

Abstract

The present study *Bhutia (Lhopo) Shamans of Sikkim: A Study in Social Change and continuity* has tried to explore the study of Bhutia (Lhopo) *bon* Shamanism; a little known indigenous religious practice having some secular overtones as well, as practiced among the Lepcha and Bhutia community of Sikkim. Shamanism as a practice is manifested through a set of unorganized religious practices or cults functioning as traditional healing practices and traditional folk religion. The indigenous Shamans such as the Bhutia (Lhopo) *bon* shamans wherever they are present in contemporary Sikkim they are forced to face the challenges coming out of the inroads made by Tibetan Buddhism as a whole and also the modern ways of life and education have added fuel to their existence. The near absence of the *bon* rituals forced the *bon* shamans and its practitioner to adapt themselves in the tunes set up by the Tibetan Buddhists and the Lamas. However, in this act of adaptation the indigenous *bon* religion and its institution is tremendously affected. It had to incorporate certain imprints of Tibetan Buddhism in terms of attire, practices, and modes of practicing ritual.

Henceforth, this study aimed to conduct a sociological research based on Bhutia Lhopo *bon* shamans of Sikkim. The study explores the current status of Bhutia (Lhopo) *bon* shamans in Chochen and its adjoining areas, their social significance and change and continuity of *bon* shamanic practices in Sikkimese society amongst the Bhutia Lhopo community of Sikkim particularly in a village named Chochen. One of the goals of this research was to document and preserve sociological knowledge of Lhopo *bon* religion, an age old *bon* cultural tradition which is waning in Bhutia Lhopo community of Sikkim.

In order to understand its persistence and sustenance of *bon* practices in Chochen and its surrounding areas, I have tried to illustrate, the social significance of *bon* shamanic practices and also tried to explore various factors that have affected the growth of *bon* shamanic institution and tried to find why *bon* shamanic practices is in the verge of extinction among the Bhutia Lhopo community of Sikkim.

Further, in order to understand the influence of Tibetan Buddhism amongst the Bhutia (Lhopo) the relationship between lamas and shamans is studied as this study unveils how with the coming up of the Tibetan Buddhism, the Shamanic institution is either absorbed or rejected by the organized religious structure. The study also portrays, how the perception of older and younger generation has molded up in different time and

space with regards to the *bon* shamanic worldly affairs. The study also tries to access the community participation in the study area.

The present study also fills the gap of research, the research which was conducted on Lhopo *bon* shamans in the year 1994- 1996 in Tingchim in the Northern part of Sikkim. The present study also shows the changes that have taken after twenty seven years of research in Lhopo *bon* shamans of Sikkim.