

Chapter 1

Introduction

Introducing the problem, its scope and working definition

The present study deals with the study of cult of Shamanism; a little known indigenous religious practice having some secular overtones as well, as practiced among the Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepali communities of Sikkim. As an institution of traditional *bon* religion, shamanism has been practiced by the indigenous communities like Lepchas and Bhutias in their day-to-day life. 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 term “Shaman” is probably originated from the Tungus languages and as Reinhard (1976:14) explains, it had already been clearly defined by Shirokogoroff (1935:269) in all Tungus language, this term refers to persons of both sexes who have mastered spirits, who at their will can introduce these spirits into themselves and use their power over the spirits in their own interests, particularly helping other people who suffer from spirits... (Balikci 2008:14). Later Eliade chose to limit the definition to the notion of soul’s flight. “The Shamans specialized in trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascent to the sky or descend to the underworld” (1964:5). According to Hitchcock and Jones (1996:29) A shaman can be defined as a part-time religious practitioner who through a controlled state of ecstasy, trance or possession is able to gain intimate knowledge of supernatural beings, their whereabouts, their mannerism, their desire, dislikes, needs and requirements, he is the specialist in the human soul and therefore fulfills the function of a doctor, a psychiatrist and priest in societies that do not differentiate between such religions or medicinal specialist.

Though the significance of Shamanism signal to what Durkheim would have called ‘elementary forms of religious life’ its relevance in contemporary Sikkim is increasingly on the wane, particularly among the Bhutia (Lhopo) Community of Sikkim. According to Balikci (2008:3) Shamanic ritual held by various specialists among Tibetan Buddhist communities such as the Sherpa’s and Ladhaki’s usually have disappeared under the influence of forms of Buddhism that did not support such worldly practices or have been absorbed into the hierarchy of the Buddhist

monasteries. Since the 17th century onwards in Sikkim the institution of shamanism stymied with the gradual emergence of Tibetan Buddhism. The rapid pace of modern way of life on the one hand such as the modern medical health care system and education etc. and the internal societal forces on the other act as the major challenge that the traditional *bon* practitioners' have to face now-a-days.

A couple of decades ago the study on Shamanism was a dead issue in the west and despite its frequent confrontation with dismissals the topic of Shamanism has proved remarkably resilient and in the 1980's witnessed a resurgence –some call its renaissance in scholarship on Shamanism. The scenario in the West is rather opposite as compared to the East as in the case of Sikkim, in the former it promotes and supports Shamanic practices and have started to teach Shamanic techniques to urban Americans and Europeans through the foundation for Shamanic studies, to promote the method of Shamanic counseling by which clients heal themselves through Shamanic experience and to teach Shamanism to population who have lost their Shamanic tradition as a result of missionization, however in the latter there is a prevalence of declining trend among the Bhutia community of Sikkim but if we ponder upon the role of the State in Sikkim we might witness a different scenario, as now people in the Himalayan tier or tribal belt are much more conscious of the Tribal identity and Shamanic religious practice is considered as one such element or component that validates their tribal identity. The State itself is involved in emancipating its recognition by providing economic and financial assistance which is known as the *Bhatta* to the Shamans and are making their best efforts to conserve and preserve their rituals, however among the Bhutia Lhopo community in Sikkim the wonder of the state is not working to that extend as State had expected because there is only handful of Lhopo *bon* shamans which can be found among the Bhutia community of Sikkim.

Bon shamanic institutions as such are unorganized religious groups and *bon* shamans are healing priest, medicine men that have their ritual practices rooted in the traditional *bon* religion. They are significantly known for their healing practices and folk medicinal attributes. A Shamanic practice to certain extent reflects the originality or the purest, elementary form of religious life. Shamans and their practices portray the cultural and religious life of our forefather. In fact, it is the genesis and origin of certain religious practices which is still prevailing in our society, though modified

or extinct or absorbed into the hierarchy of Buddhist monastery, these practices uphold the community sentiments and solidarity in earlier times and today too people can look upon traditional belief system and find solace, despite the test they have to pass in different time and space. Understandably the paucity of literature which could have directly addressed the problem as to how a dwindling traditional practice survives and how its survival gets threatened by the societal forces along may signal to the necessity of the present study.

The context of the problem.

Sikkim was established as a Buddhist kingdom in the 17th century by three Nyingma Lamas from Tibet. Chogyal was consecrated as the monarch of Sikkim and Tibetan Buddhism was made as the State religion of Sikkim. Guru Rimponche as well as many higher lamas from Tibet before and after invasion of Tibet by China came to Sikkim. These lamas are believed to have tamed many malevolent local deities residing in different landscapes of Sikkim. As they proceeded to tame the country and its inhabitants, the Lepcha's sacred landscape was integrated into the Buddhist rendition of Sikkim's sacred geography as a Beyul. Many higher Buddhist lamas as they started proselytizing the locals into Buddhism included many local *bon* shamanic deities into Buddhist pantheon (Balikci 2008) According to Balikci, from its inception, Sikkim was based on a shamanic view of the universe, where ancestors and protectors resided in its high mountains and deities of all kinds populated its countryside. The interference of the State during the Namgyals regime as Buddhism was made the State religion and other modern ways of livelihood, hindered the growth and development of the *bon* Shamanic practices and majority of the sections of Bhutia (Lhopo) and Lepcha community inclined towards the Buddhist form of religion.

Despite the changes it is pretty hard to say that the Shamanic practices has totally perished over the time because the most respected ritual specialists like Lamas understood the needs of the Lhopos for both Buddhism and the *bon* rituals of the Pawo and the Bongthing, the former takes care of their aspiration after death, and the latter deals with the obstacles, illness and misfortunes of life in this world. (Balikci 2008:8).

Likewise, the implication of Shamanism has its presence in some quarters of Sikkimese life in general and among the isolated Bhutia (Lhopo) community located particularly in East Sikkim, a rural area commonly known as Chochen, an area which

is divided into six main wards and an hour distance from the main town Gangtok. This area is dominated by the Bhutia community having their own ritual practitioner in their own blocks, male Bhutia shaman (*pawo*) and female Shamans (*pamo*) in two different blocks but under the same constituency who are actively participating in the community rituals and there are few clustered Nepali Community households as well, residing within their own respective ethnic group, the interesting fact about this area is that it is still virgin in nature as no research has been done on this subject in this area but could be disadvantageous as well because less literature would be supporting my work.

However, the indigenous Shamans such as the Bhutia Shamans wherever they are present in contemporary Sikkim they are rather 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 and the practitioners of it (i.e., the Bhutia Shamans) had to adapt themselves to the tunes set up by the Tibetan Buddhists and the Lamas. However, in this act of adaptation the indigenous Bon religion and also the institution of Shamanism were tremendously affected. It had to incorporate certain imprints of Tibetan Buddhism in terms of attire, practices, and modes of practicing rituals. Through these new inventions *bon* shamanic religion acquired a new dynamic in which one finds large scale deviation from the 'traditional form' and also from the new cultural worldview accruing from its interaction with the Buddhist lamas. Though Shamanism is still prevalent, its prevalence is contingent upon the invention of a new cultural mode of expressing indigenous beliefs and practices. Therefore, Shamans are posed with great challenges erupting out of the modern means of education and modern ways of daily activities and the intervention of Buddhism.

Research Objectives

This study tries to explore the current status of Bhutia Lhopo *bon* Shamans i.e., how with coming up of the Buddhism, the Shamanic institution is either absorbed or swallowed by the influencing religious structure such as Tibetan Buddhism and to find out how the perception of older and younger generation has moulded up in different time and space with regards to the Shamanic worldly affairs and to know the current status and functions of *bon* shamans in Sikkimese society and also to find why

Shamanic practices is in the verge of extinction among the Bhutia Lhopo and to comprehend and find out what are the various factors and agencies responsible for the weakening of the traditional bon practices.hare

The questions that the proposed study intends to examine are:

1. What is the current status of *bon* Shamanic practices of Bhutia Lhopo community in Sikkim?
2. What is the Social Significance of *bon* shamanic rituals in Chochen and its surrounding areas? What are the different forms of *bon* rituals?
3. How its significance is assessed by the community and their participation in *bon* shamanic practices? What is the perception of the older and younger generation regarding the bon shamanic rites and rituals?
4. What are the factors responsible for the change and continuity of *bon* shamanic practices in Chochen Sikkim?
5. What is the role of the State?

Conceptual framework

Shamanism as an institution in society plays a crucial role, it maintains not only the unification and solidarity among the tribal people but it also stabilizes and maintains the socio-cultural aspects of the society, the attempt to conserve and bring forth their identity is clearly reflected in their rituals, the way they try to relate themselves with the land, their ancestors and so on. According to Radcliffe Brown the way we perceive religion as an erroneous or illusory form is a wrong notion because he asserts that every religion has a social function to perform, no matter how absurd or repulsive but it's an important and effective part of the social machinery, for this notion even Durkheim critiqued Max Muller and Tylor as they perceived religion as a mere illusion and Durkheim asserted that religion is more genuine and permanent because people can always find satisfaction and solace in religion in times of need, grievances and depression. He further states that all religions are important in their own form; it represents the social basis of religion. All are true in their own fashion, all answer, though in different ways, to the given conditions of human existence. Durkheim typically asserts "collective effervescence" the heightened feeling of energy is generated in collective gathering and events which maintain the solidarity of the society.

Backman and Hultkrantz (1978:15-16), cited the social function of the shamans in a society. The first is that of the healer, although all the healers are not shamans, it is true to state that healing is a common universal function of the shaman. The second function is divination, among the Aum of Japan (ohnuki-tierney-1973:24) Shaman are consulted to locate a missing person or objects. The third is the spiritual function of the “psychopomp” escorting the souls of the dead to their final destination. The fourth function is that of a hunting magician for the group, i.e., it is through the supernatural entity that the game and food are found in the community. In some cases, the role of the sacrificial priest is performed by Shamans, but the above four functions, although there are many variants in their enactment according to region, can well be regarded as illustration of the role of the Shamans all over the world.

Bon shamanic institutions are unorganized religious institution and Bhutia Lhopo Shamans are the traditional practitioner whose roots lie in the traditional *bon* religion. Shamans and their practices were once predominating in the Sikkimese society. In those days the rituals and practices of shamans were of great value and they enjoyed a great prestige and privilege in a society. However, with the flourishing and spread of Buddhism in Sikkim, the practices of the Lhopo *bon* shaman and their status started declining. However, Buddhism is a socially organized institution which is based on disciplined hierarchy.

I.M Lewis explains, “The controlled production of trance is taken as evidence of controlled possession by spirits”. it is said that before a Pawo reaches this stage local spirits throw themselves on to him in order any time of the day and night. Eventually, as he gains experience, the Pawo uses some helping spirits powers along with the protection of his ancestral gods (pho- lha –mo –la) for a number of purposes particularly that of divination and healing by summoning and taking control of travelling local supernatural beings. (Balikci, 2008:16). Therefore, the spirit possession is one of the crucial elements of traditional Bonism, Spirit possession can be defined as an altered state of consciousness on the part of an individual as a result of what is perceived or believed to be the incorporation of an alien with vital and spiritual attributes. According to lewis there are two kinds of spirit possessions:

- Central possession.
- Peripheral possession

Central possession has a function of upholding and sustaining public morality (Lewis 1971:34). In peripheral possession the individual is able to manipulate his superiors without openly questioning their superiority. This kind of possession generally influences or affects women where they try to manipulate the men so they can achieve a balance in society; however, it's not exclusively manipulated by women but man as well, in circumstances where they are unable to advance to positions of power as a result of economic or other historic conditions.

Functions of Spirit Possessions:

According to Robert Merton, there are two types of functions:

1. Manifest Function (intended consequences of which the participants are aware)
2. Latent Function (unintended consequences of which the participants are unaware)

Manifest Function: the spirit possession is cited as sources of discontent as well as means of resolving discontent. Illness and misfortune are attributed to sorcery which is God, goddess and it is believed that when human beings neglect their god and goddess, it brings disorder and disaster, disharmony in the consensus or milieu, therefore humanbeings' resort to prayers which brings social stability in potentially unstable, disruptive social circumstances. The concept of spirit possession exists in many religions including Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Haitian, voodoo, Wicca and south East Asian and African tradition. Depending on the cultural context in which it is found, possession may be considered voluntary or in voluntary and may be considered to have beneficial or detrimental effects. (<http://en...wikipedia.org>)

Latent function: it serves as a means of status achievement for some people. It not only serves as means of explaining misfortune but alleviates status. The ritual practitioner whoever is believed to have a power and are influential in the community are not only consulted but they will be enjoying a certain status and prestige in society.

In the elementary forms of the religious life, first published in 1912, Emile Durkheim presented what is probably the most influential interpretation of religion from the functionalist perspectives. Durkheim argues that all societies divide the world in two categories, 'the sacred' and the 'profane', according to him religion is based upon this division. It is a 'unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things, that is to say things set apart and forbidden'. Therefore, sacred things must be symbols, they must represent something, and this notion brings out in a way the notion of the exceptional character of the Shamans within society. Whether he is chosen by

God or spirits to be their mouthpiece, or is predisposed to this function by physical defects, or has a hereditary inheritance of Shamanistic skills that is equivalent to a magico-religious vocation, the Shaman stand apart from the profane precisely because he has more direct relations with the sacred and his rituals are considered sacred and he excels in the efficacy of its manifestations.

If we scrutinize the deteriorating and declining aspect of Shamanism from the evolutionary perspectives whereby Auguste Comte might justify the notion by asserting that traditional cultural belief system is in the phase of conflict because this stage represents the metaphysical stage i.e. a stage which is sandwiched between the tradition and modernity and hence forth the conflict between the conception of traditional Shamanic cult and modernized principles or concept of Buddhism could be comprehended , so for that matter, if we happen to see Sikkim today in terms of its religious mode of conduct ,there are a believers who believe in the traditional bonism and consult them in times of their need and at the other hand they too consult the higher lamas regarding the various ritual purposes or in times of misfortunes.

However, if we ponder upon the current realities of the Shamanic worldly affairs, they are losing their significance in the society, their role in day-to-day activities is losing its essence, if we comprehend it from the phenomenological point of view, when any institution loses its prominence because due to lag between the people and the structure, therefore weakening of the shared inter-subjective meaning, the structure will start dwindling and declining. As in the case of the Shamans people are gradually losing a shared inter- subjective meaning, where the faith in them is declining.

Literature review

Balicki Anna, in *Lama Shamans and Ancestor* 2008, deals with the study of ritual within a community variously referred as Bhutia, Lhopo or Denjongpa in the agricultural village of Tingchim in North Sikkim. It is intended as the contribution to the Anthropology of Himalayan Buddhist communities and to the discussion concerning the relations between Buddhism and Shamanism. This study explores the rituals and working relation of Buddhist Lamas and Shamans within the wider context of village life, taking into consideration the sacred history of the land as well as its more recent political and economic transformation.

In her book, Part 1 in more general terms, aims to outline Tingchim villager's particular world view and some of the causes of its persistence. It portrays Tingchims recent political, economic, inter-ethnic and religious history as well as Sikkimese past and present scenario, including Tingchim villagers and their migratory history, even it highlights the supernatural folklores and narratives related with Kanchendzonga as Sikkim's Mountain deity. Introduction of village religion and the different levels of co-operation between Bon and Buddhist ritual specialist are highlighted in a very elaborative way and it is followed by a description of the Shaman's rituals and initiations, their interaction with the dead ancestors, and the influence of the Buddhism over their practice and the relations of their practice to north Asian Shamanism.

Part 11 is concerned with the land, its harvest, workers and rituals and also addresses the rituals of the household and its members. She demonstrates the amiable working relations of Lamas and Shamans, and the complementary aspect of their respective practices rather than the oppositions, which the recent literature suggests characterizes the Lama Shaman relationship. The chapter eventually concludes that contrary to how the Lama Shaman relation has been presented in the literature in recent years, their amiable co-existence in Tingchim villages indicates that the real confrontations may actually lie not between Bon and Buddhism and its more pragmatic village adaptations. It concludes with the main arguments leading to the endurance of the Shamanic world view which finds itself at the root of the amiable co-existence of village Lamas and Shamans and the celebration of domestic rituals. This work is the first ethnography of a Sikkimese Lhopo villagebased on long term field research.

Though she has pointed out that the relationship between the lamas and the Shamans are good and tries to complement each other's rituals and even she had predicted that the cases of this friendship between the two religious practitioners might not fare well in days to come because in Tingchim itself the changes have started to take place, learned conventional Buddhist Lamas have a very different approach towards the Shamanic practices. She even pointed out that handful of the Lhopos Bon are found as practitioners as they are declining day by day.

Mumford Stan Royal in *Himalayan dialogue (Tibetan lamas and Gurung Shamans in Nepal)* (1990), focuses upon research which was done thorough ethnographic research, of the Tibetan village Lamaism on the Nepal side of the Himalayas, just below the Tibetan border an area named Gyasumdo; where the Tibetan

villages lay along the Marsyandi River. They were surrounded by Gurung villages on the hillside above which were vital strongholds of Gurung shamanism. The research goal was to understand Tibetan Buddhist culture in the light of the historic encounter with its non-Buddhist Shamanic rivals. He has highlighted the ritual practices of the Tibetan lamas and Gurung shamans of Nepal Gyasumdo. The first part of chapter unfolds with their genesis ,a huge controversy can be found as many previous scholars have related Gurung with the Hindu account of origin, opinion has moved to the view that not only the Ghale but the other Gurung clans as well must have originally migrated from Tibet, to add to the point the legend which is associated or illustrated with the origin of the Gurung clans, it's a story which I had heard from my late grandmother though in a slight different form but similar in many ways.

In the second part of the book, the author tries to examine the ritual and legendary significance of the Ghabre shamans Spring Sacrifice and through narration of the story of their clan and legend tries to be mythically logical portrays why things are the way things are? In Gyasumdo both deer and bird are central legendry motifs for the Gurung Shamans as in the Siberian tradition. According to Berger and Luckman this universe of meaning as they term it is socially derived, it is the product of society and in turn feeds back and help produce society, which in turn maintains the solidarity of society. Robert Paul (1982:273 -86) has explored the significance of the sacrificial killing of a yak in pre-Buddhist Tibet the Ghabre Shamans equating of the wild yak with the Ghale divine ancestor supports Paul contention that yak sacrifice seems to have a communal incorporation of the patrilineal father, linked with royal succession, this ritual is still prevalent among some Bhutia tribe in Sikkim. The offerings of the red by the Ghabre Shamans portrays that how for their emotional requirement they appease the supernatural forces, as Malinowski argues that religion promotes social solidarity by dealing with the situation of emotional stress which threaten the stability of society, on the other hand, it is the matrix which the Tibetan Lamas must repudiate, for them it is a heinous sin. There is reciprocity in their definition of offense, Tibetan Buddhism asks for forgiveness for their past deeds while Ghabre Shamans ask forgiveness for not sacrificing. When Tibetans first settled in Gyasumdo, they had to follow the rituals of the Gale clan's especially the sacrifice of animals. But since 1960's the scenario changed the great Tibetan Lama who came from Tibet was outraged with the Tibetan laity for practicing the red offering ritual to

appease the local deities he outrightly condemned it and made them stop the sacrifices.

The third part of the book focuses upon the Rituals of the death, Soul calling and the Shamanic matrix, for both practitioners, calling as a healing rite mediates between the rites of life and death, and involves what Eliade (1964) calls the “psycho pomp” guiding of the consciousness that has been the hallmark of inner Asian shamanism. The textual chant of the Lamas is decontextualized from the local space and time in which the Shaman is embedded. He begins with the lay version of soul calling practiced by families in both communities and then he presented the detail oral rite of the Paju Shaman, following with the Tibetan Lamas’ textual performance, so that the two versions of this ancient healing rite may contend side by side in the mind of the reader. Mumford associates Shamanism with the ancient matrix or the Shamanic world view where personal identity is relational, defined in terms of connections between person and the landmarks of local space. He explores how these two voices. The first represented by the Shamans and the second by the Lamas, are engaged in an inter-illuminating dialogic encounter which results in the creation of a third layer “emerging between rival regimes as an unpredictable process, Buddhist project in Gyasumdo and the creation of what Mumford sees as a third layer of meaning among the Shamans, he notes in the end, the Tibetan laity is still persuaded by the primary layer that is advocated by the Gurung Shamans. This research portrays the strong hold of Gurung Shamans in Gyasumdo in Nepal and their influences among the Tibetan laity and also lucidly highlights the exclusion and demarcation of sacrificial ritual of the Shamanic influence by the Tibetan Lama who came to Nepal, he outrightly rejected and condemned those practices as he conveyed them that ritual is not the part of their traditions.

Peter Lary who is a licensed psychotherapist in the state of California wrote a book entitled *Tamang Shamans: An Ethno Psychiatric Study of Ecstasy and Healing in Nepal* (1988), talks about his own experiences. For some of the clients in his private practice, he employs Shamanic counseling methods to promote psycho-spiritual integration. This book interprets the Shaman’s role in the Tamang segment of the Nepalese society as analogous to the psychotherapist role in the contemporary western world. Dr. Peter shows how Tamang Shamans relieve the mental tension of the patient, cure illnesses, and by doing so restore equilibrium in disturbed inter -personal relationships within a family or village community. It is sometimes by solving social

conflicts that the Shaman heals the afflicted. The Shaman's training and the training of a western psychotherapist offer some striking similarities both are didactic (learning theories, procedure and methods). And practical (the psychoanalysts own training analysis and the Shaman apprentices own mastered trance). The analogy extends to the treatment and produces, and thereby accounts for the effectiveness of the Shamanistic therapy. For Dr. Peter, the Shaman certainly remains a religious specialist but the social and psychotherapeutic dimensions of his role are given full recognition.

This book is important because it presents a thorough description of the hitherto little known Tamang Shamanistic system, because it proposes an interpretation of it which renews our understanding of Shamanism in general. Also, methodologically, it is important because Peter's skillfully explores the potentialities and limitations of the experiential approach. It lucidly shows the social significance of Shamanism as an institution in the West. The psychiatrist and the scholars from different disciplines are documenting and learning the methods practiced by the Shamans.

Zangjia, Ga. in his book *Tibetian Religions, The bon religion*: (2008) the author speaks of *bon* religion as a kind of phenomenon of religious culture, as it retains an ancient form and is richly the characteristics of a specific territory and nationality. The reason is mainly attributed to prevalent atmosphere of religious culture since prehistoric society; that is secular culture and there has never been a distinct dividing line between them. The *bon* religion in Tibet underwent three stages in history namely the periods of Dor Bonism, Cha Bonism and Jo Bonism.

Dor Bonism the *bon* religion belongs to the sphere of natural religions. Cha-Bonism: the Yung Drung *bon* religion, the emblem Yung Drung was introduced along with Buddhism in 7th century. It started from the reign of the eight Tsampo Zhigum in the second century to that of King Songtsan Gambo in the 7th century. It was an important period as it underwent a qualitative change the quotation shows that Tsampo Zhigum introduce sorcery from neighboring areas to refresh and reform the outdated *bon* religion. From then on, it began to emerge from its primitive and immature form into a new stage when superior practical magic was introduced. During the religious ritual Cha-Bonism emphasized sacrificing animals to pray for the protection of gods and spirits. It seemed that all religious activities at that time would not have been held without sacrificing animals. Jo-Bonism: the new *bon* religion, a huge debate took place

between the adherents of the *bon* religion and the Tibetan Muslim. A decree being that the one that loses its stand or debate loses its prominence. However, along the course both religions consciously or unconsciously retained, altered or absorbed the rituals or principles of one another.

The development and current situation of the *bon* religion: The *bon* religion as an indigenous religion on the Qinghai-Tibet plateau, which had been handed down to this very day, has many famous monasteries apart from its long history. The monasteries of the *bon* religion built in the early stage of the second period of the dissemination of Tibetan Buddhism eventually went into decline. But from the 14th century the wave of construction of the monasteries of the *bon* religion revived. As an indigenous national religion of Tibetans, the *bon* religion enjoyed profound mass foundation all over the Tibetans areas. The reason it failed to flourish like Tibetan Buddhism in the Tibetan areas is mainly attributed to the persecution it suffered since the 8th century. The ruling class of each generation, especially the theocratic rulers of Tibetan Buddhism, made every possible effort to suppress the *bon* religion so that it lacked the nurturing environment enjoyed by Tibetan Buddhism that its development required, therefore unlike numerous splendid monasteries of Tibetan Buddhism that are distributed over the central belt of Tibet, most of the monasteries of the *bon* religion were built in remote mountainous areas. It is said that many doctrines and rituals of the *bon* religion have evolved into the main component of the folk religion worshipped by Tibetans. In other words, many religious rituals and thoughts common among Tibetan folk can trace their origins to the *bon* religions. Therefore, the *bon* religion has exerted great influence throughout the Qinghai-Tibet plateau, especially for Tibetan culture and customs.

Steven, Philips in *Anthropology of Religion, Critical Concepts in Religious Studies: 2011* is of the opinion that to understand a particular religion we must study its effects. The religion must therefore be studied in action. Since human conduct is in large part controlled or directed by what have been called sentiments that are developed in the individual, as the result of his participation in a particular religious cult. According to him, in the study of any religion, we must first of all examine the specifically religious actions, the ceremonies and the collective or individual rites. The emphasis on belief in specific doctrines which characterizes some modern religions seems to be the result of certain social development in societies of complex structures.

It is suggested that what is expressed in all religions is what he have called the sense of dependence in its double aspects, and that it is by constantly maintaining this sense of dependence that religion perform their social functions.

The articles included in the book, *Reader in Comparative Religion, An Anthropological Approach* edited by Lessa William (1965). Shagun De, discusses on Aztec Society, He was the first ethnologist to interview and record the customs and ways of life of the American Indians. He carried that study in Tenochtitlan (Mexican city). Shagun's method was to systematically question small town native Aztecs who knew no Spanish, about their customs. The answers were provided by the hieroglyphic paintings, which were later submitted to other natives who had been educated in Mexico City and who provided a written translation in Nahuatl language spoken by the Aztecs. The Aztecs believe in great pantheon of gods and had an elaborate ceremonial calendar which scheduled and regulated the ceremonies for these gods. It was thought that men depended upon the gods for their continuing existence; the gods intend depended upon offering from men for continuing welfare. The most precious offering and hence the most effective in sustaining the gods were the human hearts offered up during the year. Tezcatlipoca was one of the principal gods in the pantheon. A human impersonator was chosen who should be without flaw and no bodily defects; he would be living for one year as Tezcatlipoca. He would be honored, acknowledged as their lord and one begged favor with sigh before him and the common person bowed in reverence and kisses the earth and only for 20 days, he would be married to the four women. The temple where he will be sacrificed is called Tlacoachcalco. When he reaches the summit, the priest throws his back upon the sacrificial stone and cut upon his breast, seized his heart and raised his heart as an offering. No-matter how bizarre the ritual was, the ritual was upholding the community sentiments and is maintaining solidarity within the community.

Lowie H. Robert observes the Shamans and the priest among the plain Indians and states that Shamanism is a salient feature of the religions of the Indians of both north and South America. Lowie in his account of the Shaman of the Great Plains does not make a common mistake of calling any medical practitioner by that term. He adheres closely to the originals sense of the Tungus word Shaman which refers to a person who has entered into direct communication with spirits. Therefore, while Lowie makes mention of the tricks and the doctoring of the Shamans, he does not lose sight of

their source of power-the spirit world. Among the plains Indians the latter hold a subordinate position. The difference between the two is not defined except in terms of the source of power. A priest may supplement his ritual by a vision, but basically his position depends on learning standardized ritual beliefs and practices by becoming an apprentice and enduring a long period of formal training with older priests. The plains priest was markedly less developed as compared, for example, with those of the Hopi, Maya, Aztec, and Incas.

Nadel, S.F. discusses a study of Shamanism in Nuba Mountains, in this interesting account Nadel describes the patterns of Shamanism among the Nuba peoples of the Southern Sudan. Although drumming, dancing and other techniques used by Asiatic and American Shamans are absent, the Shaman is possessed by supernatural spirits and thereby functions both as mouthpiece of the spirit and the officiant of the cult addressed to them. It is significant to note that Shamanism is not universal in these Nuba tribes. Only six of the eighteen tribes Nadel visited had the practice, where it was used for divination and guidance on what to do about troublesome situations. Unlike many of the Asiatic and American Shamans, the Nuba Shamans do not take therapy for illness-this is done by healing experts, or men proper-rather they merely discover what the proper treatment should be. Apparently in some cases the spirits can be inherited in family lines, but the prevailing pattern is nonhereditary spirit possession as it is in Asia and America. The Nuba have two general types of Shamans-those who concern themselves with the irregular, contingent needs of individual, such as illness or barrenness, and those who concern themselves with need of the community, such as annual rituals, the control of rains or luck in war. The latter have much more prestige within the society; in fact, they exercise functions that are performed by the priests in other societies. He also raises interesting theoretical questions in his discussions of the role of the Shamans in cultural change, pointing out how the unpredictable leadership of spirit-inspired individual is an important force for change, since they can be social reformer with no fear of disbelief or resentment on the part of the people.

The above reviewed literatures are some literatures written by foreign scholars. The reviewed literature are the studies conducted on shamans belonging to different Himalayan communities as well as different countries across the globe. The important areas I have looked for in the literature are 1. The social functions and social

significance of shamans across the globe. 2. The status of shamans in different society.
3. Change and Continuity of shamanic practices in different society.

Balikci's study "Lama Shamans and Ancestors" deals with the study of ritual within the Lhopo community in the agricultural village of Tingchim in North Sikkim. She conducted anthropological research which she had carried 25 years ago i.e., in 1995 and she had done it amongst the Bhutia community of North Sikkim which is 53 kilometers North West of the State capital of Gangtok along the highway that leads to the high valleys of Lachen and Lachung on the other hand area of my study is in the eastern part of Sikkim, which is one and half hour distance from the main town Gangtok in a Bhutia Lhopo concentrated area, a village named Chochen. The study I have conducted is an effort to conduct a sociological research based on Bhutia Lhopo *bon* shamans of Sikkim. Study tries to comprehend the current status of *bon* shamans, their social significance and social change and continuity of *bon* shamanic practices in Sikkimese society amongst the Bhutia Lhopo community of Sikkim.

Further, Mumford in his study tries to highlight the relationship between the Gurung shamans and the Tibetan lamas and tries to explore how two voices, first represented by the shamans and second by lamas are engaged in a dialogue which creates a third layer "emerging between rival regimes as an unpredictable process". However, regardless of Tibetan lama's influence, he found that Gurung Shamans still had a strong hold in Gyasumdo in Nepal. In Sikkim though *bon* shamanic worldview has not got totally eradicated from the Lhopos cultural practices, however, the shamanic rites and rituals along with its practitioner is waning from Sikkimese Bhutia Lhopo culture.

Dr. Peter Lary a psychotherapist states that, "the shaman's role as analogous to the psychotherapist role" of the western world. Shamans like the psychotherapist relieve the mental tension of the patient, cure illnesses and by doing so restore equilibrium in disturbed inter -personal relationships within a family or village community. It is sometimes by solving social conflicts that the Shaman heals the afflicted and thereby accounts for the effectiveness of the shamanistic therapy. Contrary to the practices of the west, in the east the privilege of recognizing shamans as a psychotherapist is not there. Shamanic knowledge and their practices are not treated at par with the psycho-therapist as in the west. Infact, in east especially in India, in the tribal belt a different politics is brewing around shamans and their shamanic

practices. As in India, at least in the tribal belt the main determinant of being considered as the native or autochthonous is centered on worshipping of nature, its land and space.

Zangia in his book mentions about the evolution of *bon* religion in Tibet and considers *bon* religion as a kind of phenomenon of religious culture of the Tibetan people. *Bon* religion had to withstand different challenges to sustain its practices. Similarly, in Sikkim too *bon* religion had to undergo different challenges. Lack of sociological accounts of *bon* religion over a long period of time, gives less impression of how *bon* religion was socially perceived and trends of its social existence. Therefore, one of the goals of this research would be to document and preserve sociological knowledge of Lhopo *bon* religion, an age old *bon* cultural tradition which is waning in Bhutia Lhopo community.

Further, an effort is made to study the social functions of Bhutia Lhopo *bon* shamans and to explore the social significance of *bon* religion in Sikkimese Bhutia Lhopo's cultural life. Likewise, Steven Philips in his study stated that, "examination of religious action, the ceremonies and the collective or individual rites" needs to be taken into consideration when studying any religion. Therefore, the research I have conducted focuses on social functions of rituals, different kinds of rites and rituals practiced amongst the Bhutia Lhopo community of Sikkim.

The studies carried by Shagun De, Nadel and Lowie, shows the different status and categorization of shamans or ritual specialist in different society and projects the importance of ritual in upholding the community sentiments and maintaining solidarity in a society. Similarly, I have tried to examine the social significance of *bon* ritual and its influence on Bhutia Lhopo cultural life.

Fieldwork and Methodology

Bon shamans residing in Chochen and its surrounding areas and the Bhutia (Lhopo) community of Chochen constitute the universe of the present study. The area which I have chosen is 21- Nathang Machong Constituency, this area has 7 Gram Panchayat Units and 38 wards, namely, Gnathang GPU has 5 Wards, and Pachey Samching GPU has 5 Wards, Pakyong Bazar GPU has 5 Wards, Thekapung Parkha GPU has 7 Wards, Rolep Lamathang GPU has 5 Wards, 19 Latok Chochen GPU has 6 Wards and Rewa Machong GPU has 5 Wards. I have chosen 19 Latok- Chochen

G.P.U. which has 6 wards and among these wards I have chosen Chochen ward to comprehend my area of study because there are more *bon* Shamans in this ward as compared to other wards. However, altogether as there is less numbers of *bon* Lhopo shamans, therefore, I have interviewed all the *bon* shamans found in different wards of 21 Nathang Machong constituency.

My fieldwork began in the year 2015 and by the beginning of 2019 all my fieldwork was completed and I had started writing and analyzing my field data since then. The few dialects I have used in this thesis is Bhutia Lhopo dialects which is spoken by the Bhutia Lhopo's of Chochen. I have written in English (the way they have spoken) as Bhutia language dictionary is yet to be published.

Initially I went to Linkey in 2015 and conducted an elementary survey. The method of choosing the area of study was Purposive Random Sampling. First with the help through my personal contact I stayed at Linkey in a house of a head monk (Dorjee Lopen) from Machong Gumpa. Through, interaction with the monk and other people from this area I located Lhopo *bon* shamans in this constituency. I stayed for few days in Linkey and I interviewed the elderly two male lamas from Linkey and went to Dongrong to interview two *nejums*. Through them I was able to find out other *bon* shamans, found in other wards of 21-Nathang Machong constituency. I interviewed all the *bon* shamans residing in different wards of 21-Nathang Machong constituency. After, locating the shamans when I found out that there are more *bon* shamans in Chochen, therefore, I took Chochen as my main area of study.

As I mentioned I had taken Chochen Ward as my area of study because more Bhutia Lhopo households and more *bon* Shamans as compared to other district and constituencies of Sikkim was found in this ward. Almost all the household except one or two households in Chochen consulted *bon* Shamans to perform various rituals. Though *bon* Shamans was scattered in different wards I have interviewed most of the *bon* Shamans.

I interviewed two female *nejums* from Linkey ward, two male *pawos* and two *bongthings* and female *nejum* from Chochen Ward, one *pawo* from Ziling Ward and these areas where *bon* shamans resides are the names of different wards falling under 21- Nathong Machong Constituency. I have already mentioned that, I have interviewed all the *bon* shamans located in Chochen and its adjoining wards, the above mentioned are the

numbers as well as name of places where *bon* shamans are residing. I have interviewed all the *bon* shamans residing in different wards of 21-Lhatuk Chochen constituency except few laymen who acts as a role of *bongthing* but they are not addressed as one. Few eldest sons or any son who are willing to learn the *bon* shamanistic skill to appease their ancestors of their descendants once in a year, learns the art of *bon* shamans. However, it needs to be noted that they were very few in number. I did not interview them because some of them were hesitant that they act as one and some were residing in very far from my area of study.

Although I have interviewed all the *bon* shamans, still the numbers of *bon* shamans are less. Initially, I interviewed two male Lamas who were in their eighties from Linkey ward, from them I could get a comprehensive social-history of the place. I have interviewed them because they are oldest in that ward. I have also interviewed other elder members from the village to understand the social backgrounds of the village.

According to Panchayat (Chochen Ward) records there are 68 households in Chochen with the total population of 337 peoples approx. According to ICDS (Integrated Child Development Scheme), there are 53 households who are actually residing in the area with the total population of 309 people approx. out of which I interviewed the respondents belonging to 27 households along with few other members from the family to understand the perception of both the younger as well as the older generation of the family. My respondent especially the Chochen village community people consisted of 50% of the total population. Other respondents were all the Bhutia (Lhopo) *bon* shamans (residing in Chochen and its adjoining wards) and the lamas residing in Chochen.

Methodologically both the qualitative and quantitative procedure were taken into account. The research is based on primary as well as secondary data information. Different published and unpublished materials were used to understand the historical aspects of the problem. For collection of empirical data an intensive fieldwork was conducted to understand the universe of my study.

Sampling depended on the distribution or spread of number of respondents residing in different areas of 19-Lhatuk Chochen Constituency. Purposive Random Sampling was employed and the unstructured interview was conducted to respondents of Chochen village which consisted of 50 percent of the total households. The respondents were older and younger generation people of Chochen village, all Bon shamans of

Chochen and its adjoining areas and the Lamas or the Buddhist monks of Chochen.

Through the unstructured-interview with the older generation the social-history or perspectives of the past is being documented of the area. Both the lamas as well as *bon* shamans were interviewed. Through the interview with community people and *bon* shamans of Chochen, the social and economic background of the village is being represented in tables. The lineage, occupation, landholdings, annual income and educational qualifications are some of the variables used to comprehend the social and economic life of the Chochen people.

From the area chosen (Chochen), the *bon* Shamans were interrogated and all the *bon* rituals followed by the community, community participation and the social significance of *bon* rituals was taken into account. To understand the relationship between lamas and Lhopo *bon* shamans and practice of their religion in the village both lamas and *bon* shamans as well as local people were interviewed and asked regarding their choice of preference for consultation. As my research was more descriptive in nature the rigorous participant observation was employed. The *bon* seasonal rites and rituals which are observed thrice in year was observed and attended. Through meticulous participant observation all the rituals were observed, attended and documented. The social importance of the *bon* rituals and community participation during the rituals has been described in this study. This study further tried to comprehend the trends of change and continuity of *bon* shamanic practices in Sikkim, particularly in eastern part of Sikkim in a village named Chochen.

An intensive fieldwork based on an ethnographic exploration was made in order to understand the community participation and social significance of Bhutia *bon* Shamans in contemporary life processes of the Bhutia Lhopo community of Chochen and to examine the challenges and threats that this traditional institution is undergoing in the present scenario. Ethnographic methods based on rigorous participant observation was made where I attended all the *bon* shamanic seasonal rites and rituals which was held thrice in a year in the month of February, September and December and comprehensively documented the social significance of these rituals. I attended ritual of illness performed by *bongthing*, *pawo* and *nejum* in different households and sociologically comprehended different nature of illness and rituals performed by them.

I have tried to study the Lhopo *bon* shamans of Chochen, social change and

continuity by trying to comprehend the social significance of their rituals and by looking at the practices of Buddhism which is being practiced by the locals in their locality. I have tried to bring both Buddhism as well as *bon* shamanism which is being practiced by the Bhutia (Lhopos) of Chochen. However, as my study is exclusively on *bon* (Lhopo) shaman and its change and continuity, I have tried to understand by analyzing the relationship between lamas and *bon* shamans. In order to understand their relationship, I have conducted unstructured interview and tried to bring out their perception on both the religious complex and further, I participated and attended both the *bon* shamanic as well as Buddhist rituals held at the abode of the villagers as well as in sacred places of Chochen.

I attended the initiation ritual where I stayed in sacred places of Chochen and its adjoining wards. These sacred places were located in the deep jungles, I visited these places along with the *bon* shamans and other locals of Chochen and tried to document the social significance of these sacred places and tried to highlight the relation of the *bon* shamanic social world with its nature, surrounding and its people. In order to understand, the perception of the younger as well as older generation views on *bon* shamanic practices, the individuals belonging from different age groups are randomly interviewed and their views have been categorized according to their age groups. An un-structured interview was conducted in Chochen village where the collected data of 27 households which consisted of 50 percent of the total households who are currently residing in Chochen. Along with the head of the family I interviewed other members of the family which is further divided into three categories based on the population and distribution of the people in Chochen.

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

My respondents were of all age groups from school going students to middle aged to older generation people.

As, Buddhism was one of the factors or the major threat for the sustenance of *bon* shamanic institution in other parts of the Himalayas, therefore, to examine, the relationship between Buddhism and *bon* Shamanism in Chochen, I interviewed lamas as well as *bon* shamans of Chochen.

The present study is an attempt to document the dynamics of shamanism and its contemporary manifestation before it becomes a matter of past reference. For primary collection of Data, I used both recorder as well as note book to collect the information in the field, after coming back home from the field I translated my data and tried to analyze my data. As collecting of data was not feasible from my home, I stayed in the field in the house of the Panchayat Member.

For secondary data, I accessed the Central Library of North Bengal University and the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Deorali in Sikkim. Beside these different journals, magazines papers, different Internet Sites was accessed. For analyzing and report writing and submission with proper scientific methods and procedure the guidance of the supervisor is followed.

Problems encountered in the field

Initially, as my research is based on the *bon* shamans which is less in numbers it was difficult for me to locate where should I be conducting my research. Later meeting officials from Ecclesiastical Department I was able to locate the spread of *bon* shamans in Sikkim. After visiting the field (21- Nathang Machong constituency) I found out *bon* shamans were scattered in different wards which were quite far from one another. Therefore, attending all the rituals conducted by different *bon* shamans from different ward was difficult for me. However, I tried to attend most of the rituals performed by them. As *bon* shamans (*pawo* and *nejum*) held their rituals usually during night, I had to go along with them and stay with them until the rituals got over. *Bongthing* usually performed their rituals during day but sometimes they had to go to different wards for the rituals and it was quite far from my main research area Chochen. Sometimes moving to different ward by foot, which is far was difficult.

Explaining the significance of the *bon* rituals in itself, to the people who feels ashamed to follow age old traditions and why I am conducting this research repeatedly to most of the people was pretty tiring. Sometimes respondent's (villagers along with some *bon* shamans) used to ask me will they be provided with money or incentives if they provide me with information.

Even after several visits and a good rapport building with the respondents especially the *bon* shamans they hesitated to tell me the name of the deities in the altar for a long time. They feared that uttering of the malevolent deities might inflict them

and me. Some of the shamans even believed that they might lose their power.

As the terms and the rituals performed by them is very exhaustive, asking them their significance repeatedly to clear my confusion is sometimes taken with sheer irritation by them. However, *bon* shamans as well as villagers in Chochen were very welcoming and treated me as their own family members.

When I interviewed lamas as well as some of the villagers, centered on significance and weakening of *bon* shamanic institution, they sometimes did not like it or simply found the topic mysterious and doubted whether I might be the *nejum* myself.