

Chapter 6

Social Change and Continuity of Traditional *Bon* practices in Chochen (East Sikkim)

Historically, major changes in people's social and economic sphere bring about new development in attitude or outlook of the people in perceiving social reality. These changes have even influenced the religious practices or belief system of the people living in different societies. Likewise in Sikkim too, there were various factors which brought changes in traditional *bon* religion. Lauer states that, "Social Change is normal and continual but in various directions, at various rates, and at multiple levels of social life" (Lauer, 1977, 6) and some argue that change may be one of the most constant parts of our environment (Segall et.al.1990). Yet, while every society is undoubtedly in some state of flux all the time, most of these changes are relatively small and gradual (Goodwin, 1). Change is an ever-present sociological reality within society. Change can come about within a particular community, due to outside factors impinging on a particular community or as a result of contextual realities within society. Basically, social change implies firstly, internal differentiation or multiplication of forms of roles and relationships within a social structure and secondly replacement of older structure by new one. The first process may be called as change in structure and second one may be termed as change of structure. The "change in structure" incorporates smooth transitions which do not disturb the entire social system, they co-exist with the new. Thus change –in structure implies no changes by replacement but differentiation.

In a study carried by McKim Marriott "Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization", in a village named Kishan Garhi in Uttar Pradesh, he found both the socio- cultural processes of Universalization and Parochialization taking place in this village where great tradition lacks authority to replace the elements of little tradition. He also states that, "we see evidence of accretion and of transmutation in form without rationalization of the accumulated and transformed elements" (Marriott: 1955, 218).

Similarly, if we carefully observe the changes taking in the religious sphere of the people of Chochen and its surrounding areas, it can be said that it is not the total replacement but a process of differentiation taking place in the belief system of the locals. The fact that the *bon* ideology is trying to coexist with the Buddhist ideology

for its sustenance can be seen in many instances, witnessed by the *bon* specialist and their followers and vice versa. *Bon* shamans of Chochen and few *bon* shamans found in other parts of Sikkim have stopped animal sacrifice as instructed by the higher Buddhist lamas as killing of animals are considered as a heinous crime in Buddhist religion. In northern part of Sikkim, in a place named Tingchim, a place where the study conducted by Anna Balikci, she found that certain paraphernalia of Bhutia Lhopo *bon* shamans have buddhicised. However, at least amongst the *bon* shamans of Chochen I have not found any influence in their paraphernalia of the Lhopo *bon* shamans, apart from using same cymbals and bells which the Buddhist lamas uses during the Buddhist rituals.

Similarly, Buddhism too have incorporated many religious elements of *bon* religion in their modes of religious practices. For example, when any social event is held in Chochen village, initially before the programme begins, the Buddhist lamas of the village offers “serkyem” [seeking permission to hold the programme in the village and also appeases those local deities by offering millet fermented drinks (Chang) and hard drinks] to local guardian deities. There are also other household rituals where local deities are appeased by the lamas. Therefore, we can witness a socio-cultural process of “Universalization” a social process where there is converse upward spread of elements of village culture (little tradition) into Great Tradition as Mckim Marriott states it, taking place in Chochen.

However, unlike Tingchim before twenty-five years ago, Ana Balikci found that both Lamas and Lhopo *bon* shamans performing ritual together in the same altar, we cannot witness the same event in Chochen now. *Bon* shamans and Buddhist lamas perform their rituals separately in different altar. She also found that the paraphernalia used by the *bon* shamans being influenced by Buddhist deities. She found *bon* shamans using ri-nga, a Buddhist headdress for the opening séance of the retreat (Balikci: 2008, 348). However, in Chochen *bon* shamans uses the same old bato woollen crown.

The change in the belief system or the change in the attitude and perception of shared worldview in Chochen and its surrounding village is not an overnight affair but continuous social processes. It would be impossible to uproot the age-old traditions at once. It is due to a continuous witnessing of different social events over a period of time that leads to a change in the attitude of the villagers towards traditional belief system. With the help of unstructured interview, many older as well as younger

generations were interviewed regarding their perception on traditional belief system in Chochen and its surrounding wards. Many older lamas and senior villagers were interviewed to understand the village social history and their perception towards traditional belief system.

Factors Responsible for the Change in Practice of *Bon* Shamanic Rites and Rituals in Sikkim and in Particularly in Chochen.

In Sikkim handful of Bhutia Lhopo *bon* shamans are found. The age-old tradition is not practiced or found in most of the remote rural areas of Sikkim. There are various factors leading to change or decline of *bon* institution in Sikkim. In Chochen and in remote rural areas of Sikkim, there are *bon* Shamans who are still practicing *bon* shamanic rituals. However, due to assimilation of modern way of life, the *bon* institution is undergoing changes. After an in-depth interview with the respondents in Chochen and its surrounding areas and reading various literatures, it is found that various factors are responsible for the change or decline of traditional *bon* practices. The intervention of structured religion such as Tibetan Buddhism, introduction of modern English education, different welfare schemes introduced in villages, connectivity or communication facilities between rural and urban areas and most importantly change in economic source of livelihood are the main reasons that have brought many changes in the structures of belief system of the villagers of Chochen and its surrounding areas.

In order to understand the social change so far in Chochen and its adjoining areas, brief social and economic changes that have taken place in these areas, needs to be observed or comprehended. The social and economic developments that have taken place in these areas are mentioned below. As my research mainly deals with religion, major emphasis is given to the religious developments that have taken place in 21-Nathang Machong constituency.

In Sikkim, integration and assimilation of various external factors have led about a change in the *bon* belief system. Initially, in Tibet *bon* religion was very prominent and introduction of Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet was not an easy affair. When Tibetan Buddhism was introduced in Sikkim, from Tibet by different higher lamas, the native people of Sikkim who practiced *bon* religion did not accept Buddhism readily. Myths of a magical contest between a practitioner of local religious traditions and Buddhist

counterparts are common in large parts of the Himalayas. (Bentley, Jenny, 135). Even in Chochen there are many mythical tales of magical contest either between local *bon* shamanic deity who are still worshipped now and deities from other neighboring country either Bhutan or Tibet and between local religious traditions and Buddhist counterparts.

Advent of British India and Christian missionary in Sikkim, brought many social and economic changes in Sikkim. After the conflict of 1888-89, the British imperial government of India established its direct authority over Sikkim. When Claude White (first political officer) took up his position, Sikkim was lacking in most of the structures of modern government. Therefore, he began financing modernization initiatives such as the education of Sikkimese youths in British India and the introduction of allopathic or what is popularly known as western medicine (Mackay, Alex,26). Missionaries and the British government of India contributed to the early development of western medicine as well as western education in Sikkim. (Mckay, 25). The advent of British Indian government and an introduction of western medicine and western education, significantly changed the social outlook of the Sikkimese society. Different courses of action, an amalgamation of culture of modern western society experienced and exposed by the British imperials to the Primitive feudal Sikkimese society had a major impact on the social and cultural life of the Sikkimese people in general. In the process of indigenizing the western medicine in Sikkim the local indigenous medical specialist had to negotiate their age long practices. Introduction of western medicine in Sikkim directly affected the local religious specialist. Altogether, the diffusion of culture of modern western society, adversely affected the attitude of Lhopo people towards primitive religious institutions.

Before 1975 there was one main Gumpa (Buddhist monastery) in these (21-Nathang Machong constituency) areas. During monarchical regime, these areas were known as Barapathing. Gradually after 1975 many Mani-Lhagang (a Buddhist monastery where women from different age groups assemble and pray during auspicious Buddhist occasions) were constructed, construction of proper road, connection of electricity, building of Public Health Centre's, dispensaries, and junior high school were constructed in those areas. Roads are the main veins to the economic life of the people of Sikkim, however due to prolonged and heavy monsoon season and lack of proper road connectivity due to constant landslide during rainyseasons the

remote areas of Sikkim have often remained aloof and isolated from the main town. Due to constant rainfall and continuous landslide Chochen and its adjoining areas too have remained isolated and aloof from the main-stream. This adversely affected the socio-economic life of the people of Chochen and religiously people were dependent on other alternative health practices which is easily accessible to them. In fact, in 2016, Chochen was considered as the most backward place by SHAGGY (Sansad Adarsh GramYojna), through this programme different Central and State schemes were channelized and implemented in this area to alleviate the living conditions of the people living in this area.

Religiously, in 21-Nathang Machong constituency, according to respondents, before the advent of Phulchung Tulku, the number of *bon* shamans was more and the status of *bon* shamans was good. Animals were sacrificed during the rituals and most of the people consulted Lhopo *bon* shamans during illness and also to perform seasonal rites. Many elders along with few lamas said that *bon* shamans in those days were powerful unlike the *bon* shamans of today. They even said that the power of *bon* shamans these days are doubtful and fake. The *bon* rituals held in village those days were venerated and given huge social importance. After the advent of Phulchung Tulku and his stay in different areas of Barapathing, he checked the growth of *bon* shamanic practices. He did not instruct the *bon* shamans to stop their *bon* shamanic practices instantly but to change their method of offering or appeasing their deities. He instructed them to stop Machod (red offering or sacrificing of animals) but to practice Kachod (white offering i.e., fruits and eggs).

After Karmapa's (higher Buddhist lamas) visit to Sikkim and PhulchungTulkus intervention in Chochen and its surrounding areas, the locals have gradually stopped sacrificing animals. According to one of the oldest lamas (former Dorjee Lopen or incharge of Machong Gumpa) who stays in Linkey, stopping the locals from sacrificing animals was not an easy affair. The lamas along with few likeminded locals had to force and threaten the *bon* shamans and their followers that if they do not stop the animal sacrifices, they have to pay huge compensation and they will be publicly questioned because even after the instruction from the higher Buddhist lamas the locals along with the *bon* shamans continued sacrificing animals to appease the *bon* shamanic deities. Gradually animal sacrifice was stopped not just in and around of 21- Lhatuk Chochen constituencies but in other parts of Sikkim as well. Under the influence and

instruction of Karmapa and Phulchung Tulku, in Navay- Shotak (areas will falls under Kabi -Thingda constituency, East Sikkim) gave up the animal sacrifices during *bon* rituals.

However, after Recent intervention of of Thumi Tulku in Chochen and its adjoining areas, who is currently constructing Gumpa (Buddhist monastery) in Pheri and who have brought Kudung (statues) of Guru Rimponche in the sacred cave of Taku Nay and Thungka Nay, it seems that he is unable to check the growth of *bon* shamans of these areas because after the demise of PhulchungTulku, there is an increase in number of *bon* shamans in the adjoining areas of Chochen. A reason could likely be his limited stay in these areas. Nevertheless, after an interview with him, it was found that his attitude towards the *bon* shamanic practices is less friendly and by taking the examples of *bon* shamans found in Bhutan he is of the view that *bon* shamans are less powerful than the Buddhist higher lamas. The *bon* shamans are unable to take the dead spirit to their destination but the higher Buddhist lamas can take the death spirit to their destination. He also added that the *bon* shamans are considered inferior because they worship malevolent spirit. Few local in the village too objected shamanic practices because they said the *bon* shamans worship the dead people or dead spirit and consider them as the guiding spirit. According to the respondents, the worship of the ambivalent deities or malevolent deities does not bring good to the villagers but brings wrath. They infact, said that *bon* shamans are the one who call upon the death spirit and feed them and they are the main initiator of the illness and misfortune in the village.

Earlier in Chochen, *bon* shamans were considered powerful and they enjoyed a high social prestige and privileges. Gradually due to many factors they started losing their social significance. The change in attitude of people towards primitive religion started after their exposure to Tibetan Buddhism an organized religious structure.

In Sikkim, Monastic education was introduced as the first formal education. Monastic education was imparted in the monasteries to cater the spiritual needs of its followers. The main motive behind the establishment of monasteries and monastic education in Sikkim was to spread Buddhism across Sikkim and to convert the native people to adopt Buddhist Religion. Education in Sikkim during nineteenth century was of the traditional monastic education. The policies advocated by the monarch such as Chagdor Namgyal to send one son from each Bhutia family for compulsory monastic education. The advent of Karmapa and followed by many other higher lamas in

Sikkim.

One of the main reasons for the decline of *bon* practices in Sikkim is projecting or considering *bon* religion as inferior or villagers of Sikkim have been made to feel ashamed of pursuing their *bon* shamanic belief and practices, the belief mainly infused by the structured Buddhist religion. This sense of feeling of marginalization directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously infused by the Buddhist structures and modern way of cultural life has affected the outlook and attitude of the Lhopo people towards practices of *bon* religion.

Adding to the matter, the introduction of Modern English education which began in the state in late nineteenth century with the advent of Christian missionaries in Sikkim and Post- merger or after 1975, when Sikkim merged with mainstream India and modern education in Sikkim developed rapidly, good job opportunities outside the village and moving to urban areas changed the people's outlook towards the traditional religious practices. The change in economic source of livelihood changed the lifestyle as well as approach of the people. As people were exposed to the modern means of livelihood and depend less on agriculture, changes have come in the way of thinking of the people.

Now the locals are less dependent on the agricultural products produced in the village. In Chochen though majority of villagers are farmers but they depend on subsistence farming there is no surplus production for them to sell in the markets. The seasonal rites performed by the *bon* shamans, which is mainly related with the agricultural activities have started losing its significance. Their change in means of livelihood has changed their attitude toward the *bon* shamanic practices.

Similarly, education and religion represent two dominant institutions of human society. Education plays a vital role in moulding the belief system of an individual living in a society. Constant effort of the govt. in upgrading educational system has always been the prime concern. Therefore, various educational schemes have been introduced such as RTE ACT of 2009 which covers free and compulsory education etc. Education equips an individual in perceiving a social reality in a rational sense. Most of the educated youth whom I had interviewed were very skeptical about the *bon* practices being practiced at their villages. They said that they are part of the *bon* shamanic events held at their home because they are being forced by their parents to be part of the *bon* rituals. They viewed *bon* shamanic practices as illogical and outdated

and bizarre and did not like the *bon* practices. The modern educated respondents as well as monastic educated monks were not in favour of the *bon* shamanic practices.

Further, developments in healthcare system in Sikkim have negotiated the role of *bon* shamans in the state. In rural areas of Sikkim, ASHA (accredited social health activist), ICDS (integrated child development services), PHC (public health centers) plays a major role at the grassroots level in delivering basic health services to the villagers. The easy access to health care services along with its awareness programme held in villages at regular intervals has compromised and reduced the needs of the villagers to consult the *bon* specialist. The role of village doctor performed earlier by the *bon* specialist in times of illness is being overtaken by the modern doctors. The age-old tradition is losing its essence because of the easy accessibility of modern health care services. The adaptation and integration of the scientific modern health care services provided by the state had altered the outlook towards traditional *bon* practices.

Likewise, developments in the field of technology and its easy accessibility have changed the approach of the people residing in a society like for example, the Airtel connectivity tower was also constructed in 2017, though, it does not function regularly. The spread of information or health awareness programme through radio, television, mobile phones have continuously been updating the villagers. Opening of private school in the middle of the village recently, affordability of the modern information technological services and its scientific approach or the rational approach of the modern society makes it difficult for the age-old tradition to sustain. Consequently, the belief system or the attitude of the villagers towards the *bon* traditional healing practices is also undergoing changes in the village of Chochen and its adjoining areas.

Increased and easy means of transport have increased, the rate of social interaction of the people belonging to different social settings. The governmental schemes to provide road connectivity to unconnected villages have connected the remote villages to its main town. The free flow of goods and services, information and new ideas influences the routine social behavioral pattern of the individuals. Diffusion of ideas, values, concept, knowledge, practices, behaviors and materials are one of the major reasons, why *bon* shamans and their practices are undergoing changes in Chochen and its surrounding areas. More social interaction leads to increase in the rate of cultural diffusion. If these elements of social change are taking place, then it is more likely that there are changes in the attitude towards the age-old traditional religion.

In Chochen, changes in means of livelihood have adversely affected the *bon* shamanic practices. The villagers from rural areas moved to the urban areas, in search of better job opportunities. The decline in agricultural practices due to lower economic benefit from the agricultural produce, have made people to either stop agriculture or move out of their villages to urban areas in search of jobs. This has discouraged the ritual specialist who depends on agriculture to propitiate their deities. Most of the *bon* rituals are associated with the agricultural produce and without its production, the essence of the *bon* shamanic practices is lost. Further, the residents of Chochen who have started living in Gangtok have already stopped practicing *bon* religion.

Therefore, there are several factors which is gradually changing the practices of age old *bon* tradition in Sikkim and in remote areas like Chochen.

Perception of Older and Younger Generation People of Chochen towards *Bon* Shamanic Practices.

Intervention of external factors, the way the social matrix works interchangeably with thoughts and actions taking its course, redefines the society. Their social actions embedded in their history and further practicing in their day-to-day activities leads to the process of creating and recreating of society. Different external factors leading to the change in the thoughts of the people and influencing the course of their social action which in a way makes and remakes the society or the structure.

In Chochen and its adjoining wards, integration and assimilation of external factors are bringing differentiation and change within the social structure which reflects their understanding or perception of their religious undertaking in their day-to-day life. The elucidation of their modes of treatment during illness is examined to understand their attitude towards age old traditions. Their perception is examined with the illustration of the data collected and explained in the table below.

According to ICDS, there are 53 households who are actually residing in the area with the total population of 309 people. Most of the people residing in Chochen consult both *bon* shamans and Lamas. Lamaism and *bon* religion determine the socio-religious life of the Bhutia Lhopo community in Chochen ward no.4. According to the ICDS data there are almost 309 Bhutia Lhopo people with 53 households and I interviewed 27 households which consists of 50 percent of the total population who

are currently residing in Chochen. I interviewed head of the family as well as the older and younger member of the family of a household to comprehend the outlook or attitude of the villagers towards *bon* shamanic practices. The individuals belonging to different age groups are interviewed and their views are categorized according to their age groups. Purposive sample is employed to collect the data.

In order to understand the perception or outlook of the people of Chochen on Shamanic practices, an un-structured interview was conducted where their modes of choices of treatment during illness is analyzed in Chochen village. The data was divided into three categories based on the population distribution of the people in Chochen and the table illustrated below is categorized in accordance to their respective preferences or choice of treatment and consultation during illness. The division of categories are as follows,

1. The view of the younger generation whom I interviewed from school going students to an adult till age of 35.
2. Middle aged above 35 to late 50's
3. Older generation (above 60).

Table 6.1: Modes of treatment preferred by younger generation (till age 35) of Chochen village.

Sl. No.	Case no.	Sex	Age	Educational Qualification	Who is consulted during illness
1.	1	M	20	X	Lama, Doctor
2.	2	F	33	Not educated	Bongthing, Doctor
3.	3	F	34	X	Lama, Doctor
4.	4	F	28	Diploma	Lama, Doctor
5.	5	M	18	XII	Lama, Bongthing, Nejum
6.	6	M	15	VIII	Bongthing, Nejum and Doctor
7.	7	F	13	VII	Bongthing, Nejum and Doctor

8.	8	F	30	I	Bongthing and Doctor
9.	9	F	14	IX	Bongthing and Doctor
10.	10	M	32	X	Bongthing, Nejum and Doctor
11.	11	F	24	Appearing Graduation	Lama and Doctor
12.	12	F	13	VIII	Lama, Bongthing and Doctor
13.	13	F	23	IX	Bongthing, Doctor
14.	14	F	25	Not educated	Bongthing, Doctor
15.	15	F	27	V	Nejum, Doctor
16.	16	F	24	Appearing graduation	Bongthing, Pawo and Doctor
17.	17	M	18	X	Lama, Bongthing
18.	18	F	22	Graduation	Lama and Doctor

Source: *Fieldwork (2016)*

The above table 6.1 shows the preference or modes of treatment of the younger generation (till age 35) of Chochen village. From the above table it can be illustrated that the younger generations mostly preferred consulting to lamas and doctors followed by consulting to *bongthing*. As most of the school going students did not like the *bon* practices, they were skeptical and said that they find the *bon* religious practices illogical and irrational. The respondents who consulted *bongthing*, Lamas and Doctors did not refer the *pawo* and *nejum* who are being possessed by the local deities but they consult mostly the *bongthing*, Ajo Chagu who is the eldest and senior in the village and the other *bongthing* who are his apprentice. Respondents belonging to this category said that, they preferred consulting to *bongthing* because they find *bongthing* less dramatic than the *pawo* and *nejum* because *bongthing* simply chants the mantra or prayers and they do not go into trance and get possessed by tutelary deities. The reason for consulting *bongthing* is also to perform the yearly rituals of propitiating Pho (Iha) Mo (Iha) (ancestral deities) or during illness.

Few respondents who consulted lamas and doctors either do not believe in *bon*

practices or they have recently stopped *bon* rituals as they are more influenced by education or do not want to practice age old tradition. Few of the respondents of Chochen stopped following the *bon* rituals because of some political conflict during the Panchayat elections. There were two contestants who contested for Panchayat seats. One contestant for the Panchayat election was Ajo *bongthing's* son and another candidate was a lay man from Chochen who consulted *Bongthing* and other specialist during illness and for seasonal rites. Latter won the Panchayat election and he left the *bon* shamanic practices and strictly consulted lamas during illness and other household rituals. The people who supported the newly elected Panchayat left the *bon* practices as the father of the individual who lost election was an influential *bongthing* in Chochen. The panchayat member who won the election left the *bon* practices and started consulting Lamas and held a Tibetan Buddhist ritual at home annually.

Most of the respondents in early or mid-thirties were slightly ambiguous about the *bon* practices and said that they are more compelled to follow the *bon* rites as they are afraid, if any malevolent local spirits are not appeased than it might inflict them with illness or misfortune.

Further, the yearly ritual is also performed by an individual who learns the skills of *bon* practices but they are not known as *bongthing*. Especially the eldest son of the family learns the *bons* skills as an individual should belong from the same lineage or descent of the ritual performed because he would be aware about his own lineage as his knowledge of ritual practice would be passed on from his own elders belonging to same lineage (however, in the field I also found that the sons who are not employed in private or govt. enterprises also learns the skills of *bon* practices). The lay people also learn the skills of *bongthing* because Tibetan Buddhism has become more expensive and the *pawo* and *nejum* are inaccessible and unapproachable at times.

Hence, through the above Table 6.1 by examining the modes of treatment preferred by the younger generation (till age 35) we can analyze the perceptions of the younger generation of Chochen village towards *bon* shamanic practices. By examining their preference, we can comprehend the present as well as future status of *bon* shamanic institution in Chochen village.

Table 6.2: Modes of treatment preferred by Middle Aged (above 35 to late 50's)

Sl. No	Case No.	Sex	Age	Educational qualification	To whom they consult during illness.
1.	1	F	55	Not educated	Lama, Doctor
2.	2	F	40	Not educated	Bongthing, Nejum, Lama, Doctor
3.	3	M	45	Not educated	Bongthing, Nejum, Lama, Doctor
4.	4	F	52	Not educated	Bongthing, Nejum, Lama, Doctor
5.	5	M	56	Not educated	Nejum, Lamas and Doctor
6.	6	M	48	VIII	Bongthing, Lama and Doctor
7.	7	F	50	Not educated	Bongthing, Lama and Doctor
8.	8	F	55	Not educated	Bongthing, Lama, Doctor, Pawo
9.	9	M	58	Not educated	Bongthing, Lama and Doctor

Source: *Fieldwork (2016)*

Table 6.2 illustrates the modes or choices of treatment preferred by Middle-aged (above 35 to late 50's) respectively. Most of the middle-aged respondents who are above 35 to late 50's consulted *bon* shamans. Few Middle-aged respondents consulted *bon* shaman out of fear and they are ambiguous in following the age-old tradition. They practice *bon* practices out of fear because they believe that if the illness is caused by polluting or provoking the local deities then consulting doctor might intensify the illness of an individual from the village. Respondents belonging to this category mostly preferred *bongthing* because they wanted less drama. Unlike *pawo* and *nejum*, *bongthing* did not go into trance and possess the local deities, they simply chanted mantra or prayers and propitiated the deities. However, it also needs to be noted that in most of the households in Chochen, yearly seasonal rituals are performed by *pawo* and *nejum*.

Further, the reason why few respondents belonging to this category left *bon* shamanic practices which they earlier used to perform in their abode are because of personal conflict with the *bon* shamans. Hence, from the above Table 6.2 through their

modes or choices of treatment we can understand the perception of the middle aged towards *bon* shamanic practices.

Table 6.3: Modes of treatment preferred by older generations (above 60)

Sl. No	Case No.	Sex	Age	Education qualification	To whom they consult during illness
1.	1	M	63	VIII	Doctor, Lama
2.	2	M	62	Not educated	Bongthing, Lama and Doctor
3.	3	F	72	Not educated	Nejum, Bongthing, Lama and Doctor
4.	4	M	70	I	Nejum, Bongthing, Lama and Doctor
5.	5	M	62	Not educated	Nejum, Bongthing, Lama and Doctor
6.	6	F	61	Not educated	Nejum, Lama and Doctor
7.	7	M	60	Not educated	Nejum, Lama and Doctor
8.	8	M	83	Not educated	Nejum, Lama and Doctor
9.	9	M	60	Not educated	Pawo, Bongthing, Lama and Doctor
10.	10	F	77	Not educated	Bongthing, Lama, Doctor
11.	11	M	70	Not educated	Lama, Pawo and Doctor

Source: *Fieldwork (2016)*

From above Table 6.3 we can understand that most of the respondents above 60 years of age consulted *nejum*, *pawo*, *bongthing*, lamas and doctors respectively. Initially when they are sick, they consult *bon* shamans followed by lamas and if in prediction, if it is found that they need to consult doctors then they consult doctors too.

One of the respondents belonging from this category consulted just lama and doctors because of political conflict which happened during the election of Panchayat in Chochen. Though, earlier the respondent used to perform *bon* rituals at his abode but now due to conflict have left the *bon* practices.

Hence, almost all the older generation people above the age of 60 referred to the *bon* specialist during their illness and misfortune. Only few due to the political conflict during the Panchayat elections stopped performing *bon* rituals at their home.

Conclusions

Change is an ever-present sociological reality within society. Change can come about within a particular community due to several internal and external factors. Basically, social change implies firstly, internal differentiation or multiplication of forms of roles and relationships within a social structure and secondly replacement of older structure by new one. Similarly, if we carefully observe the changes taking in the religious sphere of the people of Chochen and its surrounding areas, it can be said that it is not the total replacement but a process of differentiation taking place in the belief system of the locals.

In Sikkim, penetration of different external factors has changed the status of *bon* shamanic institution. There are few rural areas in Sikkim where we can still find handful of Bhutia Lhopo *bon* shamans who are performing *bon* rites and rituals. However, the numbers of *bon* practitioners are decreasing and *bon* institution is declining because in many parts of Sikkim, in Bhutia Lhopo dominated areas we will not be able to find a single Lhopo *bon* Shaman. In Sikkim the external factors like intervention of Tibetan Buddhism, introduction of modern education by British India and Christian missionary and later supported by the durbar or Chogyals of Sikkim.

Introduction of western medicine during advent of British India in Sikkim and post- merger many primary health centers in villages and introduction of modern technology, easy road connectivity and change in means of livelihood i.e., shift from agricultural practice to other semi- skilled occupation have changed the approach of the people's outlook towards traditional belief system. Particularly in Chocen (East Sikkim) and its adjoining wards, there are *bon* shamans who are still practicing but at the same time we can see the gradual changes in the attitude and perception of the locals taking place in these areas.

Most of the households in Chochen consulted Lamas, *bongthing*, *pawo*, *nejum* as well as Doctors. Depending on the severity of an illness people consulted different health specialist. Initially if they are sick, they either consult *bongthing*, *pawo* and *nejum* than they consult the doctors because they feel that if they are affected by their wrongdoings or their negligence towards their local deities then they will not be cured by going to the doctors, in fact they believe that patient becomes more severe. Hence, they (most of the respondents or household in Chochen) consult the *bon* specialist or

Lamas. However, there are few households whose children have gone outside the village to study and stays in the outskirts of Gangtok town or those people who are residing in Gangtok who do not consult *bon* shamans during illness. As most of the villagers of Chochen belong to a low-income group and depending on the severity of illness they either go to Machong PHC (Primary Health Centres) or Pakyong hospital and in case of seriousness they go to hospitals in Gangtok.

Further, few households in Chochen have left because of the political conflict which happened during the election of Gram Panchayat in the village. They felt that it was not necessary to perform *bon* rituals and they stated consulting higher Buddhist lamas and performing Buddhist rituals at their abode.

Most of the youths especially the school going students did not like the *bon* shamanic practices, they just attend the rituals held at their home out of compulsion imposed by their elders. They found it unconvincing, ambiguous or skeptical. Most of the respondents in early thirties and mid-thirties especially who are educated are ambiguous about the *bon* practices and said that they are more compelled to follow the *bon* rites as they are afraid that if any malevolent spirits as well as the local spirits if not appeased through rituals might inflict them with illness and misfortunes.

There are few respondents in Chochen and its adjoining wards who do not consult Pawo or Nejum who gets possessed and goes into trance but consults Bongthing (a *bon* shamans who does not go into trance and gets possessed) and Lamas as they are not so dramatic as Pawo and Nejum.

Most of the people in Chochen consult *bon* specialist out of fear or out of need and hope. Need or hope because if a patient cannot be healed by the scientific treatment, they think why not consult the traditional healers, as the consultant's main purpose is to get their patient cured. Why not follow an alternative method which is practiced by the locals in their villages? Why not consult a specialist who is believed to have healed the other people in the villages? However, their reliance on *bon* shamanic practices is dependent upon the existence of *bon* specialist who are already very less in numbers in Chochen.

Further, one important reason why *bon* shamans are still thriving and the shamanic *bon* practices still holds the beliefs of the people in Chochen is because most of the villagers in Chochen are farmer and agriculturist, though they depend on

sustenance farming and do not have surplus production for sale, agriculture is their main source of livelihood. Most of the people belonged to lower income group and they are not economically sound enough to get their treatment done in Gangtok. So, the villagers in Chochen seek help from the local *bon* specialist and the local Public Health Centres. Another reason could be because of the connectivity or development as Chochen had remained isolated from the main area such as Pakyong and Gangtok because of blockage of road or frequent landslide which occurred in these areas for a long time.

Anna writes, at the end of the nineteenth century, every patrilineage in Tingchim had its own *pawo* and *nejum* while today, there are hardly a half a dozen Lhopo *pawo* and *nejum* still practicing in Sikkim. According to her, not only construction of celibate monasteries but the introduction of the cardamom cash crop in Sikkim and construction of an extensive network of roads, may be the important factors for the decline of numbers of Lhopo *bon* shamans in Tingchim. The gradual construction of a network of roads facilitated the marketing of the cardamom and travel to important monasteries, and Tibetan Rinpoche who started taking refuge in Sikkim after the Chinese takeover of their country in 1959. And roads made it equally easy to travel to Gangtok to visit its doctors and hospital (2008, 32-33). Therefore, the important reason why *bon* shamanism still thrives in Chochen (which is just one and half hour distance from the main town Gangtok) is due to continuous landslide during monsoon season, roads often remained blocked. Villagers though produced cardamom cash crop but its production is not high and they get small amount of money by selling those products. Economically the income of villagers was not good.

Accordingly, from Table 6.1 we can draw that there is gradual shift in the modes of treatment or preference of treatment of younger generation. They are more inclined towards lamas and modern doctors.

And further, Tibetan Buddhism incorporation of few religious elements of *bon* religion in their modes of religious practices indicates the socio- cultural process of Universalization “a social process where there is an upward spread of element of village culture (Little Tradition) into Great Tradition as Mckim Marriott states it, taking place in Chochen. Therefore, we can understand that even if there will be crisis of *bon* specialist but *bon* shamanic worldview would not be totally eradicated from socio-cultural practices of Bhutia Lhopo community. But one major significant point

is villagers or younger generation will be socially ignorant about their cultural practices and there is weakening of their feelings of sense of belongingness towards their community, nature and land as *bon* shamans are the main torch bearer of the Bhutia Lhopo age-old traditional cultural practices or traditional folk religion. Though few elements of *bon* religion is incorporated in Tibetan Buddhism and in Tibetan language texts, it will be professed or acknowledged only at the whims of the Buddhist Lamas.

Consequently, in his study of Mckim Marriott “Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization”, in a village named Kishan Garhi in Uttar Pradesh, when observing the religious practices of these villages, he states that, “we see evidence of accretion and of transmutation in form without rationalization of the accumulated and transformed elements” (Marriott: 1955, 218). In Chochen too, I found that the *bon* shamans along with the villagers when asked regarding the significance of performing of certain *bon* rites and rituals they give different version for performing the *bon* rites and rituals held in their abode. There is lack of certainty or sense of confusion infusing regarding the significance of practice of certain *bon* rituals amongst the villagers of Chochen. It could be because of accretion and transmutation influenced by exposure to different religious practices witnessed by the villagers of Chochen. Witnessing of these events are leading towards dilution and weakening of age old *bon* traditions.