Under phonology we intend to describe the various sounds (phonemes), segmental as well as suprasegmental features that can be found in the language and their occurrence and distribution across syllables, words and sentences. The data has been analysed to observe the patterns that the various sound segments of Memba create and generalizations, wherever found, have been noted. Observations have also been made about the suprasegmental features of the language, such as tone. An attempt has been made to compare the sound system with that of Tibetan and Tshangla, wherever possible, to highlight the differences and explain the phonological processes that occur in Memba.

3.2. Segmental Inventory

The Memba inventory of phonemes show great similarity with those of Tibetan. However, there is considerable attrition of Tibetan sound sequences and assimilation of sounds and phonological features due to sustained contact with other linguistic subgroups. These include borrowings from other Sino-Tibetan languages spoken in the region and the two majority Indo-Aryan languages, Assamese and Hindi, which have had a substantial areal diffusion in the state. While the consonant system of Memba is more or less same as the Tibetic system, the inventory of vowels has many notable non-native additions. These borrowings in turn have given rise to new phonological processes some of which are discussed in the following sections.

3.2.1. Consonants

Before discussing the consonants and vowels of Memba, it is important to mention some of the characteristic phonological features of Memba, and Tibeto-Burman (henceforth TB) languages

in general (for more on TB Typology see Burling, 2003), to provide a background to the current analysis. Some typological features of Memba are as follows:

1. The syllable is a crucial phonological unit in TB languages. The structure of the syllable determines or constrains a variety of phonological processes that may occur in a language. For example, the consonants and consonant clusters that can occur in the onset position differ significantly from those that can occur in the coda.
2. Syllable initial position is the less restrictive and therefore the inventory of syllable initial consonants is very different and significantly larger than that of syllable final consonants.

The Memba consonants that appear in syllable initial as well as final positions include:

- voiceless unaspirated consonants /p/, /t/, /k/, /s/, /ʃ/
- nasals /m/, /n/, /ŋ/
- semivowels /l/, /r/, /h/

These features are in complete congruence with Burling's (2003:173) postulations on TB languages that bilabial, apical and velar stops can usually occur at both the beginning and end of a syllable, but only initials allow contrast in voicing or aspiration.

3. The word initial prevocalic position is the least restrictive position and the entire inventory of consonants in the language occur in this position, except for /z/ which appears to be non-native to Memba due to rarity of its occurrence.
4. Stops occur both at the beginning and the end of syllables, however, the contrast for voicing and aspiration are allowed only at the syllable initial positions. Voicing and aspiration, when they occur at the word final position, are followed by a short vocalic release or a glottal stop. Voicing assimilation happens in the word final position. That is to say the phonemic distinction is lost at word final position (For example, gjap/gjab 'back')
5. The glottal stop, transcribed as /ʔ/, occurs frequently in the word final position. It does not appear, except in very rare instances, in other positions.

	Bilabial	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Retroflex	Alveo-palatal	Velar	Glottal
STOPS								
-asp	p b	t̪ d̪			t̠ d̠		k g	
+asp	p ^h	t̪ ^h			t̠ ^h		k ^h	
FRICATIVES		θ ð	s z	ʃ				
AFFRICATES								
-asp			ts	tʃ dʒ				
+asp				tʃ ^h				
NASAL	m		n			ɲ	ŋ	
FLAPS								
TRILLS			r					
LATERALS			l					
LATERAL FRICATIVE								
APPROXIMANTS						j		h

Table 4: Memba Consonant Chart

The various contrastive consonant phonemes of Memba are described below along with their distribution. The consonants are grouped by their manner of articulation. Every table is divided into three columns which lists five instances of occurrence of each phoneme in the initial, medial and final positions in a word. The additional column under each of the three headings further gives the syllabic break up of the words, which is crucial for the analysis as the syllable forms a significant phonological unit in Tibeto-Burman languages. The alternate pronunciations of the words, wherever applicable, are mentioned in parentheses. This is particularly important for determining phonological contrast or the lack of it.

3.2.1.1. Distribution of Consonants

1. Stops

The Memba inventory of stops follows a three-way phonological symmetry, as in voiceless unaspirated, voiceless aspirated and voiced unaspirated.

i. Bilabial

/p/ voiceless unaspirated bilabial stop. Occurs in syllable initial as well as final position anywhere in the word.

Initial		Medial		Final	
<i>pi:m</i> ‘knee’	pi:m	<i>nakpəh</i> ‘black’	nak.pəh	<i>gɟap</i> ‘back’	gɟap
<i>pəpər</i> ‘root’	pə.pər	<i>pakpə</i> ‘skin’	pak.pə	<i>sopsop</i> ‘soft’	sop.sop
<i>pɪŋja</i> ‘brother’	pɪ.ŋja	<i>nərpe</i> ‘lazy’	nər.pe	<i>ɬɔkp</i> ‘cut’	ɬɔkp
<i>pasəŋ</i> ‘Friday’	pa.səŋ	<i>bɔptɬi</i> ‘cymbals’	bɔp.tɬi	<i>ɬʰep</i> ‘load’	ɬʰep
<i>pu</i> ‘fur’	pu	<i>ɬɔpɬ</i> ‘duck’	ɬɔpɬ	<i>ʃɔrp</i> ‘dance’	ʃɔrp

/pʰ/ voiceless aspirated bilabial stop. Occurs in word initial prevocalic position and word final position only. The occurrences in the word final position, however, are non-contrastive as some speakers alternatively use the unaspirated allophone or follow it up with a short vocalic release. Eg. *ɬɔkp/ɬɔkpʰ* ‘thick’, *lempʰ/lemb* ‘wet’.

Initial		Final	
<i>pʰərŋən</i> ‘fly’	pʰər.ŋən	<i>jəkpʰ</i> ‘right’	jəkpʰ
<i>pʰi</i> ‘push’	pʰi	<i>jaŋpʰ</i> ‘lightweight’	jaŋpʰ
<i>pʰa</i> ‘pig’	pʰa	<i>sɔkpʰ</i> ‘whose’	sɔkpʰ
<i>pʰɪli</i> ‘butterfly’	pʰɪ.li	<i>gopʰ</i> ‘garlic’	gopʰ
<i>pʰɔkpʰ</i> ‘cave’	pʰɔkpʰ	<i>sampʰ</i> ‘bridge’	sampʰ

/b/ voiced bilabial stop. Mostly occurs in syllable initial position. Syllable end occurrences are rare and sometimes non-contrastive. For example: *gɟap/gɟab* ‘back’. Some speakers even add the vowel /u/ or glottal stop /ʔ/ when /b/ occurs at the end of the word, especially in sentences.

Initial		Medial		Final	
<i>bɔmbu</i> ‘big’	bɔm.bu	<i>kube</i> ‘thread’	ku.be	<i>a:b</i> ‘father’	a:b
<i>buh</i> ‘worm’	buh	<i>ɟɔmba</i> ‘grass’	ɟɔm.ba	<i>ʃib</i> ‘fear’	ʃib

Initial		Medial		Final	
<i>bendz</i> ‘chilli’	bendz	<i>k^habse</i> ‘salty’	k ^h ab.se	<i>gjab</i> ‘back’	gjab
<i>bɔru</i> ‘thunder’	bɔ.ru	<i>lɔŋbu</i> ‘world’	lɔŋ.bu	<i>lomb</i> ‘road’	lomb
<i>bəḍa</i> ‘cane’	bə.ḍa	<i>kəbl</i> ‘skull’	kəbl	<i>dao daŋb</i> ‘January’	dao daŋb

ii. Dental

/t/ voiceless unaspirated dental stop. Occurs in syllable initial as well as final position anywhere in the word.

Initial		Medial		Final	
<i>tɔh</i> ‘eat’	tɔh	<i>tɔkto</i> ‘child’	tɔk.to	<i>ɪt</i> ‘that’	ɪt
<i>talo</i> ‘and’	talo	<i>ɪtan</i> ‘throw’	ɪ.tan	<i>ɪskɛt</i> ‘they’	ɪs.kɛt
<i>tɔkp</i> ‘cut’	tɔkp	<i>ɔktah</i> ‘tiger’	ɔk.tah	<i>p^hɪt/ɔt</i> ‘this’	p ^h ɪt/ɔt
<i>tark</i> ‘walnut’	tark	<i>ɔrtɔŋ</i> ‘throat’	ɔr.tɔŋ	<i>ḍo dart</i> ‘whetstone’	ḍo dart
<i>tɛgən</i> ‘to give’	tɛ.gən	<i>laptar</i> ‘grater’	lap.tər	<i>bət</i> ‘a red tree used for making firewood’	bət

/t^h/ voiceless aspirated dental stop. Occurs in word initial prevocalic position. Some very rare instances of word medial prevocalic occurrence are found. Most of these occurrences are compounds for numerals.

Initial		Medial	
<i>t^hakpə</i> ‘rope’	t ^h ak.pə	<i>θu:t^hen</i> ‘pull’	θu:t ^h en
<i>t^hɪk</i> ‘drop’	t ^h ɪk	<i>tʃu:t^hamba</i> ‘ten’	tʃu:t ^h am.ba
<i>t^hɔŋ</i> ‘drink’	t ^h ɔŋ	<i>gja:t^hamba</i> ‘hundred’	gja:t ^h am.ba
<i>t^hebf</i> ‘button’	t ^h ebf	-	-
<i>t^hɔgɔn</i> ‘to appear’	t ^h ɔ.gɔn	-	-

/d/ voiced dental stop. Occurs in syllable initial position anywhere in the word. Syllable final occurrences are extremely rare.

Initial		Medial		Final	
<i>dorɔm</i> ‘floor’	dɔ.rɔm	<i>benḡḡe</i> ‘float’	ben.ḡḡe	-	-
<i>ḡirɪŋ</i> ‘today’	ḡi.rɪŋ	<i>menḡo</i> ‘flower’	men.ḡo	-	-
<i>ḡemi</i> ‘key’	ḡemi	<i>dʒəḡi</i> ‘pot’	dʒə.ḡi	-	-
<i>ḡop</i> ‘jar’	ḡop	<i>kʰaḡen</i> ‘carpet’	kʰa.ḡen	-	-

iii. Retroflex

/ɽ/ voiceless unaspirated retroflex stop. Occurs in the syllable initial position anywhere in the word.

Initial		Medial	
<i>ɽokto</i> ‘child’	ɽok.to	<i>gɔta</i> ‘hair’	gɔ.ta
<i>ɽimbu</i> ‘cloud’	ɽim.bu	<i>gettop</i> ‘which’	ge.ttop
<i>ɽi:go</i> ‘forehead’	ɽi:.go	<i>baɽi</i> ‘bowl’	ba.ɽi
<i>ɽrem</i> ‘groundnut’/‘soyabean’	ɽrem	<i>getəs</i> ‘catapult’	ge.ɽəs
<i>ɽomb</i> ‘narrow’	ɽomb	<i>roɽu</i> ‘kid’	ro.ɽu

/ɽʰ/ voiceless aspirated retroflex stop. Occurs only in the syllable initial position, mostly at the beginning of the word. Word medial prevocalic occurrences are very rare.

Initial		Medial	
<i>ɽʰah</i> ‘blood’	ɽʰah	<i>ʃʃokɽʰi</i> ‘altar’	ʃʃok.ɽʰi
<i>ɽʰrõgɔn</i> ‘wash’	ɽʰrõ.gɔn	-	-
<i>ɽʰaŋa</i> ‘necklace’	ɽʰa.ŋa	-	-
<i>ɽʰep</i> ‘load’	ɽʰep	-	-
<i>ɽʰu</i> ‘feet’	ɽʰu	-	-

/ḡ/ voiced retroflex stop. Occurs only in the syllable initial position anywhere in the word.

Initial		Medial	
<i>ḡrogo</i> ‘stomach’	ḡro.go	<i>ʃɪḡdɔdep</i> ‘fruit’	ʃɪḡ.ḡo.dep
<i>ḡõgɔn</i> ‘flow’	ḡõ.gɔn	<i>ɽʃḡḡaŋ</i> ‘mosquito’	ɽʃḡ.ḡaŋ
<i>ḡeh/ḡre</i> ‘rice’	ḡeh/ḡre	<i>gɔnḡom</i> ‘dates’	gɔn.ḡom

Initial		Medial	
<i>q̣u/q̣ru/q̣i:h</i> ‘snake’	q̣u/q̣ru/q̣i:h	<i>goḍɔŋ</i> ‘watchman’	go.ḍɔŋ
<i>q̣aŋbə</i> ‘house fly’	tʰu	<i>q̣andaŋ</i> ‘now’	q̣an.ḍaŋ

iv. Velar

/k/ voiceless unaspirated velar stop. Occurs in syllable initial as well as final position. Can occur anywhere in the word.

Initial		Medial		Final	
<i>kaŋlem</i> ‘foot’	kaŋ.lem	<i>nakpəh</i> ‘black’	nak.pəh	<i>lak</i> ‘claw’	lak
<i>kombu</i> ‘dry’	kom.bu	<i>ṭɔḳto</i> ‘child’	ṭɔḳ.to	<i>ṭf̣ik</i> ‘one’	ṭf̣ik
<i>kanḍɜn</i> ‘how’	kan.ḍɜn	<i>gjakpə</i> ‘fat’	gjak.pə	<i>eṭf̣ər ḍɜḳ</i> ‘some’	eṭf̣ə
<i>kju:</i> ‘vomit’	kju:	<i>nekər</i> ‘holy place’	ne.kər	<i>dṛɔk</i> ‘pimple’	dṛɔk
<i>ḳɔṛɔm</i> ‘worship’	ḳɔ.ṛɔm	<i>ikki</i> ‘coin’	ik.ki	<i>ʃjok</i> ‘asthma’	ʃjok

/kʰ/ voiceless aspirated velar stop. Occurs in syllable initial as well as final position, however word medial and final occurrences are rare. Syllable end occurrences are non contrastive.

Initial		Medial		Final	
<i>kʰi</i> ‘dog’	kʰi	<i>q̣a ṭʰɔṣɪnkʰa</i> ‘crocodile’	q̣a ṭʰɔ.sm.kʰa	<i>ḍɜɔkʰ</i> ‘tail’ (ALT. ḍɜu:)	ḍɜɔkʰ
<i>kʰəf</i> ‘deer’	kʰəf	<i>nəkʰs</i> ‘ink’	nəkʰs	<i>ʃjenkʰ</i> ‘wide’ (ALT. ʃjɛŋə)	ʃjenkʰ
<i>kʰazaŋ</i> ‘yesterday’	kʰa.zaŋ	<i>elikʰem</i> ‘kidney’	eli.kʰem	<i>ʃekʰ</i> ‘mirror’ (ALT. ʃik/ʃegəh)	ʃekʰ
<i>kʰɪm</i> ‘house’	kʰɪm	-	-	<i>nɪŋkʰ</i> ‘heart’ (ALT. nɪŋ)	nɪŋkʰ
<i>kʰɔmbɔ</i> ‘peach’	kʰɔm.bɔ	-	-	-	-

/g/ voiced velar stop. Occurs only in the syllable initial position anywhere in the word.

Initial		Medial	
<i>gombu</i> ‘all’	gom.bu	<i>gərgər</i> ‘round’	gər.gər
<i>gjakpə</i> ‘fat’	gjak.pə	<i>ru:go</i> ‘bone’	nəkʰsru:.go
<i>g̣ɔ̣ɔmi</i> ‘night’	g̣ɔ̣ɔ.mi	<i>θoga</i> ‘dirty’	θo.ga

Initial		Medial	
<i>gɔm</i> ‘door’	gɔm	<i>kɔpgja</i> ‘chair’	kɔp.gja
<i>gɔdʒɔŋ</i> ‘window’	gɔ.dʒɔŋ	<i>bagu</i> ‘pouch’	ba.gu

2. Fricatives

i. Dental

/θ/ voiceless dental fricative. Occurs syllable initially anywhere in the word, however, word medial occurrences are very few.

Initial		Medial		Final	
<i>θoga</i> ‘dirty’	θo.ga	<i>tʃəkθo</i> ‘table’	tʃək.θo	-	-
<i>θɔŋbu</i> ‘shopkeeper’	θɔŋ.bu	<i>tʃʰapθe</i> ‘spices’	tʃʰap.θe	-	-
<i>θah</i> ‘salt’	θah	<i>dʒapθah</i> ‘tea strainer’	dʒap.θah	-	-
<i>θɪŋdu</i> ‘ring’	θɪn.ɖu	<i>gorθoŋ</i> ‘hawker’	gor.θoŋ	-	-
<i>θepəla</i> ‘island’	θe.pə.la	-	-	-	-

/θʰ/ voiceless aspirated dental fricative. Occurs only in the word initial prevocalic position.

Initial	
<i>θʰa</i> ‘salty’	θʰa
<i>θʰao</i> ‘fever’	θʰao
<i>θʰen.ɖa</i> ‘rack kept above the central fire’	θʰen.ɖa
<i>θʰas</i> ‘small clay figures offered during rituals’	θʰas
<i>θʰen tẽ.gən</i> ‘painter’	θʰen tẽ.gən

/ð/ voiced dental fricative. Occurs in the word initial prevocalic position. Occurrences in other positions are rare and non-contrastive.

Initial		Medial		Final	
<i>ðos</i> ‘end’	ðos	<i>gaðəŋ</i> ‘when’ (ALT. <i>gazan</i>)	ga.ðəŋ	<i>bənð</i> ‘chilli’ (ALT. <i>bens/bendʒ</i>)	bənð

Initial		Medial		Final	
<i>ðari</i> 'mountain'	ðə.ri	<i>drəŋðə</i> 'honey' (ALT. <i>dəŋs/drəŋs</i>)	drəŋ.ðə	-	-
<i>ðəkta</i> 'finger'	ðək.ta	<i>gaðai</i> 'where' (ALT. <i>gaðe</i>)	ga.ðai	-	-
<i>ðar</i> 'noon'	ðar	<i>peðe</i> 'lai leaves' (ALT. <i>peze</i>)	pe.ðe	-	-
<i>ðiŋ</i> 'wooden boat'	ðiŋ	-	-	-	-

ii. Alveolar

/s/ voiceless alveolar fricative. Occurs in syllable initial as well as final position anywhere in the word.

Initial		Medial		Final	
<i>səmdʒin</i> 'animal'	səm.dʒin	<i>ɪskeɿ</i> 'they'	ɪs.keɿ	<i>khə:s</i> 'rice porridge'	khə:s
<i>sa</i> 'earth'	sa	<i>njidza bəsa</i> 'woman'	nji.dʒa bəsa	<i>ɬaks</i> 'back'	ɬaks
<i>sərb</i> 'new'	sərb	<i>kʰesəp</i> 'danger'	kʰe.səp	<i>ɖəs</i> 'all'	ɖəs
<i>so</i> 'tooth'	so	<i>drəsəm</i> 'expenditure'	drə.səm	<i>nas</i> 'disease'	nas
<i>seŋgən</i> 'to kill'	seŋ.gən	<i>asəm</i> 'moustache'	asəm	<i>nəkʰs</i> 'ink'	nəkʰs

/z/ voiced alveolar fricative. Mostly occurs in the word medial prevocalic position. Word initial occurrences are very rare and word final occurrences are few and mostly non-contrastive.

Initial		Medial		Final	
<i>zamde</i> 'front'	zam.ɖe	<i>kʰazaŋ</i> 'yesterday'	kʰa.zaŋ	<i>ɖeŋz/ɬəŋz</i> 'honey' (ALT. <i>dəŋs/drəŋs</i>)	ɖeŋz
<i>zam</i> 'clay'	zam	<i>ŋuzək</i> 'we'	ŋu.zək	<i>nǎz</i> 'ill' (ALT. <i>nēgin</i>)	nǎz
-	-	<i>kozo</i> 'onion'	ko.zo	<i>əu nenz</i> 'parrot'	əu nenz
-	-	<i>əmze</i> 'tailor'	əm.ze	<i>dʒemz</i> 'scissors' (ALT. <i>dʒemtʃʰ</i>)	-

Initial		Medial		Final	
-	-	<i>gi:zi</i> ‘spine’	gi:zi	-	-

iii. Palato-alveolar

/ʃ/ voiceless palato-alveolar fricative. Occurs in both syllable initial and final positions. Can occur anywhere in the word.

Initial		Medial		Final	
<i>fela</i> ‘say’	ʃel.a	<i>ofo</i> ‘come’	o.ʃo	<i>dɔmf</i> ‘pumpkin’	dɔmf
<i>ʃjoh</i> ‘sharp’	ʃjoh	<i>drɪbʃan</i> ‘fog’	drɪb.ʃan	<i>orʃ</i> ‘beans’	orʃ
<i>ʃiŋ</i> ‘wood’/‘tree’	ʃiŋ	<i>loʃu</i> ‘leaf’	lo.ʃu	<i>dɔbʃ</i> ‘square’	dɔbʃ
<i>ʃɔrp</i> ‘dance’	ʃɔrp	<i>peʃe</i> ‘diamond’	pe.ʃe	<i>tʃibʃ</i> ‘fourteen’	tʃibʃ
<i>ʃom</i> ‘mushroom’	ʃom	<i>qɪnʃa</i> ‘week’	qɪn.ʃa	<i>mi:ʃ</i> ‘tears’	mi:ʃ

iv. /h/ voiceless glottal approximant. Occurs in both syllable initial and final positions. Can occur anywhere in the word, although word final occurrences are most prevalent.

Initial		Medial		Final	
<i>hagon</i> ‘know’	ha.gon	<i>mi:rhe</i> ‘live’	mi:rhe	<i>t^hah</i> ‘blood’	t ^h ah
<i>hɔpla</i> ‘store room’	hɔp.la	<i>ɪmlha</i> ‘God’	ɪm.lha	<i>nakpəh</i> ‘black’	nak.pəh
<i>həjaŋ</i> ‘pan’	hə.jaŋ	<i>lham</i> ‘shoe’ (aLT. ham)	lham	<i>meh</i> ‘fire’	meh
<i>hasi</i> ‘dew’	ha.si	<i>lhamro</i> ‘lace’	lham.ro	<i>keh</i> ‘birth’	keh
<i>hu:kp</i> ‘owl’	hu:kp	-	-	<i>gah</i> ‘fence’	gah

3. Affricates

/ts/ voiceless alveolar affricate. Occurs only in the syllable initial position and very rarely in the word medial position.

Initial		Medial	
<i>tsəp</i> ‘cut’	tsəp	<i>k^hatsop</i> ‘spicy’ (hot)	k ^h a.tsop
<i>tsəm</i> ‘sew’	tsəm	-	-
<i>tso</i> ‘tooth’ (ALT. so)	tso	-	-

Initial		Medial	
<i>tseh</i> ‘pointed’	tseh	-	-
<i>tsem</i> ‘vegetables’	tsem	-	-

/tʃ/ voiceless palato-alveolar affricate. Occurs syllable initially in both word initial and medial positions. Can occur syllable finally only very rarely.

Initial		Medial		Final	
<i>tʃik</i> ‘one’	tʃik	<i>etʃər</i> ‘few’	e.tʃər	<i>maptʃ</i> ‘peacock’	maptʃ
<i>tʃirgən</i> ‘squeeze’	tʃir.gən	<i>ʃjəptʃəŋ</i> ‘spear’	ʃjəp.tʃəŋ	-	-
<i>tʃəli:h</i> ‘tongue’	tʃə.li:h	<i>ɲjiktʃiŋ</i> ‘blind’	ɲjik.tʃiŋ	-	-
<i>tʃuʃəm</i> ‘worship room’	tʃuʃəm	<i>lomtʃi</i> ‘annual memorial for the deceased’	lom.tʃi	-	-
<i>tʃəpʃ</i> ‘duck’	tʃəpʃ	<i>bəptʃi</i> ‘cymbals’	bəp.tʃi	-	-

/tʃʰ/ voiceless aspirated palato-alveolar affricate.

Initial		Medial		Final	
<i>tʃʰu</i> ‘water’	tʃʰu	<i>laŋtʃʰen</i> ‘elephant’	laŋ.tʃʰen	<i>dʒemtʃʰ</i> ‘scissors’ (ALT. <i>dʒemʃ</i>)	dʒemtʃʰ
<i>tʃʰəŋdʒəŋ</i> ‘small, little’	tʃʰəŋ.dʒəŋ	<i>etʃʰi gjǎgən</i> ‘to sneeze’	e.tʃʰi gjǎ.gən	<i>petʃʰ</i> ‘notebook’ (ALT. <i>peʃ</i>)	petʃʰ
<i>tʃʰima ʔorgən</i> ‘spit’	tʃʰi.ma ʔor.gən	<i>goŋtʃʰeb</i> ‘expensive’	goŋ.tʃʰeb	<i>emtʃʰ</i> ‘doctor’	emtʃʰ
<i>tʃʰərʃ</i> ‘rain hat made of leaves’	tʃʰərʃ	<i>tʃʰatʃʰip</i> ‘pray’	tʃʰa.tʃʰip	-	-
<i>tʃʰama</i> ‘broom’	tʃʰa.ma	<i>logotʃʰep</i> ‘brave’	logo.tʃʰep	-	-

/dʒ/ voiced palato-alveolar affricate. Occurs syllable initially in both word initial and medial positions. Occurrences in the syllable final position are very rare and non contrastive.

Initial		Medial		Final	
<i>dʒɪm/dʒem</i> 'sand'	dʒɪm/ dʒem	<i>səmdʒɪn</i> 'animal'	səm.dʒɪn	<i>ŋũ:dʒ</i> 'we' (ALT. <i>ŋɔnzɔk</i>)	ŋũ:dʒ
<i>dʒɪŋ(bə)</i> 'neck'	dʒɪŋ(bə)	<i>nəmdʒo</i> 'ear'	nəm.dʒo	-	-
<i>dʒəɖi</i> 'pot'	dʒə.ɖi	<i>gandʒɪn</i> 'how'	gan.dʒɪn	-	-
<i>dʒa</i> 'tea'	dʒa	<i>odʒu</i> 'urine'	o.dʒu	-	-

4. Nasals

/m/ bilabial nasal stop. Occurs in both syllable initial and final positions. Can occur anywhere in the word.

Initial		Medial		Final	
<i>mɔrɔm</i> 'red'	mɔ.rɔm	<i>bɔmbu</i> 'big'	bɔm.bu	<i>kaŋlem</i> 'foot'	kaŋ.lem
<i>meh</i> 'fire'	meh	<i>ɲɪmi</i> 'day'	ɲɪ.mi	<i>səm</i> 'heart'	səm
<i>məŋ/mɪŋ</i> 'name'	məŋ/mɪŋ	<i>lombu</i> 'road'	lo.mbu	<i>nəm</i> 'rain'	nəm
<i>mɪʃi</i> 'spectacles'	mɪ.ʃi	<i>name</i> 'border'	na.me	<i>kɔrɔm</i> 'worship'	kɔ.rɔm
<i>meləm</i> 'prayer'	meləm	<i>lama</i> 'priest'	la.ma	<i>ɖem</i> 'drama'	ɖem

/n/ alveolar nasal stop. Occurs in both syllable initial and final positions. Can occur anywhere in the word.

Initial		Medial		Final	
<i>nərpe</i> 'lazy'	nər.pe	<i>mendɔ</i> 'flower'	men.ɖo	<i>səmdʒɪn</i> 'animal'	səm.dʒɪn
<i>nakpəh</i> 'black'	nak.pəh	<i>pʰenəŋ</i> 'turn'	pʰe.nəŋ	<i>gəŋɖɪn</i> 'full'	gəŋ.ɖɪn
<i>naŋba</i> 'tomorrow'	naŋ.ba	<i>bənɔ</i> 'chilli'	bənɔ	<i>kandʒɪn</i> 'how'	kan.dʒɪn
<i>nogɔn</i> 'nose'	no.gɔn	<i>θendɔ</i> 'colour'	θen.ɖo	<i>epen</i> 'long shawl used as a baby harness'	e.pen
<i>nɔmbɔ</i> 'sharp'	nɔm.bɔ	<i>lanɖu</i> 'bangle'	lan.ɖu	<i>tʃʰorɖen</i> 'holy pagoda'	tʃʰor.ɖen

/ɲ/ alveo-palatal nasal stop. Occurs only in syllable initial position mostly word initially. Word medial occurrences are rare.

Initial		Medial	
<i>ni</i> ‘two’	ni	<i>lani</i> ‘arm’	la.ni
<i>nah</i> ‘fish’	nah	<i>damnin</i> ‘music’	dam.nin
<i>nirkum</i> ‘wrinkle’	nir.kum	-	-
<i>nis</i> ‘bed’	nis	-	-

/ŋ/ velar nasal stop. Occurs in both syllable initial and final positions. Can occur anywhere in the word.

Initial		Medial		Final	
<i>ŋip</i> ‘soft’	ŋip	<i>kaŋlem</i> ‘foot’	kaŋ.lem	<i>ɕiriŋ</i> ‘today’	ɕi.riŋ
<i>ŋa</i> ‘I’	ŋa	<i>ɕʰaŋo</i> ‘chest’	ɕʰã.ŋo	<i>kʰazaŋ</i> ‘yesterday’	kʰa.zaŋ
<i>ŋabu/ŋomb</i> ‘green’/‘blue’	ŋa.bu/ ŋomb	<i>naŋba</i> ‘tomorrow’	naŋ.ba	<i>tʃʰoŋdʒoŋ</i> ‘small’	tʃʰoŋ.dʒoŋ
<i>ŋoɪ</i> ‘silver’	ŋoɪ	<i>laŋtʃʰen</i> ‘elephant’	laŋ.tʃʰen	<i>ɕomdʒaŋ</i> ‘fist’	ɕom.dʒaŋ
<i>ŋorom</i> ‘sweet’	ŋo.rɔ	<i>soŋon</i> ‘seed’	sɔ.ŋon	<i>tʃandʒaŋ</i> ‘mosquito’	tʃan.dʒaŋ

5. Laterals

/l/ voiced alveolar lateral approximant. Occurs in both syllable initial and final positions. Can occur anywhere in the word.

Initial		Medial		Final	
<i>lakp</i> ‘hand’	lakp	<i>fela</i> ‘say’	ʃe.la	<i>mel</i> ‘chin’	mel
<i>loma</i> ‘leaf’	lo.ma	<i>sem ɕaŋla</i> ‘think’	sem ɕaŋ.la	<i>gjal</i> ‘a long milk churner’	gjal
<i>lha</i> ‘god’	lha	<i>eli</i> ‘cat’	eli	<i>ɕrel</i> ‘big flat bamboo basket’	ɕrel
<i>lip</i> ‘body’	lip	<i>meləm</i> ‘prayer’	me.ləm	<i>tʃal</i> ‘a kind of basket hung from the head’	tʃal
<i>lɔpke</i> ‘cough’	lɔp.ke	<i>tʃʰulo</i> ‘storm’	tʃʰu.lo	<i>ɕʰal</i> ‘dust’	ɕʰal

/r/ voiced alveolar flap [ɾ in IPA]. Occurs in both syllable initial and final positions. Can occur anywhere in the word.

Initial		Medial		Final	
<i>rɪŋbu</i> ‘long’	rɪŋ.bu	<i>kəram</i> ‘star’	kə.rəm	<i>etfər</i> ‘few’	e.tʃər
<i>rɪɖa</i> ‘animal’	rɪ.ɖa	<i>korbu:</i> ‘white’	kor.bu:	<i>ɖʰagər</i> ‘moon’	ɖʰa.gər
<i>ru:go</i> ‘bone’	ru:.go	<i>ɖrogo</i> ‘stomach’	ɖro.go	<i>pəpər</i> ‘root’	pə.pər
<i>ra</i> ‘copper’	ra	<i>ara</i> ‘alcohol’	a.ra	<i>gjaɖər</i> ‘down’	gja.gər
<i>rɔŋɖzi</i> ‘deaf’	rɔŋ.ɖzi	<i>gorɔm</i> ‘money’	go.rɔm	<i>pʰɔr</i> ‘bowl’	pʰɔr

6. Approximants

/j/ voiced palatal approximant. Occurs only in syllable initial position either alone or in a consonant sequence just before the vowel. Can occur in word initial and medial positions.

Initial		Medial	
<i>jakpə/jakpu</i> ‘good’	jak.pə/jak.pu	<i>gjaɖ</i> ‘back’	gjaɖ
<i>jərn</i> ‘tax’	jərn	<i>kʰjogo</i> ‘husband’	kʰjo.go
<i>jikju</i> ‘examination’	jik.ju	<i>ʃjɔkp</i> ‘feather’	ʃjɔkp
<i>jɪp/jep</i> ‘right side’	jɪp/jep	<i>mejo</i> ‘mole’	me.jo
<i>jarge</i> ‘summer’	jar.ge	<i>kɔpgja</i> ‘chair’	kɔp.gja

3.2.1.2. Consonant Contrasts

/p/, /pʰ/, /b/ & /m/ *pa* ‘a savoury porridge made of millet flour’
 pʰa ‘pig’,
 ba ‘auxiliary (to be)’
 ma ‘negative particle’

/p/, /b/ & /m/ *ɖɔp* ‘jar’,
 ɖɔb ‘bucket’
 ɖɔm ‘bear’

/b/ & /m/ *bɛŋɖo* ‘brinjal’
 mɛŋɖo ‘flower’

/t̪/, /t̪ʰ/ & /d̪/ *t̪ʰombu* ‘high’

	<i>tombu</i> ‘tight’ <i>dombu</i> ‘fathom’ (measure)
/t̪/, /d̪/ & /dʒ/	<i>t̪aŋ</i> ‘create IMP.’ <i>d̪aŋ</i> ‘hook’ <i>dʒaŋ</i> ‘north’
/k/, /g/, /kʰ/ & /ŋ/	<i>kombu</i> ‘dry’ <i>gombu</i> ‘all’ <i>kʰɔmbɔ</i> ‘peach’ <i>ŋɔmbu</i> ‘blue/green’ (alternatively <i>ŋonpo</i>)
/k/ & /g/	<i>kaŋ</i> ‘leg, foot’ <i>gaŋ</i> ‘on top of’ <i>kɔmpa</i> ‘wooden tongs’ <i>gompā</i> ‘temple’
/k/ & /kʰ/	<i>keh</i> ‘birth’ <i>kʰeh</i> ‘potato’ <i>kjo</i> ‘wooden ladle for scooping water’ <i>kʰjo</i> ‘you’
/kʰ/ & /g/	<i>kʰazaŋ</i> ‘yesterday’, <i>gazaŋ</i> ‘when’
/ŋ/ & /g/	<i>ŋorɔm</i> ‘sweet’, <i>gorɔm</i> ‘money’
/n/ & /ŋ/ like	<i>nɔmbu</i> 1. ‘sharp’, 2. ‘the woven fabric used to make traditional dresses <i>kʰəndʒər</i> , <i>gɔfi</i> and <i>tʰɔba</i> ’, <i>ŋɔmbu</i> ‘blue’/‘green’
/ŋ/ & /ɲ/	<i>ŋa</i> ‘I’, <i>na</i> ‘fish’
/tʃʰ/ & /ʃ/	<i>ʃɔrp</i> ‘dance’, <i>tʃʰɔrp</i> ‘dried cheese’
/l/ & /r/	<i>lɪp</i> ‘body’, <i>rɪb</i> ‘wall’ <i>lo</i> ‘lungs’, <i>ro</i> ‘dead body’

3.2.2. Vowels

The inventory of Memba vowels comprises of nine vowels as shown in the chart below. The word medial position is the least restrictive for the occurrence of vowels and the entire inventory of vowels occur in this position. The word initial position is the most restrictive and few instances of vowel occurrences in this position are found.

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		ɯ u
High-mid	e		o
		ə	
Low-mid	ɛ		ɔ
Low		a	

Table 5 : Vowel Chart

3.2.2.1. Distribution of Vowels

/i/ a high front unrounded vowel. Occurs in word medial and final positions. When occurring medially, the phoneme is lengthened. It is comparable to the English vowel in ‘leave’.

Medial	Final
<i>pi:m</i> ‘knee’	<i>k^{hi}</i> ‘dog’
<i>ɖi:la</i> ‘live’	<i>ɲimi</i> ‘day’
<i>t^{hi}:s</i> ‘fall’	<i>adʒi</i> ‘elder sister’
<i>tʃəli:h</i> ‘tongue’	<i>p^{hi}li</i> ‘butterfly’
<i>ni:dʒi</i> ‘pillow’	<i>ɖemi</i> ‘key’

/ɪ/ a high-mid front unrounded vowel. Occurs in word initial and medial positions. It is comparable to the English vowel in ‘sit’.

Initial	Medial
<i>ɪmlha</i> ‘God’	<i>ɾɪɖa</i> ‘animal’
<i>ɪt</i> ‘that’	<i>k^{hi}ɪɲɪn</i> ‘freeze’
<i>ɪm</i> ‘grandfather’ (aLT. i:m)	<i>tʃ^{hi}ɪmb</i> ‘liver’
<i>ɪskɛt</i> ‘they’	<i>nɪfɪɲ</i> ‘farm’ (aLT. nɪfɪɲ)

Initial	Medial
<i>ɪkʈəm</i> ‘hiccup’	<i>ɕɪrɪŋ</i> ‘today’

/u/ a high back rounded vowel.

Medial	Final
<i>ruɡo</i> ‘bone’	<i>ɪmʈu</i> ‘monkey’
<i>pumbaŋ</i> ‘shoulder’	<i>ɭɪɡu</i> ‘curly hair’
<i>bum</i> ‘girl’	<i>mi.pu</i> ‘eyebrow/eyelash’
<i>ku.be</i> ‘thread’	<i>odʒu</i> ‘urine’
<i>tʃuʃəm</i> ‘worship room’	<i>ɕoru</i> ‘pebble’

/ʊ/ a high-mid back rounded vowel.

Initial	Medial
<i>əmze</i> ‘tailor’	<i>oʃəm</i> ‘corn’
<i>ɔkʈa</i> ‘tiger’	<i>ðɔkθa</i> ‘finger’
<i>ɔʃ</i> ‘peach’	<i>ɡorəm</i> ‘money’
-	<i>ɡɔdʒɔŋ</i> ‘window’
-	<i>ʈɔkʈo</i> ‘child’

/e/ a tense half-close unrounded front vowel. Occurs in all three positions within the word; initial, medial and final, although the word initial occurrences are extremely rare and word final occurrences also very infrequent. This vowel be compared to the English vowel in ‘pen’; an allophonic variant of /e/ that sometimes gets used in the medial position is /ɛ/.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>etʃər</i> ‘few’	<i>meh</i> ‘fire’	<i>nərpe</i> ‘lazy’
<i>emʈʰ</i> ‘doctor’	<i>mendɔ</i> ‘flower’	<i>ɕeme</i> ‘meat’
<i>eli</i> ‘cat’	<i>ɡemɡah</i> ‘laugh’	<i>ku.be</i> ‘thread’
<i>enda</i> ‘grinding stone built over a stream’	<i>bego</i> ‘calf’	<i>ɕre</i> ‘rice’

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>epen</i> ‘long shawl used as baby harness’	<i>kek</i> ‘ladder/staircase’	<i>p^hume</i> ‘traditional dress for women’

/o/ a high-mid back rounded vowel.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>odzu</i> ‘urine’	<i>doh</i> ‘stone’	<i>nəmdzo</i> ‘ear’
<i>ofom</i> ‘corn’	<i>gorom</i> ‘money’	<i>mejo</i> ‘mole’
<i>om</i> ‘milk’	<i>kozoŋ</i> ‘onion’	<i>lo</i> ‘lungs’
<i>orf</i> ‘beans’	<i>drogo</i> ‘stomach’	<i>tɔkto</i> ‘child’
<i>obza</i> ‘an indigenous bowl shaped bamboo sieve’	<i>nor</i> ‘snuff box’	<i>k^hjo</i> ‘you’

/ɔ/ a low-mid back rounded vowel.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>ɔdzo</i> ‘elder brother’	<i>fjɔkp</i> ‘feather’	<i>ɔblo</i> ‘a big ladle for milk’
<i>ɔfgim</i> ‘elder brother’	<i>dɔm</i> ‘bear’	<i>gɔ</i> ‘head’
<i>ɔblo</i> ‘a big ladle for milk’	<i>gɔŋt^hep</i> ‘costly’	-
<i>ɔptəŋ</i> ‘wrestling’	<i>tɔkθo</i> ‘table’ (aLT. tɔks)	-
<i>ɔrtɔŋ</i> ‘throat’	<i>t^hebɔŋ</i> ‘thumb’	-

/ə/ a mid central unrounded vowel.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>əu</i> ‘boy’	<i>nəmdzo</i> ‘ear’	<i>t^hakpə</i> ‘rope’
<i>əm</i> ‘mother/an elderly woman’	<i>dərfin</i> ‘flag pole’	-
<i>əɾəŋgən</i> ‘to lean against something’	<i>etɾə</i> ‘little/few’	-
-	<i>sərb</i> ‘new’	-
-	<i>gərgər</i> ‘round’	-

/a/ a low central unrounded vowel.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>adzi</i> ‘sister’	<i>ṭʰakpə</i> ‘rope’	<i>rɪḍa</i> ‘animal’
<i>aga</i> ‘stool’	<i>laŋdʒɪm</i> ‘elephant’	<i>nɛdʒa</i> ‘wife’
<i>ab</i> ‘father’	<i>bamen</i> ‘mithun’	<i>pɪŋja</i> ‘brother’
<i>asəm</i> ‘beard/moustache’	<i>kʰabse</i> ‘salty’	<i>kʰa</i> ‘language’
<i>aŋaŋ</i> ‘father-in-law/maternal uncle’	<i>jaŋpaŋ</i> ‘young’	<i>loma</i> ‘petal’

/u/ a high back unrounded vowel

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>uum</i> ‘bow’ (ALT. jɪm, e:m)	<i>ḍuun</i> ‘seven’	<i>pu</i> ‘aroma’
-	<i>humo</i> ‘wind’ (ALT. lɔm)	<i>ri:nḍu</i> ‘lie’
-	<i>fedum</i> ‘bottle’	<i>ma-ḍu</i> ‘sit’ (ALT. dɪ:)
-	<i>jɪrkum</i> ‘wrinkle’	<i>trɪmbu</i> ‘cloud’ (TIB.)
-	<i>kər ɬasum</i> ‘jaggery’	-

3.2.2.2. Diphthongs

əʊ<->o

gəʊmi ‘night’

nəʊgū: ‘nose’

eɪ

keɪjəb/keɪjəm ‘swim’

seɪ ‘kill’

deɪ ‘here’

kʰeɪm ‘day before yesterday’

ʊɪ

ɬʰʊɪ ‘Tibetan script’

rʊɪbe ‘tortoise’

ŋʊɪ ‘silver’

kjɔɪ ‘length’

3.2.2.3. Vowel Lengthening

/i:/

Initial	Medial	Final
i:m ‘grandfather’ (ALT. ɪm)	pi:m ‘knee’	θi: ‘fat’
-	ɕi:la ‘live’	si: ‘lion’
-	ʈhi:s ‘fall’	tʃə.li: ‘tongue’
	ni:dʒi ‘pillow’	-
	ɕi:ʃin ‘rolling pin’	

/u:/

Initial	Medial	Final
u:s ‘coriander’ (TONE)	hu:kp ‘owl’ (TONE)	bu: ‘breath’
-	ju:r ‘drainage’	kju: ‘vomit’
-	ku:be ‘thread	-
-	du:b ‘boatman’	-

/e:/

Medial
je:s ‘soap’
se:m ‘nail’
ne:go ‘earwax’
me:ba ‘not’
me:jo ‘skirt’

Hypothesis: Vowel length, when it occurs word finally, is phonemic and may be indicative of loss of a final consonant from Tibetan or clipping in case of compounds.

Examples

ra (Tib. *ra-ma*) ‘goat’, *ra:* (Tib. *ra gan*) ‘brass’
mi (Tib. *mi*) ‘person’, *mi:* (Tib. *mig*) ‘eye’
lu (Tib. *glu*) ‘song’, *lu:* (Tib. *lug*) ‘sheep’
f̥i (Tib. *b̥zi*) ‘four’, *f̥i:* (Tib. *f̥ig*) ‘louse’
be (Tib. *bod*) ‘Tibet’, *be:* (Tib. *bal*) ‘wool’
ḡi ‘this’, *ḡi:* ‘sit’
kʰo ‘he/she/it’, *kʰo:* ‘soup’
ni: ‘sleep’, *ni* ‘two’

3.2.2.4. Vowel Contrasts

/i/ & /u/ & /a/ & /o/ *kʰi* ‘dog’
 kʰu ‘carry a load’ eg. *di bag tɪl kʰu term* ‘carry this bag’
 kʰa 1. ‘mouth’ 2. ‘language’ 3. ‘ice’
 kʰo ‘he/she’

/i/ & /e/ *f̥i* ‘four’, ‘die’ (IMP)
 f̥e ‘speak’

/u/ & /o/ *lo* 1. ‘year’ 2. ‘lightening’ 3. ‘lungs’
 lu 1. ‘song’ 2. ‘a small insect’ 3. ‘a ritual performed for the snake deity’
 4. put, transfer

dʒo ‘mouse’
dʒu ‘bird’

mend̥u ‘blow pipe’
mend̥o ‘flower’

ḡomba ‘grass’
ḡomba ‘cheeks’ (*ḡoŋba*)

/i/ vs. /ə/ *sɪrb* ‘yellow’
 sərb ‘new’

/i/ vs. /e/ *f̥i* ‘four’, ‘die’ (IMP)
 f̥e ‘speak’

/ɪ/ & /e/ *mɪn* ‘NEG (future)’ eg. *ŋa to seɪg mɪn* ‘I will not eat’
 mɛn ‘mantra/chant’

tʃik ‘one’
tʃek ‘ginger’

/u/ vs. /a/	<i>lu</i> 1. ‘song’ 2. ‘a small insect’ 3. ‘a ritual performed for the snake deity’
	4. ‘put, transfer’
	<i>la</i> ‘mountain’
	<i>dʒu</i> ‘bird’
	<i>dʒa</i> ‘tea’
/ʊ/ & /a/	<i>nɔm</i> ‘oil’
	<i>nam</i> 1. ‘rain’ 2. ‘forest’ 3. ‘daughter in law’
/u/ vs. /e/	<i>tʰu</i> ‘water’
	<i>tʰe</i> ‘Unce script’ (Tibetan script)
/a/ vs. /o/	<i>am</i> ‘mother’
	<i>om</i> ‘milk’
	<i>ra</i> ‘goat’
	<i>ro</i> ‘corpse’
	<i>gaŋ</i> ‘above’
	<i>goŋ</i> ‘wear’
	<i>mɛŋda</i> ‘ember’
	<i>mɛŋdo</i> ‘flower’
/o/ & /ɔ/	<i>kop</i> ‘bag’
	<i>kɔp</i> ‘command’
	<i>ɖɔmb</i> ‘bear’
	<i>ɖomba</i> ‘cheeks’
	<i>ʃɔkp</i> ‘wing’
	<i>ʃjok</i> ‘asthama’

3.2.3. Allophones

1. /ɛ/ a tense half-open unrounded front vowel. Occurs in word medial position and very rarely word finally. It occurs as an allophone to /e/ in the word medial position when. It has no equivalent in English and maybe compared to Hindi /ɛ/ as in *pesa* ‘money’. The emergence of /ɛ/ seems to be a recent development and prompted by the presence of /ɔ/ in the language and therefore the need to preserve the phonetic symmetry in the vowel system of Memba.

Medial	Final
<i>p^hɛɖe</i> ‘there’	-
<i>ɪskɛɿ</i> ‘they’	-
<i>nɛɖʒa</i> ‘wife’	-
bɛrɛŋgən ‘to run away’	

[e] & [ɛ] *gɛŋo/gɛŋo* ‘old person’
 p^hɛɖe/p^hɛɖe ‘there’
 ɪskɛɿ/ɪskɛɿ ‘they’
 nɛɖʒa/nɛɖʒa ‘wife’
 t^hale/t^hale ‘ash’

[m] & [ŋ] *ŋɔmbu/mɔmbu* ‘green’
 kɔŋbo/kombo ‘Kongbo’ (place in Tibet from where Membas originally came)

3.2.4. Regressive Assimilation of Vowels

It has been observed that the first vowel in bi-syllabic Memba words and compounds undergo change in height as an influence of the following vowel. If the following vowel is low, the preceding vowel undergoes lowering. See for example, the following words:

nɪɖʒa -> nɛɖʒa ‘wife’/‘woman’ [vowel lowering]
 ʊɖ+ɖe ‘that’ + LOC -> ʊɖe ‘there’ -> ɔde ‘there’ [vowel lowering]
 p^hɪɖ+ɖe ‘that’+ LOC -> p^hɪɖe ‘there’ -> p^hɛɖe ‘there’-> p^hɛde ‘there’[lowering]

3.3. Syllable

3.3.1. Canonical Syllabic Structure

The canonical syllabic structure of Memba can be stated as (C) (j/r) V (C), where C represents consonant or consonant cluster, V represents vowel, and parentheses () represent that the segment is optional.

kju: ‘vomit’
kjurəm ‘sour’
gjaŋ^ham ‘100’
dre ‘rice’
dʀogo ‘stomach’
kəpgja ‘chair’

3.3.2. Syllabic Structures

Based on the collected data, the following permissible syllabic structures may be reported to be found in Memba.

Syllabic Structure	Examples
VV	əu ‘boy’ ei ‘question tag’
VC	om ‘milk’ ɪ̯t ‘that’ dʒu ‘bird’
VCC	orʃ ‘beans’ emʈʰ ‘doctor’
CV	gɔ ‘head’ k ^h a ‘mouth’ ni ‘two’ tʂo ‘food’
CCV	lho ‘south’ dre ‘rice’ kju: ‘vomit’ tso ‘lake’
CVC	ɖan ‘now’ lɪp ‘body’ lek ‘work’ k ^h ap ‘needle’
CVCC	lakp ‘hand’ dɔbʃ ‘square’ nək ^h s ‘ink’ tʃ ^h akp ‘infant’

Syllabic Structure	Examples
CCVC	<i>lham</i> ‘shoe’ <i>ʃʃɔb</i> ‘shell’ <i>drem</i> ‘ceiling’ <i>tsɪk</i> ‘joint’
CCVCC	<i>ʃʃɔkp</i> ‘wing’ <i>drəŋs</i> ‘honey’ <i>tsɪkp</i> ‘pillar’ <i>tsɔŋs</i> ‘bamboo shoot’
VCV	<i>adzi</i> ‘elder sister’ <i>imi</i> ‘grandfather’
VCVC	<i>etfər</i> ‘few’
CVCV	<i>ruɡo</i> ‘bone’
CVCVC	<i>ɖoŋɔn</i> ‘to flow’
CCVCV	<i>ɖroɡo</i> ‘stomach’
CVCCV	<i>mɛŋɖo</i> ‘flower’ <i>pakpə</i> ‘skin’ <i>ɖoŋba</i> ‘village’
CCVCVC	<i>ɡjagər</i> ‘non-tribal’
CCVCCV	<i>ɡjakpə</i> ‘fat’
CVCCVC	<i>ɡərgər</i> ‘round’

Table 6: Syllable structures and their examples

3.3.3. Consonant Sequences and Clusters

As evident from the permissible syllable structures in Memba, the maximum allowable consonant clusters consist of a series of two consonants. The word final coda position is the least restrictive with respect to consonant clusters and almost the complete inventory of consonant clusters occurs in this position.

The following list charts out the permissible consonant sequences and clusters in Memba. The term consonant sequence is used wherever in the word one consonant is followed by another, but not within the same syllable. This is indicated in the following chart by a black ✓. A consonant cluster, on the other hand, must be a group of consonants within the same syllable. They are indicated in the following chart by a red ✓. The consonants in the first column indicates the preceding vowel, while the consonants in the first row indicate the latter.

	p	p ^h	b	m	t̪	t̪ ^h	d̪	θ	ð	s	z	ts	t	t ^h	d	n	r	l	ʃ	tʃ	tʃ ^h	dʒ	ɲ	j	k	k ^h	g	ŋ	h
p	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
p ^h	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
b	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
m	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
t̪	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
t̪ ^h	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
d̪	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
θ	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
ð	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
s	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
z	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
ts	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
t	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
t ^h	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
d	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
n	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
r	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
l	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
ʃ	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
tʃ	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
tʃ ^h	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
dʒ	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
ɲ	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

	p	p ^h	b	m	t̪	t̪ ^h	d̪	θ	ð	s	z	ts	t	t ^h	d	n	r	l	ʃ	tʃ	tʃ ^h	dʒ	ɲ	j	k	k ^h	g	ŋ	h
j	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
k	✓	×	×	×	✓	×	×	✓	✓	✓	×	×	✓	✓	×	×	×	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	×	✓	✓	×	×	×	×
k ^h	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	✓	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	✓	×	×	×	×	×
g	×	×	×	✓	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	✓	×	×	×	×	×
ŋ	✓	✓	✓	×	×	×	✓	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	✓	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	✓	×	×
h	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
	p	p ^h	b	m	t̪	t̪ ^h	d̪	θ	ð	s	z	ts	t	t ^h	d	n	r	l	ʃ	tʃ	tʃ ^h	dʒ	ɲ	j	k	k ^h	g	ŋ	h

Table 7: Consonant Sequences and Clusters

3.3.3.1. Permissible consonant clusters and their distribution

pn, pʃ, ptʃ, pk

k^hi sɔpn ‘bark’

p^here gjaɲn ‘scream’

θ^hapn ‘early’

tʃɔpʃ ‘duck’

nɪstɔpʃ ‘twenty four’

sɔmdʒɔsɔpʃ ‘thirty four’

ŋɔpʃt̪^ham ‘fifty’

maptʃ ‘peacock’

leɔ tʃɛpk ‘cock-fight’

bl, bʃ

kəbl ‘skull’

t̪^hɛbʃ ‘button’

dɔbʃ ‘square’

tʃɪbʃ ‘fourteen’

ʃɪbʃt̪^ham ‘forty’

ŋɔpʃt̪^ham ‘fifty’

mp^h, mb, ms, mʃ, mtʃ^h

samp^h ‘bridge’ (samp)

lemp^h ‘wet’ (lemb)

lomb ‘road’

ɔmb ‘bear’

momb ‘down’

tʃut̪^hamb ‘ten’

tɔmb/t^hɔmb ‘narrow’

dams/drams/trams ‘molar’

ðoms/zoms ‘gathering or meeting’

dʊmf 'pumpkin'

dʒemfʰ 'scissors'
emfʰ 'doctor'

nd, nz, ndʒ, nk, nkʰ

mənd 'rifle'

ɲind 'crest of a flag pole'

əu nenz 'parrot'

ɲʊnz 'we'

kʰʊnz 'they'

ɖʊndʒʰam/dɪndʒʰamb '70'

bendʒ 'chilli' (Alternatively benð/bens)

drɪnk ʈaŋgən 'to think' ʃjenkʰ 'wide'

As stated earlier, and evident from the words presented here, the word final coda position is the least restrictive position for consonant clusters and they also tend to occur mostly in monosyllabic words.

Chapter 4: Morphology of Memba

4.1. Introduction

Before discussing the word structure of Memba, it seems essential to start by defining and exemplifying some of the important morphological concepts, such as morphemes. Lehmann (1989:7) defines morphemes as the parts of meaning of a word. These parts when strung together in a certain order or manner as permissible in a language, to constitute words. The morphemes of a language make up the smallest unit of meaning. The English word ‘plants’, for example, comprises of the two morphemes ‘plant’ and ‘-s’, where the former is a reference to a class of living organisms and the latter indicates plural number. Morphemes are also often described as the smallest linguistic pieces that serve a grammatical function, which Aronoff (2011) believes, is a good definition to start with, however, does not include all morphemes. Morphological analysis of a language involves identifying its morphemes, how they are formed and what roles they perform, and also determining the relationship between various morphemes that constitute a word, and the rules that govern them.

If we consider the Hindi words *larkijā* ‘girls’ and *mahilāē* ‘women’, the meaning of the two words can be analysed as consisting of two parts (separated by hyphens): *larkī-jā* and *mahilā-ē*, where the first part of both the words represent their lexical meaning, which are ‘girl’ and ‘woman’ respectively, while latter part in both the words represents the grammatical meaning of the plurality and feminine gender. This brings us to the distinction between lexical morphemes and grammatical morphemes, where the former is not phonologically bound to another morpheme, can take stress and may be uttered in isolation. The lexical morphemes usually form the syntactic head of a phrase and define its syntactic role. The grammatical morphemes, on the other hand, must be bound to another morpheme, cannot take stress and do not hold any meaning independently. These grammatical morphemes indicate relational or grammatical meaning (Andvik, 2010:21). The lexical morphemes act as roots or stems to which grammatical morphemes attach and form the bulk of the lexicon of a language.

Another thing to note about the two Hindi examples is that the same meaning of plurality is represented by two phonologically distinct forms. The actual phonological realisation of a morpheme is referred to as a morph (Greek: shape/form). This must be differentiated from the

notion of morpheme, which represents the abstract meaning or syntactic role of a word, as perceived by the mind. In the above Hindi examples, the morpheme, that is the grammatical meaning of plurality, is represented by the two different morphs: ‘-jā’ and ‘-ē’. The two morphs may also be called allomorphs as they represent the same grammatical meaning. The choice of the morph in Hindi nouns is phonologically conditioned and depends on the gender and the final sound of the nominal stem to which the morphemes attach. These rules that determine how the morphemes are realised differ across languages and form the unique Morphology of a language. One of the most prevalent ways in which morphemes are realised in languages is through affixation, as in the above Hindi examples.

In accordance with the definition given above, Memba morphemes can be divided into lexical and grammatical morphemes. Lexical morphemes make up the majority of words in the language and consist of four lexical classes; the larger open classes of nouns and verbs, and the smaller closed classes of adjectives and adverbs. A small closed lexical class of pronouns is also found. The grammatical morphemes are fewer in number and are a functional class. The discussion in this chapter focuses mainly on the lexical morphemes of Memba. References to grammatical morphemes are made as and when they attach to the lexical stems. The following discussion on the various word classes encompasses the morphological processes involved in the formation of these lexical stems and the underlying structure and rules that determine the occurrence and distribution of various morphemes. Based on their syntactic role and the inflections they can take, Memba words may be divided into the following lexical classes.

4.2. Morphological features of Tibeto-Burman Languages

Bauman (1975:4) summarises the morphological stereotype of Tibeto-Burman (henceforth TB) languages as analytic, comprising monosyllabic roots strung together into higher syntactic order, and a lack of inflectional and derivational morphology. He further adds that TB languages tend to be semantically terse and have very few redundancies. He lists the following typical morphological features of the TB languages:

1. The sentence-final position of the verb, which universally implies other syntactic features such as postpositions, preposed modifiers (Greenberg, 1966, quoted in *ibid.*), or modal elements following the verb (Steele, 1975, quoted in *ibid.*)

2. The monosyllabicity of lexical roots.
3. The absence or sparseness of derivational processes; which in turn implies abundant usage of word compounding process.
4. The similar sparseness of inflectional process.
5. The general absence of morphophonemic alternation, with the notable exception of verb stem alternation in Tibetan associated with tense/aspect distinction, which is conspicuous and unexplained.
6. The morphologically unmarked status of tense, separable from aspectual notions.
7. The paucity of affixal processes blurs the distinction between nouns and verbs, as they exist in their various declensions and conjugal forms in Indo-European languages.
8. Absence of gender categories in nouns and pronouns.
9. Absence of agreement between nouns and verbs or adjectives due to lack of inflection.

4.3. Nouns

Memba nouns are those lexical items that refer to an entity or participant in discourse and form the syntactic argument of the verb. While the majority of Memba nouns are monosyllabic, they also tend to be bimorphemic and disyllabic like other Sino-Tibetan languages (DeLancey 2017:372). Morphologically, Memba nouns inflect to indicate number, gender and case. Syntactically, the Memba nouns occur with determiners, adjectives and postpositions and function as the following:

- i. subject of a sentence
- ii. object of a verb and postposition
- iii. complement of a verb
- iv. modifier of a noun in a compound noun
- v. constituent of a conjunct verb

Nouns make the largest and open word class in Memba. For a list of Memba nouns, see Appendix 2. From a language endangerment point of view, nouns are the most threatened word class in the sense that they are the first to be replaced by equivalents from other languages. This follows from the increasing domain of usage of the other tongues along with the ever growing inventory of modern inventions and non indigenous things and concepts that do not have a

word to describe them in their mother tongue. Younger Memba speakers tend to use English and Hindi nouns while the structure of their sentences remains Memba.

4.3.1. Gender

Gender is not a grammatical feature in Memba. Nouns do not inherently have gender and only certain entities that have natural or biological gender are morphologically marked for the same. This include human beings and animals and the same gender marking affixes apply to both human and non-human nouns. The gender marked by using distinct affixes for feminine and masculine has been referred to as morphological gender. However, the terms for representing male and female genders in human beings and certain animals may sometimes be completely different words. This is referred to as lexical gender. See the following examples:

MALE

<i>k^hjok bɔs</i>	‘man’
<i>əu</i>	‘boy’
<i>k^hjok</i>	‘husband’
<i>ab</i>	‘father’
<i>imi</i>	‘grandfather’
<i>dʒapɔ</i>	‘cock’
<i>lanɔ</i>	‘ox’
<i>əu pɪŋja</i>	‘brother’

FEMALE

<i>nedʒa bɔs</i>	‘woman’
<i>bɔm</i>	‘girl’
<i>nedʒa</i>	‘wife’
<i>am</i>	‘mother’
<i>ɛji</i>	‘grandmother’
<i>dʒom</i>	‘hen’
<i>gɔɖa</i>	‘cow’
<i>bɔm pɪŋja</i>	‘sister’

The affixes used for indicating male gender are *-ab* or *p^ho-* and for female gender are *-am* and *mo-*. *-ab* and *-am* are suffixes derived from Memba terms for ‘father’ and ‘mother’ which have broadened in their meaning to refer to masculine and feminine respectively. *am* is also used as a common term of reference for all elderly women (mother like). It may be used in its bare form to refer to any old woman or specifically along with her name to refer to a particular woman, as in Am Lulu or Am Drema.

The prefixes *p^ho-* (Alternate forms in Tibetan languages: *po/bo/pa/ba*) and *mo-* (Alternate form: *ma*) are Tibetan affixes which are less commonly used, and mostly only by elder speakers. DeLancey (2017:372) in his analysis of Tibetan *pa/ba* and *ma* (less commonly *po/bo* and *mo*) refers to these as ‘synchronically meaningless suffixes’ that get attached to monosyllabic noun stems, that is to say, they bear no meaning as such and seem to be a feature of earlier stages of the language. DeLancey (*loc. cit.*) gives the following examples to show that these affixes carry no meaning in particular, *ʃa-ba* ‘deer’, *o-ma* ‘milk’ and *k^hra-ma* ‘window’. He also notes the usage of the suffix to indicate gender on nouns with natural gender as in, *bod-pa* ‘Tibetan (person)’ and *bod-ma* ‘female Tibetan’ or *rgjal-po* ‘king’ and *rgjal-mo* ‘queen’. According to the convention, the default gender of the unmarked stem is interpreted to be masculine, and the feminine marker *ma/mo* must be added to specify female gender. For example, *k^hi* ‘dog (male)’ and *k^hi-mo* ‘bitch’ (*loc. cit.*), *pɪŋja* ‘brother’ and *bɔm pɪŋja* ‘sister’ (bɔm ‘girl’). It is interesting to note that while Tibetan uses the gender marker as a suffix, the morphemes *p^ho* and *mo* is mostly used as prefix in Memba, but may also be used as a suffix. Example: *p^ho-k^hi* ‘dog’ and *mo-k^hi* ‘bitch’, *rah-p^ho* ‘male goat’ and *rah-mo* ‘female goat’. (Badu 2002:3)

A few other gender affixes such as *foki* and *khyub* for male, *moki* for female, as in *k^hi foki* ‘dog’, *k^hi moki* ‘bitch’ and *ta khyub* ‘male horse’ reported in Goiba (2020:65) could not be verified to be in use among the speakers. *foki* and *moki* seem to be erroneously analysed as singular morphemes and appear to be phonetic variants of *p^ho-k^hi* and *mo-k^hi* as analysed in the preceding paragraph. While /f/ is a non-native sound, some speakers tend to pronounce *p^h* as *f*, a common sound change found in free variation across language families in India due to the influence of English and Perso-Arabic languages.

4.3.2. Number

Memba has a two way number system, that is singular-plural number. While the singular nouns remain unmarked, the clitic *kes* is attached to indicate plural number. It is important to note that only the nouns inflect for number and the verbs and adjectives do not inflect for number agreement with the noun. Following are some examples of plural nouns:

<i>mi</i> : ‘person’/‘man’	<i>mi: kes</i> ‘people’
<i>lanɡo</i> ‘ox’	<i>lanɡo kes</i> ‘oxen’
<i>k^hi</i> ‘dog’	<i>k^hi kes</i> ‘dogs’

<i>p^ha</i> ‘pig’	<i>p^ha kes</i> ‘pigs’
<i>tɔkɔ</i> ‘child’	<i>tɔkɔ kes</i> ‘kids’
<i>bɔm pɪŋja</i> ‘sister’	<i>bɔm pɪŋja kes</i> ‘sisters’
<i>dɔŋba</i> ‘village’	<i>dɔŋba kes</i> ‘villages’

The suffix *-kes* also appears in case of pronouns to indicate plurality, as in:

<i>ŋa</i> ‘I’	<i>ŋɔn kes</i> ‘we’
<i>k^hjo</i> ‘you’	<i>k^hɔn kes</i> ‘you. PL’
<i>k^ho</i> ‘he’/‘she’/‘it’	<i>k^hɔn kes/ ɔt kes</i> ‘they’
<i>dɪ</i> ‘this’	<i>dɪ kes</i> ‘these’

Badu (2002:2) mentions *keɖe*, *ɬ^həmdʒe* and *laga* as plural marking suffixes in Memba. While *keɖe* could not be verified to be in use, the other two are not plural markers but quantitative adjectives as confirmed through collected data. *ɬ^həmdʒe* means ‘all’, *laga* means ‘many’.

4.3.3. Case

Case in grammar is identified as the syntactic and semantic relation between the nouns and the verbs or between the nouns in a sentence. The syntactic relations refer to the function of a noun as subject of an intransitive verb, or the subject, direct object or indirect object of a transitive verb. Semantic relations refer to the role of the noun as agent, patient, recipient or possessor. These relations are morphologically marked on the nouns in a majority of languages or may be expressed through the word order in some others such as English. Some other languages may express case relations through the use of adpositions. Languages which do not use overt markers to express case relations have a strict word order as it is only through the order of words that the syntactic role of the different constituents becomes evident. Regardless of whether it is overtly marked or not in a language, the term case refers to all these relations between the different arguments of a verb. Based on the various semantic roles that Memba nouns may take the following cases along with their markers are identified (See Table 8). The case markers in Memba always attach as a suffix or postposition to the noun whose role they express in a sentence.

Case	Marker
Nominative	Unmarked
Accusative	/-l/, /-ʊl/, /-ɖɪl/ (Plural /ɖɪsɪl/)
Dative	/-l/, /-ɖɪl/
Genitive	/-k/, /-ɖɪk/
Instrumental	/-ne/, /-nek/, /-ɖɪg/, /-ɖɪgi/
Locative	/-ɖe/, /-te/
Ablative	/-ne/
Comitative	/ɣʊmbu/, /ɣʊmu/
Benefactive	/-ɖɪl/, /-ɖɪg/

Table 8: Memba Case Markers

4.3.3.1. Nominative Case

The nominative case is the bare, uninflected form of the noun when it functions as the subject of a sentence. The noun in nominative case performs the semantic role of the agent of the action described by the verb. The noun in the following sentences exhibit the nominative case in Memba:

1. ɲa ɲɪm mendo gob nu
 1SG sun flower like be.PRS
 ‘I like sunflower.’

2. ɲa kiro ba/ɪn
 1SG Kiro be
 ‘I am Kiro.’

3. ɖɔrdʒi ɲi ɖɪn (go)
 Dorji sleep PRF AUX
 ‘Dorji is sleeping’

4. kʰjo hor taŋgən
 2SG snore
 ‘You snore.’

4.3.3.2. Accusative Case

The accusative case is the form used in certain languages to mark the direct object of a transitive verb. In Memba the suffixes /-dɪl/, /-l/ and /-ɪl/ are used to mark this syntactic function. The choice of suffix used for a noun is phonologically conditioned and depends on the word final segment of the word it attaches to. The noun in accusative case performs the semantic role of the patient, that is to say the action being described by the verb is being performed on the person or thing in accusative case. The following sentences exhibit the accusative case in Memba.

5. dawa sange-l tʰoŋ ba
 Dawa Sangey-ACC see AUX
 ‘Dawa saw Sangey.’

6. pasan kʰorɔŋ tɔkto dɪl jak dʒi: ba
 Pasang 3.PL.GEN child ACC love do AUX
 ‘Pasang loves his children.’

7. ŋa kʰo-k pɪŋja dɪl tʰoŋdʒɔŋ
 1SG 3SG-GEN brother ACC see.PRF
 ‘I saw her brother.’

8. ŋa-l dʒa kop tʃɪk gɔi
 1SG-ACC tea cup one need
 ‘I want a cup of tea.’

9. dɪ kes-ɪl kube dɪgi dam-ʃ
 this PL-ACC thread INS tie-IMP
 ‘Tie these with a cotton thread.’

10. dɪ-l kube dɪgi dam-ʃ
 this-ACC thread INS tie-IMP
 ‘Tie these with a cotton thread.’

Since the accusative case in Memba is overtly marked and the marker attaches directly to the patient, it allows for a flexible word order as in:

11. pema-l laŋdʒɪn seɪ ʃaba
 Pema-ACC elephant kill PFV
 ‘Pema was killed by an elephant.’

as opposed to:

12. laŋdʒɪn pema-l seɪ ʃaba
 elephant Pema-ACC kill PFV
 ‘An elephant killed Pema.’

Such reordering is useful in changing the focus or adding emphasis on a particular argument in the sentence and is used, as in this example, in passive constructions.

4.3.3.3. Dative Case

The dative case is the form used in certain languages to mark the indirect object of a transitive verb. In Memba the suffixes /-dɪl/, /-l/ and /-ɪl/ are used to mark this syntactic function. The choice of suffix used for a noun is phonologically conditioned and depends on the word final segment of the word it attaches to. Semantically the dative case refers to the recipient or beneficiary of the action being described by the verb, or the thing referred to by the direct object of the sentence. The markers for accusative and dative case are the same and when the verb takes two objects, the indirect object is overtly marked as dative while the direct object is left unmarked.

13. pasəŋ kʰo-rɔŋ tɕkto ɖil jak dʒi: ba
 Pasang 3.PL-REF child DAT love do AUX
 ‘Pasang loves his children.’

14. kʰɔnz tʰamdʒe-l gorɔm tɕutʰam tʰam tɕe
 3PL all-DAT money hundred REDUP give
 ‘Give hundred rupees to each one of them.’

15. miro kʰo-l mendo tɕe ba
 Miro 3SG-ACC flower give AUX
 ‘Miro gave a flower to him.’

4.3.3.4. Genitive case

The genitive case indicates the semantic relationship of possessor and possessed between two nouns or between a noun and a pronoun. Syntactically, the noun or pronoun marked with the genitive case modifies another noun and shares an attributive relationship with it. The markers /-k/, /ɖɪk/ are used to mark the genitive case.

16. kʰo-k mɪŋ ɖordʒi ba
 3SG-GEN name Dorjee AUX
 ‘His name is Dorjee.’

17. ꞑe-k go ꞑe nan (HON)
 I.GEN head LOC pain
 ‘My head is aching.’

18. saŋge-k bum ꞑiŋja
 Sangey-GEN sister
 ‘Sangey’s sister’

19. gɔmo-k/gom-ꞑik kəbdʒa tʃa dɪn
 door-GEN latch break PFV
 ‘The door’s latch is broken.’

4.3.3.5. Instrumental Case

A noun in the instrumental case represents the means or tool through which the action described by the verb is carried out or achieved. The postpositions /ꞑiŋ/ and /nek/ are used in Memba to denote the instrumental case on a noun.

20. kʰo ut ʃiŋ ꞑil tər ꞑiŋ tsəp dɪn
 3SG that tree ACC axe INS cut PFV
 OR

21. kʰo ʃiŋ ꞑil tər ne tsap ba/ʃas
 3SG tree ACC axe INS cut AUX
 ‘He cut the tree with an axe.’

22. ɲa bas nek lob
 1SG bus INS come.PRF
 OR

23. ɲa bas ne leb/lep
 1SG bus INS come.PRF
 ‘I came by bus.’

24. ɲʊn kes ꞑo nek kʰim tʃop
 3P PL stone INS house make.PFV
 OR

25. ɲʊn kʰim ꞑil ꞑo ꞑigi ne tʃop
 3P house ACC stone with INS make.PRF
 ‘We built the house with stones.’

4.3.3.6. Locative Case

The locative case indicates the location, position or spatial orientation of a noun with respect to either the action or state denoted by the verb, or in relation to another noun. Memba has a

generic locative marker /-ɖe/ which denote the meanings ‘in’, ‘at’, ‘on’ and ‘by’. The following examples exhibit the use of this marker in this sense.

26. k^{ho} k^{hm} ɖe nu
 3SG house in be.PRS
 ‘He is in the house’

27. pek go ɖe nan
 1SG.GEN head LOC pain
 ‘There is pain in my head.’

28. 00a 0ebedɣɪk kəri ɖe lu
 salt very little curry LOC put.IMP
 ‘Add a little salt to the curry.’

In addition to the generic locative suffix, there are other specific postpositional markers which indicate the relative position of a noun with reference to another noun in the sentence. Some of these specific postpositions in Memba are as follows:

i. **0e ɖe/ lo ɖe/gaŋ ɖe-** ‘on top of’/‘above’

29. tu ʃɪŋ 0e ɖe ɖɪn
 monkey tree on top of sit.PROG
 ‘The monkey is on the tree.’

30. ʃɪŋ gaŋ ɖe tu dɣɪg nu
 tree on top of LOC monkey one be. PRS
 ‘There is a monkey on top of the tree.’

31. k^{ho} ʃe-n əm/ama dɣɪk dorɔŋ gaŋ ɖe ɲɪ-dm
 3SG say-PRF woman one floor above LOC sleep-PROG
 ‘She said that the woman is sleeping on the floor.’

32. paŋaŋ uɬ kɔpɣja gaŋ ɖe ɖi-s ko
 Pasang that chair above LOC sit-PFV AUX
 ‘Pasang sat on that chair.’

33. tɕɔks gaŋ ɖe peɬ ɲɪ ʃan
 table above LOC book two be.PRS
 ‘There are two books on the table.’

34. eli: nakp cɨk rɨb lo ɖe di-s
 cat black one wall on LOC sit-PFV
 ‘The black cat sat on the wall.’

ii. **naŋ ɖe-** ‘in’/‘into’

35. k^ho naŋ ɖe θθa etɕər dʒɨg lu
 curry in LOC salt little one put.IMP
 ‘Add a pinch of salt to the curry.’

36. k^hjo naŋ ɖe me-le
 3SG inside LOC NEG-come
 ‘Do not come inside.’

iii. **zam ɖe/dam ɖe-** ‘near’

37. ɲek k^hɨm tɕ^hu/jargəb zam/dam ɖe ju/jʊɨ ba
 1SG.GEN house river near LOC be AUX
 ‘My house is near the river.’

iv. **o ɖe-** ‘under’/‘below’

38. eli: tɕəks o ɖe nu
 cat table under LOC be.PRS
 ‘The cat is under the table’

39. samp o ɖe tɕ^hu nu
 bridge under LOC water be.PRS
 ‘Water is under the bridge.’

v. **sər ɖe-** ‘beside’/‘in front of’

40. tɕ^hu la sər ɖe nu
 river mountain beside LOC be.PRS
 ‘The river is beside the mountain’

41. ʊdɔk k^hɨm gom sər ɖe nu
 his house temple near LOC be.PRS
 ‘His house is in front of the temple.’

vi. **lak ɖe-** ‘close to’/‘with’ (Literally: ‘in hand’)

42. ʊdɔk p^hon nəmbər ɲa lak ɖe me-ba
 his phone number 1SG hand LOC NEG-AUX
 ‘I don’t have his phone number.’

v. **gjab ɬe/gjab ɬe-** ‘behind’

43. ɣʊnzʊk labər la gjap ɬe ju-ba
 our school mountain back LOC be-AUX
 ‘Our school is behind the mountain.’

4.3.3.7. Ablative Case

The ablative case denotes the removal, separation or motion away of something from a source.

The postposition /ne/ is used to mark the ablative case in Memba.

44. k^ho ɾʌnəgər ne loɪ ba
 3SG Itanagar LOC come AUX
 ‘She will come from Itanagar.’

45. loma kes ʃɪŋ tse ne t^hi dɪn
 leaf PL tree break LOC fall PROG
 ‘Leaves are falling from the tree.’

46. ɲa ɲaraŋ bum pɪŋja k^hɪm ne drɔmʃ ɲi k^hʊ.s
 1SG my sister house INS pumpkin two bring.PFV-1SG
 ‘I brought two pumpkins from my sister’s house.’

4.3.3.8. Comitative Case

The comitative case indicates the relation of accompaniment. It is marked by /nɔmbu/ or /ɲɔmu/ in Memba.

47. kiro miro ɲɔmbu ʈaʊn ɖro ba
 Kiro Miro with town go AUX
 OR
 kiro miro ɲɔmu ʈaʊn ɖros
 Kiro Miro with town go.PFV
 ‘Kiro went to town with Miro.’

4.3.3.9. Benefactive Case

The benefactive case expresses the meaning that the noun it refers to is benefited by the action described in the sentence. This case appears on the indirect object in the sentence, and is sometimes incorporated within the dative case. It is marked by /ɖɪl/ and /-ɖɪg/ in Memba.

48. ab k^horoŋ əʊ ɖɪl θemθala k^hʊn
 father his boy BEN toy buy.PRF
 ‘Father bought a toy for his son.’

49. k^ho k^horoŋ k^him mi ɖɪŋ lek dʒi ba
 3SG his house people BEN work do AUX
 ‘He works for his family.’

4.4. Pronouns

Syntactically, pronouns are the class of words that can substitute the noun or the noun phrase and that refers to either the participants in the discourse, such as ‘you’ and ‘I’, or to someone or something previously identified in the discourse. In the latter case, pronouns have an anaphoric reference, that is to say, they refer to a person or thing mentioned earlier in the discourse. Memba pronouns are a small class of words, but perform a wide range of functions and contain a lot of information as they inflect for person, number and case. In their bare form, the pronouns can be used as the subject of a sentence. The following types of pronouns can be identified in Memba:

4.4.1. Personal Pronouns

Personal pronouns are those pronouns that refer to a particular grammatical person in a discourse: the first person (I, we), second person (you) or third person (he, she, it). The personal pronoun may not necessarily refer to humans only. They can also refer to animals and inanimate objects. In addition to grammatical person, Memba pronouns also inflect for number as in the following table:

Person Number	Singular	Dual	Plural
1	ŋa ‘I’	ŋʊɲi ‘the two of us’	ŋʊn (kes) ‘we’
2	k ^h jo/ tʃ ^h o ‘you’	k ^h jʊɲi ‘the two of you’	k ^h ʊn (kes) ‘you PL.’
3	k ^h o ‘he/she’ ʊt/ɪt ‘it’ ɖi ‘this’	k ^h ʊɲi ‘the two of them’/ ‘each other’	k ^h ʊn (kes) ‘they’

Table 9: Memba Personal Pronouns

The dual number is not grammatical in Memba and in case of pronouns it is formed by the compounding of singular forms with the word for 2, that is *ɲi*. It occurs only in the bare form as mentioned in table 9 and as reciprocal pronouns with the meanings ‘one another’ or ‘each other’ (See example sentences 60, 61 and 64). Reciprocal pronouns along with reflexive pronouns (Table 10) form the category of anaphors, that is, expressions whose interpretation depends on another specific expression referred to earlier in the discourse.

Apart from inflecting for person and number, Memba pronouns also take several case markings. Table 10 below shows case inflection on Memba personal pronouns. Some theorists consider the following case marked pronouns as different subtypes of pronouns.

Case Person	1 SG	1 PL	2 SG	2 PL	3 SG	3 PL
Nominative	ɲa	ɲʊn	kʰjo	kʰjʊn	kʰo	kʰʊn
Accusative	ɲal	ɲʊnzʊl	kʰjol/tʰʊl	kʰjʊndʒʊl/ tʰʊnzʊl	kʰol/ʊdʊl	kʰʊnz kesəl/ʊt kesəl
Dative	ɲal	ɲʊnzʊl	kʰjol/tʰʊl	kʰjʊndʒʊl/ tʰʊnzʊl	kʰol/ʊdʊl	kʰʊnz kesəl/ʊt kesəl
Genitive/ Possessive	ɲak/ɲek	ɲak/ɲek	kʰjok/tʰʊok	kʰjʊndʒʊk/ tʰʊnzʊk	kʰok/ʊdʊk/ kʰorsʊk	kʰʊnzʊk/ kʰorsʊk
Reflexive	naraɲ	naraɲ	kʰjoraɲ/ kʰjoroɲ/ kʰjorsuraɲ	kʰjʊndʒʊra ɲ	kʰoraɲ/ kʰoroɲ- kʰorsu	kʰʊnzuraɲ

Table 10: Case on Personal Pronouns

The following sentences exhibit the use of personal Memba pronouns in different case roles:

50. kʰo ɲa-l dʒom dʒi-n
 3SG 1SG-ACC love do
 ‘She loves me.’

51. kʰun ɲʊnz-ʊl dʒom dʒi-n
 3PL 1PL-ACC love do
 ‘They love us.’

52. ηa $k^h o-k$ $p\eta ja$ $d\dot{u}l$ $t^h o\eta-d\dot{z}o\eta$
 1SG 3SG-GEN brother ACC see-PRF
 ‘I saw her brother.’
53. $k^h \ddot{u}n$ $k^h o\text{rsu}-k$ $k^h im$ $gjab$ $\underset{.}{d}e$ p^ha $s\ddot{o}m$ $\int a-n$
 3PL 3PL-GEN house back LOC pig three keep
 ‘They kept three pigs in their backyard.’
54. $k^h jo$ $\eta o\eta b\ddot{u}$ $\int i$ $k^h \ddot{u}-n$
 2SG bamboo four bring
 ‘You brought four bamboo.’
55. ηa $\eta a-ran$ go lip $t^h r\ddot{u}-b$
 1SG 1SG-REFL head body wash-PFV.1SG
 ‘I bathed myself.’
56. $k^h jo-ro\eta$ ran $d\dot{z}i$
 2SG-REF REFL do
 ‘Do it yourself.’
57. $k^h o$ $k^h o-ro\eta$ $k^h o-ro\eta$ ne k^ha $t^h e-n$
 3SG 3SG-REFL 3SG-REFL INS talk speak
 ‘She talked to herself.’
58. gom $k^h o-ro\eta$ $k^h o-ro\eta$ (ne) p^he-s
 door 3SG-REFL 3SG-REFL INS open-PRF
 ‘The door opened by itself.’
59. $k^h \ddot{u}n$ (kes) $k^h o\text{rs}\ddot{u}-k$ kor ne $\int e-n$
 3PL PL themselves-GEN about INS speak
 ‘They told me about themselves.’
60. $drema$ dan $pasan$ $k^h \ddot{u}-\eta i$ $mi: teri$ $d\dot{z}i$ dm
 Drema and Pasang t 3-two look do PROG
 ‘Drema and Pasang are/were looking at each other.’
61. $\eta u-\eta i$ gom $\underset{.}{d}e$ $t^h \ddot{o}m-d\dot{z}o\eta$
 1-two temple LOC meet.PFV
 ‘We (two) met each other at the temple.’
62. $\underset{.}{d}a$ $k^h \ddot{u}nz-\ddot{u}l$ $\theta em \theta e$ $t\underset{.}{f}u$
 now 3PL-ACC play IMP
 ‘Let them play.’

63. k^hʊn kes k^hjʊnz-ʊl t^hʊŋ-s
 3PL PL 2PL-ACC see-PRF
 ‘They saw you (PL.)’
64. k^hjo ŋʊ-ni ni dɪl t^hʊŋ-s
 you 1-two two ACC see-PRF
 ‘You saw the two of us.’

4.4.2. Demonstrative Pronouns

Demonstrative pronouns include words like ‘this’ and ‘that’ that point to specific entities while distinguishing them from other entities. For example, in the sentence ‘I want to eat this apple’, the speaker is referring to a specific apple and not the others. The demonstrative pronouns are often deictic and are therefore specific to a certain frame of reference. In the previous sentence, the phrase ‘this apple’ has the underlying sense that the apple being referred to is somewhere close to the speaker and within sight. If the apple were to be far away or out of sight the pronoun ‘that’ would be used to refer to it instead. Apart from deictic reference, demonstrative pronouns may also have anaphoric reference, where the physical location of the speaker is irrelevant and the entity being referred to has been previously mentioned in the discourse. Memba has the following demonstrative pronouns.

	Proximal	Distal
Singular	ɖi ‘this’/‘he/she/it’ Also used as a determiner ɪ/ɪɖ ‘this’ (very few occurrences)	ʊɖ ‘that’/‘he/she/it’ Also used as a determiner p ^h ɪɖ/p ^h ɪɖ ‘that’ ((very few occurrences)
Plural	ɖi kes ‘these’	ʊɖ kes ‘those’/‘they’ p ^h ɪɖ kes ‘they’

Table 11: Memba Demonstrative Pronouns

Memba has a very minimalistic system of demonstrative pronouns with a two way distinction, proximal and distal, depending on the proximity of the speaker to the referent. The Memba demonstrative pronouns also inflect for number. It is interesting to note that unlike many languages the demonstrative pronouns here do not make any distinction based on animacy and

the same forms are used for humans as well as non-human and inanimate entities. The demonstrative pronouns are, in fact, the same as third person personal pronouns. The following sentences provide examples of usage of Memba demonstrative pronouns:

65. di gɔɖa (am) ba ɔne ʊt/pʰɪt laŋgo ba
 this cow FEM AUX and that ox AUX
 ‘This is a cow and that is an ox.’

66. pasaŋ ʊt kɔpkja gaŋ ɖe di-s
 Pasang that chair above LOC sit-PRF
 ‘Pasang sat on that chair.’

67. ɪɖ su-k kʰɪm ba?
 this who-GEN house AUX
 ‘Whose house is this?’

68. ɖi kes-ɪl kube ɖɪgi dam-ʃ
 this PL-ACC thread INS tie-IMP
 ‘Tie these with a thread.’

69. di lekdʒɪŋgən kes-ɪl kʰɪm tʃo-la do ŋobʃtʰam gon
 DET labour PL-ACC house construct-INF stone fifty need
 ‘The labourers need fifty stones to build a house.’

70. ʊt kes ɲɔŋbu tsep tɪn
 3 PL bamboo cut PROG
 ‘They are cutting bamboo.’

4.4.3. Interrogative Pronouns

An interrogative pronoun or question word is a function word used to ask a question. Table 12 lists the interrogative pronouns found in Memba:

Memba	English
tʃi	what
gaɖe	where
su	who
gazaŋ	when
gəɖ	which
suk	whose
sul	whom

Memba	English
tʃi dʒɪn le/ tʃi dʒɪŋgən (Literally: what do for/ for what work)	why
gadʒɪn	how
godʒu	how much
gozu	how many

Table 12: Memba Interrogative Pronouns

Some interrogative sentences in Memba are as follows:

71. k^hjo-k mɪŋ tʃi mei/ba?
 2SG-GEN name what be.PRS
 ‘What is your name?’

72. k^hjo-k k^hɪm gaɖe jɔɪ-ba?
 2SG-GEN house where be.PRS
 ‘Where is your house?’

73. k^hjo-k k^hɪm gət ba?
 2SG-GEN house which be.PRS
 ‘Which is your house?’

74. ɪɖ su ba?
 3SG who be.PRS
 ‘Who is he?’

75. ɪd su-k k^hɪm ba?
 this who-GEN house AUX
 ‘Whose house is that?’

76. k^hjo su-l ɖeb nu?
 you who-ACC like AUX
 ‘Whom do you like?’

77. k^hjo gazaŋ ɖro-gi?
 2SG when go-FUT
 ‘When will you go?’

78. k^hjo ɖɪlli tʃi dʒɪŋ-gən ɖro-i
 2SG Delhi what do-INF go-FUT
 ‘Why are you going to Delhi?’

79. ʊt̪ t̪i dʒm le dʒju ʃa ba?
 she what do for leave PFV AUX

OR

80. kʰo ʃʊŋle t̪ʃikʊrne jutʌŋ ba?
 3SG job why leave AUX
 ‘Why did she leave the job?’

81. dordʒi gandʒm t̪ʰi ba?
 Dorji how fall AUX
 ‘How did Dorji fall?’

82. sange-l gorʊm godʒu t̪ʰop ba?
 Sangey-ACC money how much receive AUX
 ‘How much money did Sangey get?’

83. kʰjo-l kɪtʌb gozu goi?
 you-ACC book how many want/need
 ‘How many books do you want?’

4.4.4. Indefinite Pronouns

The indefinite pronouns differ from all other types of pronouns discussed so far, as they do not refer to a specific person or thing. They may be used for a person or a thing, both of which have related but different forms. They may be used for countable as well as uncountable nouns. Some indefinite pronouns found in Memba are listed in Table 13 below.

Memba	English
t̪ʰamdʒe	everbody/everything/all
sʊ ʌŋ	nobody, anybody
sʊ ina	somebody
t̪ʃi ina	something
t̪ʃi ʌŋ	nothing, anything
gombu	all
t̪ʃəla	many (uncountable)
laga	many (countable)
jaŋ ne- jaŋ ne	neither-nor

Table 13: Memba Indefinite Pronouns

84. k^{ho} k^hazaŋ ne tʃiŋaŋ sa mo-səŋ
 3SG yesterday ABL anything food NEG-eat
 ‘She has not eaten anything since yesterday.’
85. ŋa-l so aŋ t^həŋ mʊ-səŋ
 1SG-ACC nobody see NEG-eat
 ‘Nobody saw me.’
86. t^hamdʒe jɪkju d̪e d̪e-n məna
 everybody examination LOC pass NEG
 ‘Everyone did not pass the examination.’
87. jaŋ ne k^hjo jaŋ ne ŋga d̪i k^ha dɪl gandʒɪn ʃisʊk-ba
 neither 2SG nor 1SG this problem ACC solve-AUX
 ‘Neither I nor you can solve the problem.’
88. su ina dʒɪg hor taŋ-gən
 some one snore-INF
 ‘Someone snores.’

4.5. Verb

The verbs along with the nouns, form the biggest word classes in Memba, and are open word classes. Verbs have been defined as words which convey an action (physical or mental), an occurrence or a state of being. The following tables list some verbs of Memba

Table 14: Memba Action Verbs

Memba	English
tʃ ^h u dʒãŋgən	to fetch water (go and get)
jomŋgʊn/ jom	to float
p ^h əɾəŋgən	to fly
k ^h əŋgʊn Ləŋgən (to take)	to get (come and get)
drəŋgʊn/dəŋgʊn	to go
gɟũ:ŋgʊn	to run

Memba	English
bereṅgən/ beren dōṅgən	to run away
ke dʒamṅən/ke dʒəmgən	to swim
ṁṁṅgən	to walk (not run)
gorṁṅgən	to wander
keṁṅgən	to give birth
lak ḍḍṅgən/dḍṅgən	to clap
ḍendʒa tərṁṅən	to slap
seṁṅən	to kill
tʃḍṅgən	to build
ṁṁṅgən	to find
ʃorɸ/ʃɪrb gʲāṅgən	to dance
kʊrʊm dʒṁṅgən	to worship
lṁṅgən (IMP form: ʃʲo)	to come
ḍoʃa tərṁṅən	to kick
pʰu gʲāṅgən	to blow
tərṁṅgən	to beat
ṁem ṁāṅgən	to play
dʒomgən	to move
tḍṅgən	to give
ha gḍṅgən/gḍṅgən	to know
jũ:ṅgən	to happen
tāṅgən (like sweater)	to make
dʒɪ:ṅgən	to do
ṅḍṅgən	to fry
tsḍṅgən	to cook

Table 15: Memba Position Verbs

Memba	English
𐌿𐌶:𐌺𐌾𐌰	to die
𐌱𐌴𐌾𐌾𐌰	to dissolve
𐌸𐌺𐌺𐌾𐌰	to ripen (as a fruit)
𐌶𐌴𐌾𐌰 𐌸𐌴:𐌺𐌾𐌰	to kneel down (take a position)
𐌶𐌴𐌺𐌺𐌾𐌰	to lean (against something)
𐌶𐌴:𐌺𐌾𐌰	to lie down (assume a position)
𐌾𐌴𐌸𐌺𐌺𐌾𐌰	to bend down
𐌸𐌴:𐌺𐌾𐌰	to adopt (a child)
𐌾𐌺:𐌺𐌾𐌰	to bloom (produce flowers)
𐌴𐌸𐌺𐌾𐌰	to stand
𐌸𐌴:𐌺𐌾𐌰	to sit
𐌸𐌴𐌸𐌺𐌾𐌰	to appear
𐌴𐌺𐌺𐌾𐌰	to disappear
𐌶𐌴𐌺𐌾𐌰	to agree
𐌶𐌴𐌺𐌺𐌾𐌰	to swell
𐌿𐌴:𐌺𐌾𐌰	to melt
𐌸𐌴𐌴 𐌶𐌴𐌺𐌾𐌰	to believe
𐌸𐌴𐌴 𐌶𐌴𐌺𐌾𐌾𐌺𐌾𐌰	to doubt
𐌴𐌺𐌴𐌴 𐌸𐌴𐌴:𐌺𐌾𐌰	to hate
𐌴𐌺𐌴𐌴 𐌸𐌴𐌺𐌾𐌰	to like
𐌾𐌴𐌴 𐌸𐌴𐌺𐌾𐌰	to love
𐌴𐌺𐌺𐌾𐌰	to include
𐌴𐌴 𐌴𐌺𐌺𐌾𐌰	to promise
𐌸𐌴𐌺𐌾𐌰	to imagine
𐌴𐌴 𐌸𐌴𐌺𐌾𐌰	to think
𐌸𐌴𐌺𐌾𐌰	to learn
𐌴𐌴 𐌾𐌴𐌺𐌾𐌰	to understand
𐌶𐌴𐌴𐌴 𐌸𐌴𐌺𐌾𐌰	to dream

Memba	English
p ^h e tʃɛ̃gən	to forget
dɾeŋg tʃɛ̃gən	to remember
mi: tʃɛ̃gən	to see
tʰɛ̃gən	to hear
sən tʃɛ̃gən/tʰɔŋ tʃɛ̃gən	to taste
nɔŋ gɟi̯agən	to smell

Table 16: Memba Utterance Verbs

Memba	English
tʰam gep̃gən	to abuse
tamlɪn gep̃gən	to answer
dɪ: gən	to ask (to question)
lɛ̃gən	to ask for
sɔpɲɔn	to bark (as a dog)
bɛ̃gən	to call
men drɛ̃gən	to chant (mantras)
kɔp gɟi̯agən	to command (order some)
k ^h a tʃ ^h ɛ̃gən	to gossip
tsem ʃɛ̃gən	to joke
bɛdʒəp dʒəp̃ɲən	to mutter (speak indistinctly)
ʃɛ̃gən/mɛ̃gən	to say/tell
ləp̃gən/Tʰam gep̃gən	to scold
p ^h ere gɟəp̃gən	to scream
kɛlo tʃep ʃɛ̃gən	to shout
lu tʃɛ̃gən	to sing
mɛ̃gən	to speak
ʃɛ̃gən	to tell (a story)
k ^h a tʃ ^h ɛ̃gən	to talk
ðɪkðɪk tʃɛ̃gən	to warn

Memba	English
tʃe ʔəŋgən	to recite
p ^h ere gjan dʒəŋgən	to read (aloud)
ʔam ʔəŋgən	to speak (in public)
ləp̌gən	to teach

Table 17: Memba Body Function Verbs

Memba	English
bu: ʔəŋgən	to breathe
ləpke k ^h əŋgən	to cough
je tʃ ^h əŋgən	to yawn
etʃ ^h i gjaŋgən	to sneeze
hor ʔəŋgən	to snore
odʒu ʔəŋgən	to urinate
kjū:ŋgən	to vomit
aga ʔəŋgən	to excrete
mi:na kəŋgən	to sweat
ɪktʊm gjaŋgən	to hiccup
bera gjaŋgən	to belch (burp)
səp̌gən	to choke
kələk ʔəŋgən	to tickle

4.5.1. Compound verbs

dʒogo ʔən ‘to be hungry’

ʔo saŋgən ‘to eat’

taŋ ros ‘ran away’ (HIN: bhaag gaya)

ŋi ros ‘slept’ (HIN: so gaya)

lu ʔəŋgən ‘to sing’

ʃəp̌ gjaŋgən ‘to dance’

4.5.2. Verb Morphology

Memba verbs are morphologically marked for tense, aspect, number and person. The number and person agreement occurs only for the first person, singular in the future tense. The grammatical concepts of tense and aspect are closely related and sometimes indistinguishable from each other in the way they are manifested in a language, as it happens to be the case in Memba as well. Bernard Comrie (1985:7) states, that the conceptual confusion between ‘tense’ and ‘aspect’ are made worse by the fact that many languages specify both the location in time (tense) as well as the internal contour of time (aspect) using the same forms. This makes the identification of the tense and the aspect markers extremely tricky in many languages. Traditional grammars written by non-linguists tend to focus solely on tense as the grammatical feature encoded in the verbs of a language, and to a large extent ignore the categories of aspect and mood. This may be why authors like Badu (2002:7) have described Memba tense system in the traditional tripartite distinction of past, present and future. A closer look at Memba utterances reveals otherwise, as we shall discuss in the following sections. While looking at the following sections it must be borne in mind that the data collected for the study is not sufficient to give a complete picture of the verb morphology as the tense, aspect and mood are sometimes encoded in a semantically dense manner on a small morpheme, which also includes agreement information. The analysis presented here is preliminary in nature and will need to be verified with more data.

4.5.2.1. Tense

Tense is the grammatical feature which provides a temporal reference point of an utterance viz a viz another point of time (usually the time of utterance of speech). Comrie (1985:9) defines tense as ‘the grammaticalised expression of location in time’. Linguistically, the tense may be expressed in a number of ways, including verbal particles or flexional morphemes. However, the temporality expressed by the verbal morphology are not very precise and tend to only code the information about ‘anteriority, simultaneity and posteriority of a situation with the present moment as reference point.’ (ibid. 11). Hence the notions of past, present and future are found most commonly across languages. More precise information about the timeframe is expressed differently in different languages through either lexical items with time reference, such as ‘today’, ‘this week’, ‘last month’, ‘just now’ etc. or through ‘lexically composed expressions

that tend to be of an infinite number and depending on culture, allow to be highly precise in the location of the situation in the timeline, as “10 thousandths of seconds after the beginning of the experiment”.’ (Hermont et. al. 2020:29).

While the past, present and future represent ‘deictic’ tense, that is tense with reference to the point of utterance, there is another kind of tense found in languages which does not locate an event with reference to another point in time, but with reference to another event. Bhat (1999) refers to this category of tense as ‘non-deictic’. For example, the following Memba sentence exhibits the ‘non-deictic’ tense:

89. k^ho ʈo sa-n ɲi ro-s
 3SG food eat-INF sleep lie down-PFV
 ‘Having eaten his food, he slept.’

In the above sentence, the event of *sleeping* has *eating food* as its reference point, that is the event of *eating* happened prior to *sleeping*. The non-deictic tense indicates the time of occurrence of an event by referring to another event that happened prior to or simultaneously or posterior to that event. This is different from deictic tense which indicates time with reference to the point of utterance of a sentence. While the deictic tense can occur in both finite and non-finite forms, the non-deictic tense usually occurs in the non-finite form.

In terms of deictic tenses, Memba has a two-fold distinction between future and non-future. The language does not have distinctive grammatical markers for past and present time, but has them for future tense. It appears to have different markers for distinguishing the degrees of remoteness. That is to say, how far back in the past did an event occur with respect to the time of speech, remote or immediate, are marked differently in many instances. However, this would need to be verified by looking at a larger data set. The past and present tense are conceived of as a singular category, which may be called non-future, and which refers to all actions that have taken place either in a time before or at the time of the speech. The future tense is seen as distinct from this category, as it describes a tentative action which may or may not occur in time to come. The Memba tense system can be understood as a bipartite scheme which distinguishes between non-future and future timeframes. This distinction of tense in Memba is closely associated with the modal distinction of indicative and subjunctive, which refer to statements that are concrete and statements that are hypothetical, respectively.

In line with this notion of indicative vs. subjunctive or realis vs. irrealis mood, the future tense also distinguishes between events that are sure to happen and those which may or may not happen. The future tense is marked by the verbal suffix ‘-gi’ where the said action is certain to happen, or the conditions of occurrence of which are in control of the speaker. The actions that are likely to happen in the future, however, the occurrence of which are not certain (might, should) or clearly uncertain (will not) are marked by the particle ‘-kja’ added to the verb. The actions of past and present are referred to by the same forms of the verb. The exact time frame is indicated by the use of temporal adverbs such as yesterday, last year, now, not yet, everyday etc., specifically composed lexical expressions such as ‘the 15th day of every month after death’, or inferred from the pragmatic context. The aspectual marking also helps interpret the temporality of an event.

99. k^ho/vt̪ k^him ɖe nu
 3SG house LOC be.NON.FUT
 i. ‘He was in the house.’
 ii. ‘He is in the house.’

100. ɖa vt̪ k^him ɖe ju kja
 now 3SG house LOC present SUBJ
 ‘He must be at home now.’

101. k^ho k^him ɖe jong ju ba
 3SG house LOC happen be AUX
 ‘He will be in the house.’

4.5.2.2. Aspect

Aspect is another grammatical notion of time and temporality which is closely linked to tense, and together with tense gives a finer distinction of time. While tense is a deictic category and refers to the location of an action on a timeline, aspect refers to the ‘internal temporal distinctions’ (Comrie 1976:3) of the event; the manner in which the action unfolds at a given point of time and how time passes. Comrie (1985:7) defines aspect as ‘the grammaticalised expression of internal temporal constituency.’ It is important to theoretically distinguish the concepts of tense and aspect in order to accurately analyse the information encoded in the Memba verb, as the two notions tend to conflate in one common form. That is to say that verbal inflections in Memba combine the information about the location of an action in time, as well

as the internal constitution of time as action progresses within that time frame. Aspect ‘can refer to a situation that is characterized by a closed point in the timeline, by points that are repeated on the line or by a trace that extends along the line.’ (Hermont et. al. 2020:30). While the verbal morphology gives aspectual information in most cases, special lexical items or adverbial phrases, such as ‘sometimes’, ‘often’, ‘once in a while’, ‘frequently’, may also be added by languages to give more specific and nuanced information about the internal temporal constituency of an action.

Another important concept that becomes crucial in analysing time and temporality in languages is the fact that verbs themselves, depending on the action they refer to, may contain implications of time, that is, traits of tense and aspect may be encoded within the verb itself. Therefore all verbs may not take all flexional morphemes of tense and aspect. Vendler (1957) identifies four categories of verbs, namely: i) stative verbs (love, know, hate, want etc.), ii) active verbs (run, read, walk, play, cook, work etc.), iii) achievements (win a lottery, reach the destination, climb the mountain etc.) and iv) accomplishments (draw a circle, write a book, read Hamlet etc.).

Memba has an elaborate system of aspectual marking on verbs which not only encodes information about the internal time and manner of an action but also hints at the time of the event. The notions of tense and aspect are quite inextricably linked to each other as demonstrated by the analysis of the following Memba sentences.

Progressive marker -*ɖi/-ɖɪn/-tɪn/-n*

Past

102. pema ɬo tʃo ɖɪn
 Pema food cook PROG
 ‘Pema was cooking.’

103. ʋɬ kes ɲi ɖɪn
 3 PL sleep PROG
 ‘They were sleeping.’

104. k^hazəŋg ɲɪm gəŋgu nam bəp-tɪn
 yesterday day whole rain fell-PROG
 ‘It was raining the whole day yesterday.’

Present

105. k^{ho} dʒa tʃo ɖɪn
3SG tea cook PROG
'She is making tea.'
106. ʊt̪ kes ɲʊŋ tsep tɪn
3 PL bamboo chop PROG
'They are cutting bamboo now.'
107. ŋga ɖan d̪re se ɖi
1SG now rice eat PROG
'I am eating rice right now.'
108. mi: dʒɪk ʃɪŋ tʃe:-n
man one tree cut-PROG
'The man is cutting a tree.'
109. t̪rɔk̪to om t̪ʰʊŋg-ʊn
child milk drink-PROG
'The child is having milk.'
110. gordʒo naŋg ɖe mɛŋdo ge:-n
garden inside LOC flower bloom-PROG
'Flower are blooming in the garden.'
111. nam bap-n
rain fall-PROG
OR
112. ɖa nam bap tɪn
now rain fall PROG
'It is raining.'
113. ʃɪŋ loma kes t̪ɪ-n go
tree leaf PL fall-PROG AUX
'Leaves are falling down from the tree.'
114. t̪ɔk̪to labər d̪ro-n
child school go-PROG
'Child is going to school.'

Future- There is no distinction for progressive in aspect for future.

115. naŋba ʃoge ʊt̪ nam d̪ro kja
tomorrow morning 3SG forest go FUT
'Tomorrow morning he will be going to forest.'
116. naŋba soʒe ʊt̪ suzi t̪futam ɖe rɪda ser kja
tomorrow morning 3SG time ten LOC animal kill FUT
'Tomorrow at 10 o'clock he will be hunting.'

The suffix **-kja** indicates a future likelihood of an event the certainty of which is not confirmed.

Some other instances of its usage that are found in the data are:

qro kja	‘will be going’
le kja	‘will come’
bap kja	‘might rain’
r ^h ei kja	‘will have to/will be’
ju kja	‘must be’
no kja	‘will buy’
t ^h okja	‘may take’
t ^h rosu meikja	‘will not take’
to tʃokja	‘can cook’
mi t ^h ei-kja	‘can look after’
mi ta meɪ kja	‘will not look after’
ɲokja	‘will cry’
qro meɪ-kja	‘will not go’ 1
u tɲ kja	‘will sing’
ʃɔrp gjakja	‘will dance’
sei kja	‘will eat’
lek dʒɪkja	‘will have done’
dʒorkja	‘would have reached’

Some other verbal suffixes found in the data and the possible tense and aspect information they encode:

Perfective:

-s, Eg. *qro-s* ‘went’, *ni-s* ‘slept’, *sa-s* ‘ate’, *ʃi-s* ‘died’

<i>ɲa qros</i> ‘I went’	<i>ɲɔnz qros</i> ‘we went’
<i>k^hjo qros</i> ‘you went’	<i>k^hʃɔn qros</i> ‘you (PL) went’
<i>k^ho qros</i> ‘he/she went’	<i>k^hɔn/k^hɔnz qros</i> ‘they went’

-dʒɔɲ

t ^h oɲ-dʒɔɲ	‘saw’
ʃe-dʒɔɲ	‘said’
t ^h e-dʒɔɲ	‘gave’
t ^h om-dʒɔɲ	‘met’
dʒi-dʒɔɲ	‘did’
modʒɔɲ	‘NEG’

-b/p Used only for first person

lob/leb/lep	‘came’
tʃɔp	‘built’
dʒɪb	‘did’

dɿrob 'went'
 ʃidʒɪb 'saw'
 ɲob 'bought'
 beb 'called'
 tɕep 'gave'
 tsəp 'cut'
 tʰrub 'bathed'

-ba

dɿro ba 'went'
 ɲi-ba 'slept'
 sa-ba 'ate'

Infinite: -la

dɿro-la 'to go'

117. dɕe sɪgɾet tʰʊŋg-la me: ba
 here cigarette drink-INF NEG AUX
 'Smoking is prohibited here.'

Imperative: -ɿ, -ro,

kʰɿ-ɿ 'bring-IMP'
 dɕam-ɿ 'tie-IMP'
 tɕe-ɿ 'give-IMP'
 tɕe-ro 'give-IMP'
 dɿro-tɕu-ro 'go-let-IMP'

Present, habitual/continuous: -ɪ

se-ɪ 'eat'
 gɿ-ɪ 'need'
 jɿ-ɪ 'be/happen'
 hago-ɪ 'know'
 dɿroi 'am/are going'

Future certain/1 SG future: -gi

118. ɲa nanba kʰjo-l phon dʒɪ-gi ei?
 I tomorrow you-ACC phone do-FUT yes?
 'Shall I call you tomorrow?'

Some verbal paradigms that emerge from the collected data:

Verb	Aspect	1SG ηα	1PL ησν kes	2SG k ^h jo	2PL k ^h jσn kes	3SG k ^h o	3PL k ^h σn kes
hor t̪əŋgən ‘to snore’	Habitual	hor t̪əŋgəi	hor t̪əŋgəi	hor t̪əŋgən	hor t̪əŋgən	t̪əŋgəi ba	t̪əŋgəi ba
t ^h əŋg d̪zəŋgən ‘to see’	perfective	t ^h əŋ d̪zəŋ	t ^h əŋ d̪zəŋ	t ^h əŋs	t ^h əŋs	t ^h əŋs	t ^h əŋs
ḍrəŋgən ‘to go’	future	ḍrəgi/ḍəgi	ḍrəgi/ḍəgi	ḍrək kja	ḍrək kja	ḍrək kja	ḍrək kja

Here are two verb paradigms that demonstrate the use of some verbal suffixes:

ḍrəŋgən ‘to go’

119. ηα nɪnɪŋ maɪsɔr ḍrə-k
 1SG last year Mysore go-PFV
 ‘I went to Mysore last year.’ (Past perfective)

120. ηα ḍɪnfə-reŋ əlɔŋ ḍrə-i
 1SG week-every Along go-NONFUT
 ‘I go to Along every week.’ (Habitual)

121. ηα ɡəm ḍrə-i
 1SG temple go-NONFUT
 ‘I am going to the temple.’ (Progressive)

122. ησν kes ɡəm ḍrə-i
 1SG PL temple go-IPFV
 ‘We are going to the temple.’ (Progressive)

123. ηα labər ḍrə meh
 1SG school go NEG
 ‘I don’t go to school.’ (Habitual negative)

124. ηα-η oḍe ḍrə-b
 1SG-REF there go-HAB
 ‘I too go there.’ (Habitual)

125. ηα k^hazəŋg labər ḍrə me ba
 1SG yesterday school go NEG AUX
 ‘I did not go to school yesterday.’ (Past perfective negative)

126. *ŋa naŋgba dʒəjpər ɖogi mɪn*
 1SG tomorrow Jaipur go NEG
 ‘I will not go to Jaipur tomorrow.’ (Future negative)

127. *tʰamdʒe ɖro-k-ba*
 everyone go-PFV-AUX
 ‘Everyone should go.’

128. *ɖro-h*
 go-IMP
 ‘Leave/go!’ (Imperative)

129. *dɪrɪŋ ŋa alo ɖro-k sam be*
 today 1SG Aalo go-PFV want AUX
 ‘I want to go to Aalo today.’

130. *ŋa dogʊŋ ʈaʊn ɖro-k sam*
 1SG tonight town go-PFV want
 ‘I want to go to town today.’

131. *kʰjo oɖe ɖro-k pe?*
 2SG there go-PFV AUX
 ‘Will you go there?’ (Future interrogative)

132. *kʰjo kʰɪm gaɖãŋg ɖro-gi*
 2SG home when go-FUT
 ‘When are you going home?’

133. *kʰjo ɖɪlli tʃi dʒɪŋ-gən ɖroi*
 2SG Delhi what do-INF go-INF
 ‘Why are you going to Delhi?’

134. *kʰazəŋg nam bap me-dʒo ŋa ɖro-la-ɪju*
 yesterday rain fall NEG 1SG go-INF-FUT
 ‘If it had not rained yesterday, I would have gone.’

135. *hapɽa ɲen ɖe kʰʊn bambai ɖro-s*
 week last LOC 3PL Bombay go-PFV
 OR

136. *kʰʊnz dʒʊmʊk hapɽa de bəmbəɪ ɖro ba*
 3PL last week LOC Bombay go AUX
 ‘Last week they had gone to Mumbai.’

137. *kʰʊnz dʊkan ɖro-s*
 3PL market/shop go-PRF
 ‘They have gone to the market.’

138. t̪ək̚to labər d̪ro-n
 child school go-PROG
 ‘The child is going to school.’

139. naŋba soɡe ʋɛ nam d̪ro-kja
 tomorrow morning 3SG forest go-SUBJ
 ‘He will go to the forest tomorrow morning.’

140. d̪ro-b taŋ d̪erd̪oŋon ʃiŋd̪od̪reb ŋjo-n kʰɔ-ʃ
 go-IMP and ripe fruit buy-INF bring-IMP
 OR

141. d̪o-n ʃiŋd̪od̪reb d̪erd̪iŋon ŋjo-n kʰɔ-ʃ
 go-INF fruit ripe buy-INF bring-IMP
 ‘Go and get some ripe fruits’

142. ʋɛ nam d̪ro-n sei-la ŋeg lek ba
 that forest go-INF hunt-INF my job AUX
 ‘To go and hunt in the forest is my job.’

143. ŋa d̪reŋ ge kʰo t̪ʃoɡu t̪ʃoɡu ɡom d̪ro-h
 1SG want that 3SG daily daily temple go-IMP.
 ‘I want that he goes to the temple everyday.’

144. kʰo d̪illi t̪ʃik-po d̪ro-gi t̪ʃ-eɪ kja
 3SG Delhi alone go-FUT able- SUBJ
 ‘She will be able to go to Dekhi alone.’

t̪o sāŋɡən ‘to eat’

145. ŋa d̪re sə-i/se-i
 1SG rice eat-NONFUT
 ‘I eat rice.’

146. ŋa t̪o se d̪i
 1SG food eat PROG
 ‘I am eating food.’

147. ŋaɖan d̪re se-d̪i
 1SG now rice eat-PROG
 ‘I am eating rice right now.’

148. d̪a ŋa-l t̪o sa-la rʰeɪ kja
 now I-ACC food eat-INF must SUBJ
 ‘I have to eat now.’ (HIN: kʰana paɖeɡa)

149. ηa to sa me
 1SG food eat.PST.PFV NEG
 ‘I have not eaten.’
150. $\eta ak^h azan$ dre $sa-p$
 1SG yesterday rice eat -PFV
 ‘I ate rice yesterday.’
151. $khazan$ ηa to sa me
 yesterday 1SG food eat.PST NEG
 ‘I did not eat yesterday.’
152. $khazan$ ηa to an sa me
 yesterday 1SG food till then eat.PST.PFV NEG
 ‘I had not yet eaten.’
153. ηga $\text{to}g\text{on}g$ dre $se-gi$
 1SG tonight rice eat-FUT
 ‘I will eat rice tonight.’
154. ηa to $se-g$ min
 1SG food eat-FUT NEG
 ‘I shall not eat food.’
155. ηa $dirin$ to $so-gi$ min
 1SG today food eat-FUT NEG
 ‘I will not eat today.’
156. ηa $nanja$ to $sa-go$ $min-ba$
 1SG till then food eat-FUT NEG-
 ‘I shall not have eaten.’
157. $dawa$ am jik $sa-n$
 Dawa mango one (DET) eat-CONT
 ‘Dawa is eating a mango.’
158. $drema$ am $dardeŋgən$ jik $sa-n$
 Drema mango ripe one eat-CONT
 ‘Drema is eating a ripe mango.’
159. $dawa$ $moŋ$ nan de am $sa-ba$
 Dawa bus in LOC mango eat-PRF
 ‘Dawa ate the mango in the bus.’
160. $\text{to}rkto$ kes $jiri$ $gombu$ sa $ja-ba$
 child PL sweet all eat have-PFV
 ‘The children ate all the sweets.’

161. dɾema ʃoje napkja am sa-ba
Drema morning LOC mango eat-PRF
'Drema ate a mango in the morning.'
162. kʰo ʈo se su ba
3SG food eat PFV AUX
'He has taken/eaten his meal.'
163. kʰo kʰazaŋ ne ʈʃijaŋ sa mosʊŋ
3SG yesterday LOC nothing eat NEG
'She did not eat anything yesterday.'
164. ʊʈ naŋba gəʊmi dɾe seɪ kja
3SG tomorrow night rice eat SUBJ
OR
165. naŋba gəʊmi kʰo dɾe seɪ-k ba
tomorrow night 3SG rice eat-FUT AUX
'He will eat rice tomorrow at night.'
166. ɲe-k am gəle gəle seɪ ba
1SG-GEN mother slowly slowly eat AUX
'My mother eats her food slowly slowly.'
167. ʈo sa-k pəŋ ɲi
food eat-FUT after sleep
'Sleep after eating.' (HIN: kʰa ke so jao)
168. kʰo ʈo sa-n ɲi ros
3SG food eat-INF sleep PFV
'Having eaten his food, he slept.'
169. paŋa ʃiŋ dɾodep sʊm sa-s
Pasang fruit three eat-PRF
OR
170. paŋa ʃiŋ dɾodep sʊm sa ʃa-ba (HIN: kʰa lja)
Pasang fruit three eat have-PFV
'Pasang ate three fruits.'
171. ɲa ʈo so-sʊla mənə
1SG food eat-have-INF NEG
More food cannot be eaten by me. (HIN: mʊdʒʰse ɔɾ kʰaja nəhi dʒajega)
172. bum dʒɪg ʈo so su-ba
girl one food eat have.PFV
'The girl had eaten the food.'

173. k^hjo ʈo sa-be
 2SG food eat-Q.PST.PFV
 ‘Have you eaten?’

174. ne:naŋ ɖe ɖre laga so-i-ba
 Nehnang LOC rice a lot eat-HAB-AUX
 ‘A lot of rice is eaten in Nehnang.’ (HIN: Nehnaŋ mē tʃavəl zjaɖa k^haɟa dʒaɖa hɛ)

175. ŋa ɖre laga so-i
 1SG rice a lot eat-HAB
 ‘I eat a lot of rice.’

176. ŋɔnzɯ ɖre laga so-i
 1PL rice lot eat-HAB
 ‘We eat a lot of rice.’

4.5.2.3. Nominalization of Verbs

In Memba the verbal suffixes */-n/* or */-ən/* are used for nominalization. This helps in relative clause construction. This verbal suffix found in Memba corresponds with the nominalizing */-n/* suffix in Sino-Tibetan mentioned in the literature (LaPolla, 2016:24). See the following examples:

177. ʈru dʒɔk ʈɔp-ʃɛŋ-ən
 monkey tail cut-break-NOM
 ‘monkey whose tail is cut’

178. nɔŋu dʒom pam tʃo-ʃɛŋ-ən
 last night chicken cook-PRF-NOM
 ‘the chicken that was cooked last night’

179. lek dʒiŋ-gən nedʒa bɔʃ
 work do-NOM women
 ‘women who work’ (working women)

180. ʊd əʊ dɪl be ʃe-k tʃaŋ-gən dɪl
 3SG boy DAT cry call-IMP break-NOM
 ‘Call the boy who broke the glass.’

4.6. Adjectives

The adjectives are a small word class which modifies the noun or noun phrase and gives information about its attributive qualities. Memba adjectives do not take inflection for gender or number. The adjectives follow the nominal head they modify, as in the following examples:

Memba	English
mengdo mʊrʊm	red rose
əm nʊgtʃʰep	beautiful woman
ap nʊgtʃʰep	handsome man
əm gjeŋgo/eji gjeŋgo	old woman
əʊ jaŋgpaŋg	young man
le gjakpə/le jakpu	good work
lomb(u) gore	bad road
tʃal bʊmbu	big basket
bʊm tʃʰʊŋgdʒʊŋg/bʊm ecər	small girl
bʊm rʊŋgbə	tall girl
gam dʒɪb	heavy box
gam jaŋgbə	light box
tʃʰu ɖoŋgorʊŋg	deep water
lomb rʊŋgbu	long route
lomb tʃʰʊŋgɖʊŋg/lomb tʃʰʊŋgdʒʊŋg	short route
mam ɖoŋŋŋ tʃʰep	brave soldier
kʰɪm nʲanda/nʲama kʰɪm	first house

The following table lists a few adjectives in Memba:

Table 18: Memba Adjectives

Memba	English
ʃenʃɪn/jaŋpaŋ (Adi)	young
geŋo	old

Memba	English
dərdɪn/dərdɪnən	ripe
riɖɪn/rɔɪkjo	rotten
sepsep/sɔp	fresh
sərp/sərb	new
tʃʰɪŋdʒɪŋ, etʃər, etʃər dʒɪk	little
rɪŋgbɔ	long
tʰeɪm(ɔ)	straight
demdem/lelep	flat
kuɖɪn/gɔrkjo	curve
tseh	pointed
tɔmb/tʰɔmb	narrow
Bɔmbu (hem bɔmbu)	huge
jakpu	good
gore	bad
θob	hot
droŋbɔ	cold
nɪŋtʃep/danʂan	beautiful
gore	ugly
tʰakp (eg rope) tʰanbɔ (eg man)	strong
kjombɔ	weak
tʰombɔ	high
ʃjambɔ/mombɔ	low
hembɔ nu/laga	many
tʃʰuɖa	rich
ŋomdʒɪŋ	poor
goŋtʃʰeb	costly
tʰakpɔ	hard
dʒombɔ	smooth
janpʰ	light
nɔmbɔ	sharp

Memba	English
nɔmbɔ mənə	blunt
ɲɪp	soft
tɔkp	thick
kjɔmb	thin
səŋb	fat
ɲorɔm	sweet
k ^h am	bitter
k ^h abse	salty
kjɔrɔm	sour
tɔmbɔ	Tight

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1. Summary of the Research

The objective of this research was to create a database of ethnographic and linguistic information of the Memba community of Arunachal Pradesh. The study aims to present an overview of the Memba people, their culture and a grammatical sketch of the Memba language. Through extensive fieldwork it was possible to collect primary linguistic data which was then analysed to create a phonological and morphological sketch. The ethnolinguistic part of study manages to touch on several aspects of the Memba oral tradition and culture, and traces the transition of the society into the modern day by offering insights on contemporary issues and challenges that the community faces. Given the scope of the work which includes both ethnology and grammar, it has not been possible to cover all grammatical categories in the analysis for the present study. However, the data presented in the work can be useful for another study in the future.

5.2. Findings of the Research

The Membas are a small highland community residing in the Mechuka valley of Arunachal Pradesh with a distinct Tibetan-Buddhist culture and a language with only 4495 speakers (Census 2011). Their language and culture, while safely preserved within the community, is slowly getting endangered due to modernisation, migration and the influence of majority languages. There is a perceptible shift in cultural practices and domains of language use in the recent decades. The Membas have a rich and colourful cultural history, which is embedded deeply into their self-perception and identity and are manifested in their everyday practices. Their cultural values, lifestyle and practices, despite being labelled as ‘tribal’, are sophisticated, modern and sustainable. Their religious values and heritage knowledge system are vast and hold a lot of relevance even in the modern times. They have a keen understanding of the sensitive ecology they inhabit and their moral principles ensure that they preserve and protect it. The Membas emerge as a skilled and hard-working community, who live in harmony with their surroundings, and adapt to the harshest of climatic and living conditions to constantly evolve, while being humble and content. Some of these themes have been explored in the

second chapter of the thesis. Also aspects of Memba culture have been discussed in brief in this chapter.

The Memba language is under-documented and there is no clarity on its genealogical classification in the literature available. The study has tried to delve into the various reasons for this lack of clarity, which includes mixed populations, the existence of another group called ‘Memba’, and the similarity of their language with Tshangla of Bhutan, leading to the classification of Mechuka Memba as Tshanglic. The review of literature reveals Memba to belong to the Bodish subgroup (See sections 1.4.4.1 and 1.4.4.2). The Membas have an indigenous script, and a vast body of religious and historical literature but literacy in those languages is limited to the monastery educated Lamas. The Memba people actively use their language in all domains of usage, except in formal or official contexts or when interacting with people outside their linguistic community. This may make it seem that the language is safe and faces no threat. However, facing unemployment and lack of development, a significant section of the educated population among the Membas has been migrating every year to access higher education and jobs. Also Hindi and English have been emerging as two majority languages which is leading to a shrink in domains of use of Memba.

The third chapter presents a phonological overview of Memba. The study found 29 consonants and 7 vowels in the language. The stop consonants have a three-way congruency which includes voiceless unaspirated, voiced unaspirated and voiceless aspirated segments. The syllable emerges as an important phonological unit that regulates the distribution of the consonants. The complete inventory of Memba consonants occurs in the word initial pre-vocalic position. Voicing and aspiration in consonants is non-contrastive in the word final position. Some vowels seem to have undergone lengthening at the word final position as a loss of a final consonant from Tibetan.

The fourth chapter discusses the morphology of Memba. The grammatical categories of noun, pronoun, verb and adjective have been detailed. Memba has an analytic morphological structure and tends to be ‘semantically terse’ (Bauman 1975:4). Memba nouns inflect for number, gender and case. While gender is not a grammatical feature, it is marked on nouns with biological gender. Memba has a singular-plural number system. Only nouns inflect for number and there is no number or gender agreement on adjectives and verbs. Memba has a

nominative-accusative case system. Apart from that nouns may inflect for dative, genitive, instrumental, locative, ablative, comitative and benefactive cases. There are morphophonemic alternations in the choice of the suffix depending on the final segment of the nominal base it attaches to. Personal pronouns in Memba take inflections for person, number and case. The demonstrative pronouns make a two-way proximity distinction, i.e. proximal and distal and inflect for number. Memba verbs inflect for tense, aspect, number and person. The tense system marks the distinction between past and non-past. The verbal affixes encode the tense and aspect information in the same morpheme and it is difficult in some cases to distinguish the two grammatical categories. The adjectives do not take inflection for number and gender and follow the noun they modify.

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Appendix 1

Basic Word List

S. No.	English Word	Memba Word
1	All	gombu/dēs
2	And	one/talo
3	Animal	səmdʒɪn/di:nd/gome/rɪda/goda-p ^h a
4	Ashes	t ^h alɛ/ t ^h al/ sola
5	Back	gɟap/gɟab/gɟəp
6	Bad	gore
7	Bark (of dog)	k ^h i-sɔp
8	Bark (of tree)	ʃɪŋg pakpə
9	Belly	dʁogo
10	Big	bɔmbu
11	Bird	dʒu:(h)
12	Black	nakpəh
13	Blood	t ^h ah
14	Blow	t ^h ɔŋgɔn/p ^h u/t ^h ɔma tɔh
15	Bone	ru:go
16	Breast	om
17	Chest	t ^h anɡo/dranɡo
18	Breath	bu:(h)
19	Burn	me:-t ^h ah/bəriŋɡɪn/tala
20	Child	tɔktɔ(h)
21	Male child	əu-t ^h ɔŋɡdʒɔŋɡ/əu tɔktɔ
22	Female child	bum-t ^h ɔŋɡdʒɔŋɡ/
23	Claw	lak
24	Cloud	tɪmbu/mu:kja
25	Cold	dɔŋɡbu/dɔŋɡbo
26	Come	leŋɡɪn/t ^h ɔjoh/sjoh/ofo

S. No.	English Word	Memba Word
27	Count	k ^h araŋg
28	Cut	ʔɔkp/tsəp/ʔɔbla
29	Day	ɲimi
30	Today	ɖ(ɪ)riŋg
31	Tomorrow	naŋgba
32	Yesterday	k ^h azaŋg
33	Die	ʃiba
34	Dig	koh
35	Dirty	θoga
36	Dog	k ^h i
37	Drink	ʔ ^h ɔŋg
38	Dry	kombu/kɔmb ^h u
39	Lazy	nərpe
40	Dust	ɲjani
41	Ear	nəmdʒo
42	Earth	sa(h)
43	Eat	ʔoh
44	Egg	goã:/kõa/goŋga
45	Eye	mi:
46	Fall	ʔ ^h i:s/riŋgɪn
47	Far	ʔ ^h arɪm/ʔ ^h areŋg/ʔ ^h ariŋg
48	Fat (adj.)	gjakpə
49	Fat (n)	θi:
50	Father	a:b
51	Fear	ʃi:b/ʃib
52	Feather	ʃjɔkp
53	Few	etʃər
54	Fight	ɖriŋgri-dʒɪg/ʔ ^h am tʃɔrmɔn
55	Fire	meh
56	Fish	ɲah

S. No.	English Word	Memba Word
57	Five	ṇah
58	Float	benḍṇge
59	Flow	ḍoṇḡon
60	Flower	mengo
61	Fly	p ^h ərgən/p ^h urn
62	Fog	muga/ḍribjan
63	Foot	kanḡlem/kanḡbə/le:m
64	Four	ṣi
65	Freeze	k ^h ṇḡm
66	Fruit	ṣṇḡ-ḍoḍep/ṣṇḡ-ḍrebo
67	Full	ḡəṇḡḍḍin/ḡəṇḡno
68	Give	ṭəṇḡm/ṇalṭero
69	Good	jakpə
70	Grass	ḍṭamba
71	Green	ṇabu/məmbə
72	Hair	ḡoṭa/ḡoṭa
73	Hand	lakp
74	He	k ^h oh
75	Head	ḡo
76	Forehead	ṭi:ḡo/ṭreḡo
77	Hear	ṇṇṇḡm/nəmdzo t ^h əṇḡḡə
78	Heart	səm/nṇḡ
79	Heat	ṭṭkp/ṭ ^h obu
80	Heavy	ḍzip
81	Here	dei/dé/ṭ ^h u
82	Hit	ṭər/ṭərkpə
83	Hold	sṇḡ
84	Horn	rodzu
85	How	kandzin
86	Hunt	riḡah-seṇḡən

S. No.	English Word	Memba Word
87	Husband	k ^h jogo
88	I	ŋga
89	Ice	k ^h a
90	Kill	seɪ
91	Knee	pi:m
92	Know	hagon
93	Laugh	gemgah
94	Leaf	loma/lofu
95	Left (direction)	jakjo
96	Leg	kaŋg/kaŋgbu
97	Lie	ri:ɬi/ri:ndu/ji:ndu
98	Live (stay)	di:la
99	Live (life)	mi:rhe/songbu
100	Long	riŋgbu
101	Louse	ʃi
102	Male	əu/mo
103	Female	bum/p ^h o
104	Many	laga/rembu
105	Meat (cooked)	ɖeme/tʃitʃi/ʃjah-ɬo
106	Meat (raw)	ɖeme ɬoʃiŋge/ʃjah-lemba
107	Moon	ɖ ^h agər/ɖao
108	Mother	əm
109	Mountain	la/ðəri
110	Hill	la
111	Mouth	k ^h a(h)
112	Name	məŋg/miŋg
113	Narrow	tʃ ^h ɔŋgdʒɔŋg/kjɔmb ^h
114	Near	ɬ ^h a-ɲɔbnu/t ^h anjep/surɖe
115	Neck	dʒiŋgbə/dʒiŋgb ^h
116	New	sərb ^e /sərp

S. No.	English Word	Memba Word
117	Night	gə̌ʊmi/gə̌mi
118	Nose	nəʊgũ:/nogũ:
119	Not	me:ba/mogo
120	Old	njɪŋgbɛ/gɛŋgo (old person)
121	One	tʃɪk
122	Other	kʰək/kʰo(h)
123	Person	mi:/mɪh
124	Play	θem-θa
125	Pull	tʰengɪn/θu:tʰen
126	Push	pʰi/pʰapʰu
127	Rain	nəm/nam
128	Red	mɔrɔm/mɔrm(ɔ)
129	Right (correct)	jəkph/dʒaŋgbɔ ʃe
130	Right (direction)	jɪpʰ tʃʰuɗi/jeɪbɔ
131	River	tʃʰu:ga/jargjab-tʃʰu (name of local river)
132	Road	lombu/lom
133	Root	pəpər/pəppər
134	Rope	tʰakpə
135	Rotten	ri:ɗɪŋg/rɔɪkjo
136	Round	gərgər
137	Rub	ʊr
138	Salt	θah
139	Sand	dʒɪm/dʒem
140	Say	ʃela
141	Scratch	okɔn
142	Sea	θθo
143	See	mi:-tʃah
144	Seed	sə̌gɔn/somɔn
145	Sew	tsəm/koloθəm
146	Sharp	ʃjoh/ʃə̌gɔn/nɔmbu

S. No.	English Word	Memba Word
147	Short	tʃʰʰəŋɡdʒəŋɡ/tʃʰʰəŋɡdʒəŋɡ
148	Sing	lu-taŋɡ
149	Sit	di:/ma-du
150	Skin	pakpə/pakpah
151	Sky	lumb/nəm/nəm ɡʊlʰəŋɡ
152	Sleep	ɲɲɪŋm/ɲi:
153	Small	tʃʰʰəŋɡdʒəŋɡ
154	Smell	nəŋɡjaŋɡ/nəŋɡbo-jakpo/nəm
155	Smoke	dʒwa(h)/dʒbah
156	Smooth	dʒʊmb(ʊ)/dʒʊmbu
157	Snake	dʒi:h/dʒu
158	Some	etʃər dʒɪk
159	Sow	θəŋɡʊn
160	Spit	tʃʰima tʃʰəŋɡʊn/tʃʰima tʃʰəŋɡʊn
161	Squeeze	tʃʰɪŋɡən
162	Stand	ləŋɡ/dʒaləŋɡ
163	Star	kəŋəm/karmə
164	Stick	ɡjɪkʰəh/dʒɪkʰə
165	Stone	dʒo(h)
166	Straight	tʃʰem/tʃʰi:mu
167	Suck	dʒɪpʒən
168	Sun	ɲɲɪm
169	Swell	təŋɡdʒɪŋ
170	Swim	keɪjəb/keɪjəm
171	Tail	dʒɪkʰ/dʒu:
172	There	pʰeɪde
173	They	iɪsketʃ
174	Thick	tʃʰɪkʰ
175	Thin	tʃʰromu/tʃʰrom/tʃʰɪmbu
176	Think	səm/dʒɪŋk tʃʰəŋɡ/sem tʃʰəŋɡla/dəŋɡ tʃʰəŋɡla

S. No.	English Word	Memba Word
177	This	ḡi
178	That	ɪt/p ^h ɪt
179	Thou (you hon.)	k ^h jo
180	Three	sɔm
181	Throw	ɪtɔŋg/jula
182	Tie	ḡəmfa/ḡamla
183	Tongue	tʃəli:h/tʃi:li
184	Tooth	so(h)/tso
185	Tree	ʃɪŋg/lɔʃɪŋg
186	Trunk	ʃɪŋg ɖoŋgbu
187	Turn	gərn/p ^h enang
188	Two	ni
189	Vomit	kjũ:ɡɔn/kjɔpɔ kju:
190	Walk	ḡɔ:ɡɔn/ḡroh
191	Warm	ɖzəmdzəɔ/lamlɪm (lukewarm)
192	Wash	t ^h rɔŋɡɔn/t ^h uh
193	Water	tʃ ^h u:
194	We	ŋɡuzɔk/ŋɡũ:ɖz
195	Wet	ləmb/ləmp ^h
196	What	tʃi:ba
197	When	ɡəzəŋɡ/ɡaðəŋɡ
198	Where	kəḡe/ɡaðəɪ
199	White	korbu:/kɔrp
200	Who	su:
201	Which	ɡetɔp
202	Whose	sɔkp ^h
203	Wide	ʃjɛnk ^h /ʃjɛŋɡə
204	Wife	nəɖza/njidza
205	Wind	lɔm/luɔmo
206	Wing	ʃjɔkp(ə)

S. No.	English Word	Memba Word
207	Wipe	tʃiːʃja/tʃʰah
208	With	ɲjʊmu
209	Woman	ɲjidza bʊsa
210	Wood	ʃɪŋg
211	Forest	nam
212	Worm	buh
213	Year	lo(h)
214	Brother	ɔdʒo/pɪŋgja
215	Clothing	golo
216	Cook	ʔola/θola
217	Dance	ʃɔrp ɡjãgən
218	Pray	tʃʰatʃʰɪp
219	Carpet	umʒe/ɖɛn kʰaɖɛn
220	Skirt	meːjo
221	Sweater	ʔogu
222	Top	ʔɔɖɔŋg
223	Eight	geː
224	Hundred	ɡjaʔʰam(ba)
225	Seven	ɖɪn/dʊn
226	Ten	tʃuːʔʰam(ba)
227	Shoot	ɡjəpɡən
228	Sister	adʒi/bʊmbɪŋgja
229	Spear	ʃjəpɔŋg/ɖɔŋg
230	Bow	jɪm/ʊm/eːm
231	Arrow	ɖa(h)
232	Twenty	ɲɪʃʰam
233	Elder brother	ɔdʒo/ɔʃɡɪm
234	Younger brother	pɪŋgja tʃʰɔm/əu (pɪŋgja)
235	Brother's wife	nəm
236	Cat	eli(h)

S. No.	English Word	Memba Word
237	Dog	k ^h i(h)
238	Pig	p ^h a(h)
239	Chilli	bɛnð/bɛns/bɛndʒ
240	Chicken	tʃɔmpam/dʒom dʒapto (male)
241	Comb	dʒɔkʃe/gjɔkʃe/dʒɔkse
242	Copper	səŋg/tsəŋg
243	Brass	ra:
244	Cow	gɔɖa
245	Mithun	bəmiŋg/bamen/ti:bin/laŋgo
246	Bamboo	jɔŋgmu/njɔm/ɲu:ŋg
247	Cough	lopke(h)
248	Cry	ŋũgɔn
249	Door	gɔm
250	Down	oɖe/ʃjəmdɛ/samɖe
251	Up	θəɖe/tʃe
252	Earrings	nəmdʒjo/nəmdʒ talo/nəmdʒo tala
253	Necklace	t ^h āh/t ^h raŋga/t ^h aŋga
254	Bangles	lanɖu/na:ɳɖu
255	Elephant	laŋgdʒɪn/laŋgbu tʃ ^h e
256	Eyebrow	mi:pu
257	Fever	θau gɛgən/tɔŋg ʃɔŋgɔm/dɔŋgsɔm
258	Finger	lak ðɔktah/dʒɔkdʒa /dʒɔkca
259	Flour	trosam/droh/drocām
260	Food	ɖo(h)
261	Rice (uncooked)	dɛh
262	Rice (cooked)	ɖoh/dɛ:so ʃiŋɪn
263	Farm	ɲiʃiŋg/ni:sɪŋg
264	Vegetable	θɔjɔm/θem/sem
265	Leafy vegetables	pɛʒe
266	Potato	k ^h eh

S. No.	English Word	Memba Word
267	Garlic	gokp(o)/gwokp
268	God	ɪmlha(h)
269	Priest	lama/dap
270	Gold	sər
271	Grandfather	i:m/ɪmh
272	Grandmother	eji/əm
273	Hot	tʰɔkp
274	House	kʰɪm
275	Fly	dʁaŋgbə/dʁaŋgmə
276	Mosquito	tʃɒdʁaŋg/tʃɒndʁaŋg
277	Itch	sobu/sɔp tɪŋgən/sopʰ
278	Language	kʰa/θɔmbe
279	Lion	si:
280	Tiger	ɔktʰa
281	Lips	kʰa tʃʰubʌŋg
282	Bear	dʒɔm
283	Milk	ɔm
284	Medicine	men
285	Mirror	ʃi:k/ʃegəh/ʃekʰ
286	Money	gorɔm
287	Mouse	dʒu:h/dʒo
288	Nails	sɜm/sɪm
289	Oil	nɔm
290	Onion	kozo/koθoŋg/kodzɔŋg
291	Pain	sərgən/nop
292	Monkey	tʃɔh
293	Pond	tʃʰu θɔh/tʃʰu lɔŋgɔr
294	Shop	tʰɔŋgɒŋ
295	Run	dʒɔ:ŋgɔn
296	Shawl	gamsa

S. No.	English Word	Memba Word
297	Elder sister	adʒi
298	Sister's husband	makpu/magpo
299	Spectacles	mĩʃe/mi:se
300	Spices	tʃʰapθe
301	Spoon	ebi
302	Bowl	pʰʊr/baʈi
303	Plate	ɖərmah
304	Sugar	karh/kər
305	Tea	dʒəh/dʒah
306	Thumb	θebong/tʰebang
307	Turmeric	həɖdi
308	Yellow	sɪrp/sɪrbu
309	Village	lumbʊ/ɖrɔŋgbah
310	Abuse (verb)	tʰam gʲəpɡɪn/tʰagjəmn
311	Air	lung
312	Ant	tʃʌndəŋg/ɖoma
313	Aroma	pʊ
314	Bald	ɡʊri
315	Bathe	ko tʰʊŋɡʊn
316	Give	tʰoŋg
317	Market	tʰom/tʰrom/θəŋgəŋg/gʲagər/dʒagər
318	Begin	lɪŋg
319	Behind	gʲap/dʒap ɖeh
320	Blind	ŋjɪktʃɪŋg
321	Brave	logotʃʰep
322	Bull	baləŋg/laŋgo
323	Butterfly	pʰɪli/ampɪli/tʰakəm
324	Buy	ŋjɔŋɡʊn/ŋjoh
325	Cheap	kʰep/kʰəbə ʲʊwɔn
326	Corpse	ro/mi: rə

S. No.	English Word	Memba Word
327	Costly	gəŋg tʰep/gəŋg bu
328	Curse	mena
329	Daily	ŋjɪmrɪf/ŋjɪmɖɪdʌŋdard/ŋjɪmrəs
330	Danger	kʰisɔkp/so dʒɛŋgəno/kʰesɔp
331	Deaf	rɔŋgdʒi/rɔŋgpi
332	Double	ŋjibɔr/tʃakto
333	Flood	ʃjakpa(h)
334	Earn	kju:sā:gən/gjusala
335	End	ðos/tʰa tʃe
336	Enemy	trah/drah
337	Friend	dʀokpola/adʒɪn
338	Farmer	lek
339	Goat	ra(h)
340	Half	tʃʰek/tʃʰegə/tʃʰak
341	Hard	tʰrakpɔ
342	Difficult	dɔp gɟəpɡən/gore/kəle tʰobu/dʒi:kop
343	High	tʰɔmbu/tʰombu
344	Honey	dəŋgs/dʀəŋgðə/dəŋgz
345	Hunger	dʀogotɔn/dʀogotɔŋ/dʀogotɔŋɡɔn
346	Ill	nɛɡɪn/nāz
347	Ironsmith	tʃa ɖɔŋɡɔn
348	Village head	dɛbə/dʒi:bi/godʒi
349	Landlord	sa ɖoɖa
350	House	kʰɪm
351	Chair	kɔpkja:
352	Table	tʃɔkθo
353	Front	ɖɪn ɖɛh
354	Inside	naŋg
355	Family	kʰɪmzəŋg/dʀazo/bɔmba
356	Shoe	lham

Body Parts

S.No	English	Memba
1	Head	go
2	Forehead	ṭrego
3	Hair	ṭra/kɔṭa
4	Eye	mi:
5	Nose	nogʊŋg
6	Ear	nəmdʒo
7	Eyebrow	mi:pu(h)
8	Cheeks	ḡomba/ḡoŋgba
9	Lips	k ^h a tʃ ^h ubang
10	Mouth	k ^h a(h)
11	Tongue	tʃəli(h)
12	Hands	lakpə/lak
13	Elbow	lakpə tʃ ^h ɪkpə/lak tʃ ^h ɪkɔ
14	Finger	ðɔktʃa/lak dʒɔktʃa
15	Thumb	tʃ ^h ebəŋg
16	Arm	lakpə
17	Shoulder	pəŋgbang
18	Nails	səm/sɪm
19	Back	gjab/gjap/ṭaks
20	Lower back	məṭɪm/mece
21	Stomach	dʒogo
22	Chest	d(r)ango
23	Breasts	om
24	Leg	kaŋgbə/kaŋg
25	Thigh	kaŋg məṭem
26	Knee	pi:m/pɪm tɔlək
27	Foot	kaŋg lem
28	Toes	kaŋgbə ðɔktʃah/kaŋg dʒɔktʃa

S.No	English	Memba
29	Heart	nɔŋg/njɔŋg
30	Lungs	lo
31	Liver	tʃɪmb
32	Neck	dʒɪŋgbə
33	Wrist	lakpə ɫɪkpə/lak tʃɪkɔ
34	Ankle	kaŋgbə ɫɪkpə/kaŋg tʃɪkp
35	Tooth	tsoh/so
36	Gums	sɔŋjiʃ/sɔŋji
37	Palm	lakpə pərɕi
38	Stomach	dʒepə
39	Intestines	gɕuma
40	Kidney	kʰem
41	Brain	lepə/dʒi:rəkp
42	Wrinkles	ʒego rɪm
43	Toenails	kaŋgbə səm
44	Skin	pakpə

Cardinal Numbers

Number	Memba
1	tʃɪk
2	ɲi
3	sɔm
4	ʃi
5	ŋgah (TONE)
6	dʒu
7	dʒum
8	gʰe
9	gu
10	tʃɪjuɫʰamba

Number	Memba
11	tfɔk tʃik
12	tfɔk ɲi
13	tfɔk sɔm
14	tfip ʃi
15	tfɛ əŋg
16	tfɔ ɖu:h
17	tfɔp ɬaɪn
18	tfəp ge
19	tfɔr gu
20	ɲifutʰamba
21	ɲifutadʒik
22	ɲifutani
23	ɲifutasɔm
24	ɲifutəpʃi
25	ɲifutɛŋga
26	ɲifutədu
27	ɲifutsəpɖaɪn
28	ɲifuθəpke
29	ɲifuθorgu
30	sɔmdʒutʰamba
40	ʃiptʃutʰamba
50	ŋoptʃutʰamba
60	ɖrɔktʃutʰamba
70	ɖaɪndʒutʰamba
80	gʲəptʃutʰamba
90	goptʃutʰamba
100	gʲatʰamba
200	gʲa ɲʲi
1000	ɬʰoŋgra tʃik
10000	ɬʰoŋgra tʃutʰamba

Number	Memba
100000	bum tɕik
1000000	bum tɕu ^h amba

Kinship Terms

S.No.	English	Memba
1	Father	a:b
2	Mother	əm/am
3	Son	əʊ
4	Daughter	bum
5	Husband	k ^h jogo
6	Wife	nedʒa
7	Brother	əʊ pɪŋgja
8	Sister	bum pɪŋgja
9	Father's brother	ʊgu
10	Father's brother's wife	əm/am
11	Father's sister	ani
12	Father's sister's husband	aʃaŋg
13	Mother's brother	aʃaŋg
14	Mother's brother's wife	ani
15	Mother's sister	ani
16	Mother's sister's husband	aʃaŋg
17	Grandmother (maternal and paternal)	eji
18	Grandfather (maternal and paternal)	im
19	Daughter-in-law	əʊ gu nəm
20	Son-in-law	makpu
21	Brother's wife	nəm
22	Sister's husband	makpu
23	Male cousin	t ^h əu

S.No.	English	Memba
24	Female cousin	ṭʰom/ṭʰomu

Months of the Year

S. No.	Month	Memba Name
1	January	ḍawa ḍangba
2	February	ḍawa nji:pa
3	March	ḍawa sʊŋba
4	April	ḍawa si:ba
5	May	ḍawa ŋgaba
6	June	ḍawa ḍrʊkpa
7	July	ḍawa ḍimba
8	August	ḍawa ge:ba
9	September	ḍawa gʊwa
10	October	ḍawa tʃu:ba
11	November	ḍawa tʃʊktʃip
12	December	ḍawa tʃʊŋgɔb

Appendix 2

Details of Informants

Name: Dawa Tashi Naksang

Sex: Male

Age: 66

Education: Nil

Occupation: Agriculture and Homestay Owner

(Has done several jobs including working in the army for two years, owned a shop, Silver-smithery at Government Craft Centre, Mechuka)

Residence: Tachingpanga

Place of work: Mechuka Town

Place of Birth: Tachigpanga

Children: 2 sons and 6 daughters

Siblings: 5 brothers and 1 sister

Migration: Has worked in Assam, travelled to Mysore and Kalimpong extensively for business

Languages known: Memba, Hindi, Bori, Bokar, Ramo, Tagin, Assamese, Nepali

Name: Richin Tsering Sharjo

Sex: Male

Age: 23

Education: 8th pass

Occupation: Painter

Residence: Bumji Panga Stays in Sharjogang

Place of work: Gandhi Market, Mechukha Township

Place of Birth: Sharjo Gang

Father: Tsering Tashi, Bumji Panga, Class 2

Mother: Pasang Dema, Lhalung, Nil

Siblings: 3 sisters and 3 younger brothers

Marital Status: Married

Wife: Nyomba Sharjo, Monpa from Tawang, Lhalung

Migration: Stayed in Dirang for 3 months, in Tawang for 1 year (to train as painter)

Languages known: Memba, Hindi

Name: Pasang Buru

Sex: Male

Age: 43

Education: 10th Pass

Occupation: NGO worker, business

Residence: Mechuka town

Place of work: Mechuka town

Place of birth: Lhalung

Father: Yorko Buru, Lhalung, Nil

Mother: Sangey Drema, Singbir, Nil

Siblings: 3 brothers and 4 sisters
Marital status: Married
Wife: Sati Buru, Thargeling, 5 pass
Migration: Lhalung up to 19 years, in Mechuka town ever since
Languages known: Hindi, Memba

Name: Kunsang Gyana (Maiden name: Sharjo)
Sex: Female
Age: 49
Education: Class 5
Occupation: Business (Readymade Shop)
Residence: Mechukha Town (Bumji Panga since 2004)
Birthplace: Shekar
Father: Sangey Chembe (Lama), Chorling
Mother: Khandu Sharjo, Mechuka Village, Nil
Siblings: 4 brothers and 4 sisters
Marital Status: Married
Husband: Pasang Gyana, Business, Shekar, Nil
Languages: Memba, Hindi

Name: Dawa Lamu Chukla
Sex: Female
Age: 18
Education: 8th pass
Occupation: Student
Residence: Mechuka town
Place of birth: Menchuka
Father: Dorjee Chukla, Singbir, Teacher,
Mother: Drema Chukla, Singbir, Housewife, Education: nil
Migration: Stayed in Mechuka town throughout
Languages known: Memba, Hindi, English

Name: Dawa Buri Sona
Sex: Female
Age: 28
Education: Nil
Occupation: business
Residence: Yorne
Place of birth: Yorne
Place of work: Mechuka town
Father's name: Pema Sona, Singbur (Lives on Yorne), Lama
Mother's name: Drema Sona, Singbur
Husband's name: Phurba Sona, Army (Posted in Anadaman), Dechenthang
Siblings: 2 brothers, 2 sisters

Name: Lopsang Drema Dorsom
Sex: Female
Age: 31
Education: Nil
Occupation: Business, Restaurant
Residence: Old Market, Mechuka
Place of birth: Dechenthang
Lived in Dechenthang till 2011 and then got married and moved to Dargeyling for two month and lived in Mechuka ever since
Father: Tashi Philley, Dechenthang, Farming
Mother: Tsering Lomu Philley, Lhalung, Housewife
Husband's Name: Tsering Penden Dorsom, Lama
Siblings: 2 brothers and 2 sisters
Languages known: Memba, Hindi

Name: Phinjo Topke Sona
Sex: Male
Age: 54
Education: Nil
Occupation: Carpenter
Residence: Gallong Gong (Upper)
Place of birth: Gallong
Place of work: Mechuka town
Father's name: Late Ongju Sona, Carpenter, Gallong
Mother's name: Ongmo Sona, Housewife, Mechuka village
Siblings: 2 brothers and 2 sisters
Wife: Njim Buri, Farming
Languages known: Memba, Hindi

Name: Yedik Philley
Sex: Female
Age: 70
Education: Nil
Occupation: Business, Wine shop
Residence: Mechuka town for 11 years, from Dechenthang
Family: 8 children
Siblings: 7 brothers 6 sisters
Father's name: Sangey Chambey Sharjo
Mother's Name: Khandu Sharjo
Husband's name: Nyima Philley
Languages known: Memba, Hindi

Name: Jamba Goiba
Sex: Female
Age: 61
Education: Nil

Occupation: Restaurant Owner
Residence: Bumji Panga
Family: 8 children
Father's Name: Takpər Goiba
Mother's name: Yurin Goiba
Husband's Name: Tsering Goiba
Languages known: Hindi, Memba, Adi (little)

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