

Chapter 2

Social and Economic Background of the Villagers of Chochen

Introducing the Field: Settings a Basic Profile

Sikkim lies in the Eastern Himalayan belt and is a land sandwiched between three international borders Tibet in the North, Bhutan in the East and Nepal in the West. Sikkim because of its favorable geographical topography had been a contact zone both before and after the Chogyal regime. This location along Himalayan crossroads has been historically, both a blessing and curse for Sikkimese people (Mullard: 2006, 1).

Sikkim became an independent Himalayan kingdom in 1642 where the three Nyingma lamas who came from Tibet consecrated Phuntsok Namgyal as the first Chogyal of Sikkim in Yuksam. Sikkim became a protectorate of British government in the year 1890 and later became a part of India in May 1975. It is said that majority of Tibeto- Burman speaking people residing in Sikkim have come from Chumbi in Tibet and Ha from Bhutan. According to 2011 Census the total population of Sikkim is 610,577 inhabitants out of which 69,548 belongs to the Bhutia community.

Sikkimese Lhopo are an indigenous ethnic group of Sikkim who are believed to be the descendants of the Tibetan immigrants and term “Bhutia” however is misleading as it refers to any Buddhist highlanders of Tibetan origin living in the Himalayas and Balikci refers to them as Lhopo which seems to be the term they themselves prefer. (Balikci: 2008, 3) and Lhopos are the minority in the state. After Sikkim’s merger with India the Schedule Tribe Order of 1978 included other tribal groups like the Sherpas, Dukpas, Tibetans, Dophapas, Kagatay, Yolmos, Chumbipas in the category of Bhutia therefore Bhutia is a generic term.

The area which I have chosen is 21- Nathang Machong Constituency, these areas have 7- Gram Panchayat Units and 38 wards. I have chosen 19 Latok- Chochen G.P.U. which has 6 wards namely, Tadong ward, Pheri, Ziling, Lhatuk, Thek and Chochen and among these wards I have chosen Chochen ward as my area of study because there are more Shamans in this ward as compared to other wards.

Initially I went to Linkey and conducted my elementary survey. As I mentioned I would be taking Chochen Ward as my area of study because more Bhutia households and more Lhopo *bon* Shamans as compared to other district and constituencies of Sikkim were found in this ward. Almost all the households except one or two

households in Chochen consulted Lhopo *bon* Shamans to perform various rituals. Though Lhopo *bon* Shamans are scattered in different wards I have interviewed most of them. I interviewed two female *nejum* from Linkey ward. Two male *pawo* and two *bongthing* 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 19- Lhatuk Chochen Gram Panchayat Unit.

Ajo Chagu was the oldest amongst all the *bon* shamans. He was 80 years old and he was respected by all the villagers of Chochen and its adjoining areas. He was being visited by people from other parts of Sikkim as well. After the completion of my fieldwork, he passed away in the year 2020 due to illness. According to villagers and some of the lamas, *pawo* Kancha, *pawo* Gayching and *pawo* Sangay and *nejum* Tshering Diki were the most powerful *bon* shamans of Chochen.

According to narration of some of the villagers they said that earlier *bon* shamans were very powerful and strong and even performed some unbelievable magical tricks. The *bon* shamans while performing *bon* rituals in sacred places of Chochen in Taku Nay and Thungka nay, used to take out holy water (thue) from the huge rocks. However, according to some of the respondents, the *bon* shamans now are not powerful and strong, infact some of the respondents doubt their genuineness, whether they are real *bon* shamans or faking. *Bon* shamans those days used to perform a ritual where they used to go to retreat in their own abode. People from the village used to attend the rituals. However, after the death of *nejum* Tshering Diki, tradition of going into retreat by the *bon* shamans stopped as shedid not pass on her knowledge to her disciple.

Bon shamans in earlier days were respected and consulted by all the villagers, however with time the *bon* shamans in Chochen have lost their prestige and privilege as compared to earlier *bon* shamans.

History of the Land: Perspectives of the Past

This section highlights the history of the settings where I have conducted my research. I have interviewed the elders in the village and illustrated their narratives of how Buddhism and Lhopo *bon* shamanism flourished in these areas.

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. And I have also interviewed other elders in the village who had sound knowledge about the village. The following narration is the illustration of interview with the older lamas of Linkey.

According to them, the main Gumpa of 21- Latok Chochen constituency is Machong Gumpa; it is a Nyingma sect monastery and is almost 200 years old. It is the branch of Pema Yangste monastery. It was earlier located in Linkey. During the Chogyal's rule, Linkey was known as Chota Pathing and Machong as Bara Pathing. Linkey is the main door way which leads towards the 21 Lhatok-Chochen Constituency.

Thowa Chindey Rimponche was the first Rimponche who visited these areas and his nephew who was also a Lama and a Lharipa (a painter who paints Buddhist religious figures) and later who was known as Lama Khenchen suggested changing the location of the main Gumpa from Linkey to Machong as the landscape of Machong was very similar to that of Pema Yangtse monastery in Tashiding West Sikkim and also there was more concentration of Lhopo people in Machong area. Therefore, they shifted their Gumpa from Linkey to Machong. Lharipa Dawa was the first Lama who initiated the construction and paintings of the wall of the Machong Gumpa.

Initially, there were only 5 to 6 Lamas in the Gumpa now there are more than 200 monks in the Machong Gumpa (monastery). During the Dupche (Annual Buddhist) rites which is held once in a year, annual rituals are performed by the Lamas. People from the entire ward assemble together, Torkyap, Thamar Chyam, Guru Thakpo Chyam (rituals performed by the lamas once a year), all the people from different community attends the annual ritual. However as compared to other areas as in Phodong Monastery of Sikkim they do not have a system where the contribution from the Zinda or Penloh (local members in charge of the rituals) is mandatory, the people who attend the rituals contribute voluntarily. Gumpa themselves organizes the fund for the Annual rites. The state govt. provides the funds for the Gumpa Lharipa Dawa went to Tibet after the completion of the Gumpa. Khenchen-Phero Chana was the top among the 500 pundits of India who was present in Tibet at one point of time. There was a Wang (ritual anointing) going in Tibet at that point of time and also a debate going on and Lharipa Dawa participated in it and he started winning in every debate he participated. The higher lamas in Tibet got jealous of his knowledge,

therefore, there was a threat to his life and he ran away. Then, for his endeavor, Lharipa was even known by name as Kuzu Khenchey. He further did the painting in the Gumpa and then he went to Pema Yangtse. At the end he was killed. This story was narrated by the respondent's father to his son.

According to Panchayat (Chochen Ward) records there are 68 households in Chochen with the total population of 337 peoples. According to ICDS data (Integrated Child Development Services) 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 Lhopo *bon* Shamans and Lamas. Tibetan Buddhism and *bon* religion determine the socio- religious life of the Bhutia Lhopo community in Chochen ward no.4.

The reason why I have chosen this area is already mentioned above and the reason why I choose to study the Lhopo community is because majority of the Bhutia Lhopo today are Buddhist and they do not have Lhopo *bon* Shamans, the other Bhutia dominated area like the Navek- Shotak (East Sikkim), Thingda or Kabi (North Sikkim) which falls under Kabi Thingda constituency have hardly any Bhutia Lhopo *bon* specialist left. The Shamans available in these areas are of other ethnic group like the Lepcha *mun* or Lepcha *bongthing* or Tamang and Limbo Shamans, if need arises the Bhutia Lhopo of this area consult the Shamans belonging to other ethnic group as there are hardly any Lhopo *bon* Shamans left in these areas. However, it is pretty interesting that just one and half hour distance from main town Gangtok in the area named 21 Lhatok Chochen constituency, we can still find traces of Lhopo *bon* Shamans who are still actively participating in the religious activities of the villagers. Therefore, as there are more Lhopo *bon* shamans located in Chochen ward, I have taken Chochen Ward as the main focal point of the research area. By interviewing and intensively observing and participating in the rituals performed by the *bon* shamans of Chochen in different wards, I have tried to bring into account the social significance of different rituals performed by the ritual specialist in different wards of 19- Lhatuk Chochen areas in the Bhutia Lhopo households. To comprehend the worldview of the locals and its relation to the *bon* shamanic practices, I have conducted an unstructured interview of the perception of older and younger generation. Depending on the elementary research conducted and the collection of the data on the areas, the division of the age is categorically divided.

The main land mark of this Chochen ward is Chochen Lake. It is situated in the Chochen ward which is below the road in this ward. However, the lake has dried up and the local people have modified the lake with the grants received from the Govt. and have some home stays aside the Chochen Lake. The lake is in fact surrounded by green crops grown during different seasons, viz. rice, maize, millet etc. And in the middle of the lake more grasses and bushes are seen, the lake is encircled by an iron rod boundary. As story narrated by Ajo Chagu or Ajo *bongthing* (who was also commonly known as Cho Ka Ajo) It was believed that Cho Tha, Cho Lon, Cho Fa (mythical horse, ox and pig respectively) used to live in the lake and the respondents said; the reason why misfortune is happening in Chochen now is because during their forefather's times, Cho Lon (a mythical ox) mated with ordinary cow and the ordinary ox was not accepted by the local cows. Therefore, the mythical ox was taken as bad omen by the locals and the locals tried to kill him with bow and arrow but the ox jumped along with the calf in the lake and vanished forever. So now, the people of Chochen believe that the misfortune that is happening is due to the death of the mythical ox in the lake (narrated by late Ajo Chagu (Bongthing who passed away in the year 2020) after completion of my field work.

Ajo Chagu stated that, earlier *bon* shamans were really powerful and enjoyed a great prestige and privileges and he said that he wanted *bon* shamanic tradition to be there in Sikkimese Lhopo society. Therefore, he encouraged the new *bon* specialist and directed other *bon* shamans in the village to exercise their practices sincerely.

Further, there is one Mani Lhagang above the road in Chochen which is named as Norbu Mani Lhagang. The reason behind naming Chochen Norpu Mani Lhagang as Norbu Lhagang was, when an expecting cow gave birth to Zey (precious stone) instead of calf which is considered as Norbu (jewel). Hence, Chochen Mani Lhagang was named as Norbu Mani Lhagang in Chochen.

It was said by the locals that due to huge land slide in the late 1990s, Chandu Khola Bridge was carried away by landslide; the bridge was located in between 4th mile and 5th mile leading towards Chochen. The landslide was so huge it swept till Rongphu Khola (stream). Roads remained blocked for many years and even if locals of Chochen had to go to Gangtok then they had to cross the debris by foot and get a taxi to reach Gangtok. After landslide, often the road remained blocked and unblocked for many years. Chochen is an area where mobile network tower was constructed for

the 1st time in April 2017. Due to these reason Chochen has remained distant and isolated from mainstream Gangtok and most of the locals during the blockage of the road used to go to Rongli or Rhenock to buy the basic household goods by foot.

In the year 2000, Barapathing Junior High School was constructed by the Sikkim Govt. in Thekabung Ward of 21 Lhatuk Chochen Constituency. Recently a new dispensary is constructed; it has been of about nearly five years since its construction. The older dispensary was swept away by landslide. The nearest PHC (Public Health Centre) is situated in Machong Ward. It is of about half an hour walk from Chochen.

Pathing Rimponche was one of the Rimponche who had major influence on the locals residing in 21 Lhatuk Chochen constituencies. Pathing Rimponche who is also known by the people as Phulchung Tulku, his real name was Zigme Thinlay Gyatsho, he was re- incarnation of Channa Zenno Tempay Gyalchen Rimponche from Tibet (as narrated by one of the Lama from Pheri who was the disciple of Rimponche). He came to India at the age of 25, after taking a tour of Gyagar Nay (a pilgrimage at different parts of plain areas, India) he came to Gangtok first and then moved to Tokchi, Lamaten and Machong. Later, Phulchung Tulku was addressed as Pathing Rimponche after staying and meditating in different parts of 21-Lhatuk Chochen constituency. He passed away in the year 2003. Five years ago, his new incarnation is said to be born in Lhasa.

He had a major contribution in these areas because locals believed that he had tamed many local malevolent spirits in the areas. Under his supervision and guidance many Gumpas in these areas were constructed. In Chochen and its surrounding areas before the advent of Pathing Rimponche, in illness and death of the individuals, many animals were sacrificed by the locals to appease the local malevolent spirits as instructed by the *bon* shamans. He stopped the offering of red (Machod) and suggested the ritual specialist for offering of white (Kachod) i.e fruits and eggs.

He was called for his presence in many parts of Sikkim. I remember him visiting our place in Phenengla Shotak (East Sikkim) and tamed many local malevolent spirits. Our parents and grandparents said that they should not be uttering or saying aloud the names of those malevolent deities because that might revive those malevolent deities who are said to be tamed and fastened their mouth (Kha Damshey) by Pathing

Rimponche. During the Stay of Pathing Rimponche in different parts of 21-Nathang Machong constituencies there were few *bon* shamans. Although he did not openly discard *bon* shamans in Chochen and its adjoining wards but he was not akin to practices of *bon* shamans because in Phenengla Shotak (East Sikkim) Rimponche said to the locals not to entertain shamanic practices. However, after death of Pathing Rimponche, I found out that there was increase in the number of *bon* shamans in Chochen and its adjoining wards.

After death of Pathing Rimponche, Thumi Tulku from Bhutan who resides in Deorali Gumpa has started visiting these areas. When he was 8yrs of age he was brought from Bhutan (Paro) by Dorupchen Rimponche to Sikkim. He was familiar with the Barapathing, since Barapathing is an area where more concentration of Bhutia (Lhopos) or Denjongpas are found and consequently, a greater number of Buddhist. He started visiting these areas since past seven years; he comes to Barapathing during Buddhist rituals and on other auspicious Buddhist occasions to perform Buddhist rituals and also during the death ceremony of some of the Zindas (host where the ritual is held) who requests him for the rituals. He is currently constructing a Gumpa in Pheri (Pheri is a ward which comes under 19 Lhatuk Chochen GPU and Khuma Chamkong is the old Pheri Gumpa, this area is also dominated by the Bhutia Lhopos, there are nearly 79 Bhutia household in Pheri most belonging from Phempu lineage, they perform both Buddhist rites and *bon* shamanic rites to perform the yearly rites to appease the Pholha Molha. These lineage people basically appease the ya lha (or the deities from Tibet) and offers yaks leg to propitiate the deities. However now, most of the household perform *bon* shamanic rites and rituals once in three years) where earlier Gomchen Kuzo, a lama from Tibet used to meditate.

Initially Rimponche thought of making a Gumpa in Zangtey a place below the Linkey Mani Lhagang as the area was on the cliff. However, the land was already sold to another person in a hefty amount and the myth associated with the land changed the minds of Thumi Tulku (as locals believed that a malevolent spirit (Gaypu) from Bhutan resides in Zangtay. This Gaypu is being chased from Bhutan by the higher lamas. This Gaypu can take different forms and inflicts Nepo(illness) to the locals. Therefore, due to this problem he didn't further try to pursue his plans, however later he has thought of subduing this malevolent spirit and constructing Chorten and restoring peace and harmony in this place).

Later Pheri local people came to know about his plans and Pheri locals said that they have an appropriate location where the Rimponche can construct a Gumpa. The locals suggested Rimponche to construct a Gumpa in Khuma Chamkong in Pheri. Gomchen Kuzo who was later known as Pheri Kuzo resided in this place, before that Druptho Thangtong Gyalpu from Tibet meditated in this Chamkong. Druptho Thangtong Gyalpo through *ter* (magic) can make a boat and bridge out of the iron. His makings are still found in some parts of Bhutan. He came from Tibet and went to Bhutan and came to Sikkim and visited Pheri in Barapathing and meditated in this place. Lama Gomchen Kuzo meditated in Khuma Chamkong. Later, he was known as Pheri Gomchen and it was believed that Shokpa [Yeti, Meegay (sometimes even considered as local guardian deities)] used to serve him as myth says, once Gomchen Kuzo took out the thorns (Malinga ko kara, a nepali term for thorns) from his legs which was wedged in Shokpas feet and was hurting the Shokpa. Since then, as there was shortage of water in this Chamkong this Shokpa used to get the water and firewood for the Gomchen. It was believed that this Gomchen can even eat stone and stay without food for about a month or two and meditate. It is said that even today we can find those stones which Gomchen Kuzo had kept to eat which is called Dhochuelen. And after Gomchen Kuzo even Pathing Rimponche who came from Tibet, meditated in Khuma Chamkong.

Thumi tulku further said that lamas and shamans are different ritual practitioners because *bon* shamanic deities embodies the Zigten Gay lha (worldly deities, the deities that are not enlightened and their Sungma (local protective deities' power) are not so powerful whereas lamas revere the enlightened deities. They possess Mey phe y day phe y (half human and half malevolent spirits). They are totally different from Rimponche.

In Bhutan, this *pawo* and *pamo* does not set up their altar in Choesam (room where the Buddhist deities are kept and worshipped) rather they set their altar outside Choesam as they feel that their prediction does not become clear and vivid and their prediction becomes vague. In Bhutan Zay Khempu and Zongchen Khenchen Rimponche have subdued all the malevolent spirits in Bhutan and Thumi Tulku further added that it will be better if they do not invoke or possess these ambivalent malevolent spirits and even in Pheri *nejum* was not happy with destruction of the nature in order to construct the road which leads towards Kuma Chamkong where Thumi Tulku will be

constructing the Gumpa.

Social and economic background of the villagers of Chochen.

The tables shown below illustrates the social and economic background of the village. These tables highlight the lineage, educational qualifications, occupations, landholdings and annual income of the villagers.

In Chochen, according to ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) data, there are 53 households who are actually residing in the area with the total population of 309 people. I have conducted unstructured interview of 27 households of the villagers. The interview constitutes the analysis of 50 percent of households residing in Chochen village.

Table 2.1 Lineage of the Villagers of Chochen

Lineage of respondents	Number of households	Percentage (%)
Kinthup Tshering	6	22.2
Adongpa	8	29.6
Dimpey Wangchuk	12	44.4
Thumgay	1	3.7

Source: *Fieldwork (2016)*

Table 2.1, shows the lineage of the villagers of Chochen. Above mentioned are the name of the lineage whose forefathers are worshipped and appeased by the *bon* shamans of Chochen. The forefathers along with deceased *bon* shamans are appeased by the *bon* shamans of Chochen. However, a respondent belonging to Thungmay lineage does not worship or appease his ancestral deities. He is a married monk with family and apart from being a lama he also earns his livelihood through agricultural practices and he said, he does not believe in *bon* shamanic rites and rituals and I found out that in all the *bon* rituals I had attended I did not find Thungmay effigies or ancestors being appeased by *bon* shamans.

The people who stay near his premises are more influenced by him and when sick he suggests them to seek monk or doctor, however those people who have left their *bon* shamanic yearly rites recently, at the least consulted the oldest *bongthing* in case of emergency.

Table 2.2 Occupation of the villagers of Chochen.

Occupation	Number of households	Percentage (%)
Farmer	19	70
Govt. employee	2	7.4
Driver	1	3.7
Housewife	5	18.5

Source: *Fieldwork (2016)*

The above-mentioned table 2.2 shows the occupation of the respondents belonging to 27 households of Chochen. 70% of the respondents whom I had interviewed were farmers. They are agriculturists and depended on subsistence farming. They grew maize, wheat, rice, millet and cardamom in their field. Almost all the wife of the farmers whom I interviewed in Chochen were housewives. There were very few people who were govt. employees. The villagers who were employed did not stay in the village but they stayed in an around capital town Gangtok. As, majority of the villagers in Chochen were farmers and agriculturist they still held shamanic seasonal rites and rituals in their abode. However, there is shift in their mode of religious practices in the recent past. The political conflict which made certain people stop *bon* shamanic practices and the children who have now gone outside for job or study stopped or discouraged their parents from following *bon* shamanic practices and above all, few people who still followed *bon* shamanic practices at times were ambivalent about the practices held in their village or their abode.

Table 2.3 Educational qualifications of villagers.

Educational qualifications	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Not literate	16	64
Primary level	3	12
Higher secondary	4	16
Senior secondary	1	1.9
Technical courses	1	1.9

Source: *Fieldwork (2016)*

The above-mentioned table 2.3 represents the educational qualifications of the respondents of Chochen. 64% of respondent whom I had interviewed were not literate.

Table 2.4 Land holdings in hectares.

Size of land holdings (in-hectares) approx.	Number of family	Percentage (%)
0-20	25	92.5
20-40	1	3.7
40-60	-	-
60-80	-	-
80-100	1	3.7

Source: *Fieldwork (2016)*

Above mentioned table 2.4 highlights the land holdings in hectares approx. of the villagers of Chochen. Most of the respondents had 2 to 21 hectares of land. Only 1 household whose family was Mandal (village headman or tax collector during monarchical regime) had 100 hectares of land.

Table 2.5 Annual income per annum of the Bhutia Lhopo household of Chochen

Respondent No	Gender	Annual Income
Case 1	Male	30000
Case 2	Male	22000
Case 3	Female	20000
Case 4	Female	150000
Case 5	Female	180000
Case 6	Female	20000
Case 7	Female	10000
Case 8	Male	22000
Case 9	Male	12000
Case 10	Female	20000

Case 11	Male	80000
Case 12	Male	20000
Case 13	Female	20000
Case 14	Male	80000
Case 15	Male	25000
Case 16	Female	25000
Case 17	Male	25000
Case 18	Male	20000
Case 19	Male	20000
Case 20	Male	20000
Case 21	Male	20400
Case 22	Male	20200
Case 23	Male	20800
Case 24	Male	20000
Case 25	Male	20000
Case 26	Female	20000
Case 27	Male	20000

Source: *Fieldwork (2016)*

The table 2.5 is the classification of Annual Income which has been segregated as per World Bank by using Atlas method 2019. Table 2.5 represents 27 different cases representing the annual income per annum of Bhutia Lhopo households of Chochen and consequently Table 2.5.1 represents the range of income of the Bhutia Lhopo households of Chochen.

Table 2.5.1 Range of income of the Bhutia Lhopo households

Income (in Rs)	Frequency	%	Range
70,069 or less	23	85.18%	Low income
70,137 to 2,73,098	4	14.81%	Lower-middle income
2,73,167 to 8,45,955	0	0	Upper-middle income
8,46,023 or more	0	0	High income

Source: *World Bank by using Atlas method, 2019*

The classification of income has been segregated as per World Bank by using Atlas method, 2019. The range of income has been accordingly maintained for the household of Bhutia community of Chochen Village. From the above table 2.5, 85.18% of the household falls under lower income range. Only 14.81% of the household falls under lower-middle income range.

Social and economic background of *bon* shamans of 21- Nathang Machong Constituency.

The table below represents the social and economic background of the *bon* shamans of Chochen and its adjoining wards. There are different types of *bon* shamans namely, *bongthing* (a *bon* shamans who do not get possessed), *nejum* (a lady *bon* shaman), *pawo* (male *bon* shaman who gets possessed by local deities). Unstructured interview and Intensive fieldwork were conducted by participating in all the *bon* rites and rituals.

Table 2.6 Types, Lineage, Age, Gender and Wards of *Bon* Shamans

Types of <i>bon</i> shaman	Lineage	Age	Gender	Name of ward
Bongthing	Adongpa	85	Male	Chochen
Nejum	Adongpa	65	Female	Chochen
Nejum	Adongpa	39	Female	Chochen
Pawo	Dimpey Wangchuk	49	Male	Chochen
Nejum	Adongpa	57	Female	Dongrong

Nejum	Adongpa	58	Female	Dongrong
Pawo	Adongpa	55	Male	Ziling
Pawo	Adongpa	58	Male	Chochen
Bongthing	Chungku	59	Male	Chochen
Nejum	Dimpey Wangchuk	35	Female	Chochen
Bongthing	Dimpey Wangchuk	58	Male	Chochen

Source: *Fieldwork (2016)*

The above-mentioned table 2.6 highlights the types of *bon* shamans, their lineage, age, gender and the ward where they reside. As there are more concentration of *bon* shamans residing in Chochen, I took Chochen as my main area of study. *Bon* shamans during their shamanic rites traces their lineages. The effigies made in the altar represents their ancestors and they appease and worships their ancestors. The mentioned table shows different lineages of shamans found in different wards. The oldest bongthing whom I interviewed was the most respected and revered by the locals of the village. Unfortunately, after my fieldwork was over, he passed away in 2020. He was teacher to many of the *bon* shamans of Chochen, he was the person who could trace the ancestors of newly identified *bon* shamans. After the death of Pawo Sangay who had passed away before my fieldwork, Ajo Chagu was the only elderly bongthing who was consulted and respected by the villagers during illness.

Table 2.7 Occupations of *Bon* Shamans.

Occupations of bon- shamans	Number of respondents (bon- shamans)	Percentage (%)
Farmer	6	54.5
Housewife	5	45.4

Source: *Fieldwork (2016)*

Bon shamans are not full-time ritual specialists. They are consulted during illness or during different seasonal or yearly rites and rituals. They earn their livelihood through agriculture. They solely depend on subsistence farming. Therefore, when they

are consulted, the consultant gives a little money or things to eat or gifts as a mode of payment. They do not charge them or have a fixed fees like other health specialist, they take whatever the consultant offers. However, *bon* shamans enjoys the Bhatta (allowance) a state govt. of Sikkim offers. It needs to be noted that not all the bon shamans whom I had interviewed got their Bhatta either they had not applied or they did not have a good relationship with the Panchayat.

Table 2.8 Educational qualifications of *Bon* Shamans.

Educational qualification of <i>bon</i> shamans	Number of respondents
Not literate	11

Source: *Fieldwork (2016)*

The above table 2.8, represents the educational qualifications of *bon* shamans. I found out that all the *bon* shamans whom I had interviewed was not literate.

Table 2.9 Landholdings of *Bon* Shamans (in hectares).

Landholdings of <i>bon</i> shamans (in hectares)	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
1-5	8	72.7
5-10	1	9
10-15	1	9
15-20	1	9

Source: *Fieldwork (2016)*

The above table2.9, highlights the land holdings of *bon* Shamans (in hectares).

Table 2.10 Annual income of *Bon* Shamans (in Rs) approximately

Number of <i>bon</i> respondents	Annual Income (in rs) approx.
Case 1	15,000
Case 11	20,000
Case 111	21,000

Case IV	21,000
Case V	40,000
Case VI	20,000
Case VII	25,000
Case VIII	20,000
Case IX	25,000
Case X	21,000
Case XI	20,000

Source: *Fieldwork (2016)*

The table 2.10 is the classification of Annual Income of *bon* shamans which has been segregated as per World Bank by using Atlas method 2019. Table 2.10 represents 11 different cases representing the annual income per annum of Lhopo *bon* shamans of Chochen and Table 2.10.1 represents the range of income of the Bhutia Lhopo *bon* shamans of Chochen.

2.10.1 Range of income of Lhopo *Bon* Shamans of Chochen

Income (in Rs)	Frequency	%	Range
70,069 or less	11	100	Low income
70,137 to 2,73,098	0	0	Lower-middle income
2,73,167 to 8,45,955	0	0	Upper-middle income
8,46,023 or more	0	0	High income

Source: *World Bank by using Atlas method, 2019*

The classification of income has been segregated as per World Bank by using Atlas method, 2019. The range of income has been accordingly maintained for the Lhopo *bon* shamans of different wards. From the above table, 100% of the *bon* shaman's income falls under lower income range.

Conclusion

This chapter deals with the socio-economic background of the villagers of Chochen. I have introduced the field and tried to get a comprehensive social history of area of study by illustrating the narratives narrated by the elders in the village. The older elders in the village were interviewed and I have tried to highlight how Buddhism and *bon* shamanism flourished in these areas.

With the help of unstructured interview method respondents belonging to 27 households of the village of Chochen were interviewed to understand the social and economic background of the villagers of Chochen. The variables like lineage, educational qualifications, occupations, landholdings and annual income of the villagers are analyzed. Unstructured interview method was conducted of 27 households of the village which constitute the analysis of 50 percent households residing in Chochen village.

Further different tables are also shown to analyze the socio-economic background of the *bon* shamans residing in Chochen and its adjoining areas.

Linkey is the main door or gateway towards 19-lhatuk Chochen Gram Panchayat Unit, as mentioned by the elderly lamas, the main Gumpa was in Linkey. However, because of the favorability of the landscape which looks similar to Pema Yangtse Gumpa (the main Gumpa of Nyingmapa sect of Buddhism) the Gumpa was shifted towards Machong. The social history of initial religious developments in 21-lhatuk Chochen is important because it projects the socio- cultural beliefs of the locals living in an around Chochen Village.

Chochen is a village where majority of the people residing in this village are farmers. Economically they belonged to a lower income group. They are farmers who depended on subsistence farming. One of the reasons why *bon* shamanic practices still thrives in Chochen village is because majority of people in Chochen are agriculturist and economically they belonged to a lower income group and consulting doctors in Gangtok will be expensive to them. Hence, they rather choose an alternative method for healing their ailments. So, *bon* shamans are their nearest and affordable help during health crises.

Majority of *bon* shamans whom I had interviewed were farmers and the female *bon* shamans are housewives. *Bon* shamans in Chochen and its adjoining wards are

part time ritual specialist. They are agriculturists and depended on subsistence farming. Economically they belonged to a lower income group. Few *bon* shamans whom I had interviewed were enjoying the Bhatta (allowance) offered by the state government. During the *bon* rituals they appease their ancestral deities (pho lha mo lha). They trace their-lineages which is reflected from the effigies in the altar whom they worship and appease for the well-being of descendants.

Hence, Chochen is a small village with 53 households and total population of 309 people who are currently residing in Chochen and 70 percent of the respondents whom I had interviewed were agriculturists and 85 percent of respondents from Chochen belonged to lower income group. The reason why *bon* shamans still thrive in Chochen is because majority of people are agriculturists and the economic condition of the people is not sound and consulting to a doctor from Gangtok is expensive for them. Therefore, consulting *bon* shamans during crises is their first option.