

Chapter 3

Social Significance of *Bon* Shamanic Rites and Rituals held in Chochen

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. The social significance of *bon* shamans and the importance of their religious rites are evidently reflected in different rituals performed by them. These rituals include initiation ritual, seasonal rites and ritual of illness. The rites and rituals performed by the *bon* shamans in Chochen village underline the shared knowledge and belief among the villagers. It portrays the significance of their social world and the importance of inter- subjective meaning shared by the villagers. The notion of sacredness is attached to their environment, like stream water, rocks, jungle etc. The villagers believe that deities reside in these sacred places and the shared knowledge amongst the villagers that this sacred place needs to be worshipped and should not be polluted. If the deities residing in these sacred places are offended then villagers believe that they will be inflicted with illness and misfortunes.

These inter-subjective meanings shared by these villagers in turn helps in upholding the Lhopo *bon* shamanic belief system and maintaining peace and harmony in the village which helps in retaining a strong social cohesion in the village. *Bon* religion in many senses reflects the ordered mutual dependency between the humans and the supernatural entity. If we cautiously observe the rituals performed by the *bon* shamans and the worldview understood and shared by the villagers, we can come to a point stated by Durkheim, divination of society or worshipping of a society. Similarly, William Robinson Smith, a gifted linguist and scholar of Old Testament saw religion as rooted not in speculative myths about the nature of things but in the rituals that essentially worshipped divine representations of the social order itself: religion was made up of a series of acts and observations [it] did not exist for the sake of saving souls but for the preservation and welfare of society. It is indeed true because *bon* shamans through rituals are essentially worshipping the divine representation of the social order and their selfless attributes towards societies simply imply their concern

in preserving and for the welfare of the society. For Robinson Smith; ritual is primary component of religion and it fundamentally serves the basic social functions of creating and maintaining community (Bell Catherine: 1997, 4).

For Radcliffe brown, religion is an “essential part of social machinery by which human beings live together in an orderly arrangement of social relations: we deal not with the origins but with the social functions of religions, i.e., the contribution they make to the formation and maintenance of social order” (ibid. 27). Malinowski a contemporary of Radcliffe-Brown, put more stress on individual emotional states by arguing that some rituals (magical as opposed to religious ones, he thought) have the practical function of alleviating anxiety, distress, fear, doubt and sorrow (ibid. 28).

The ritual according to Durkheim, takes on a twin function of reinforcing collective values and reaffirming the community among individuals. In other words, Durkheim emphasis on religion and rituals as an integrative force in society must be seen as part of his idea of the ‘collective consciousness of society’. Religious practices are the mechanism by which the collective consciousness of a society gets institutionalized and is reproduced from one generation to the next. Rituals in such context should be seen as creating a ground for group solidarity amongst the individuals participating in it. The elaborative procedure- in which individuals come to take upon themselves various roles performing and various gestures, movements and engage in various forms of vocal recitations, chanting and so on are all means through which rituals bring about a sense of group solidarity among its participants. Through rituals, Durkheim tried to emphasize that the participants acquire the knowledge of what is good, required, accepted and desired by the community and in this sense brought the individual closer to the collective identity of the group. Further Durkheim observed that at the symbolic level, ritual represented the collective identity of the social group. So according to Durkheim rituals are sacred because it represents the collective identity of the social group.

Therefore, elucidation on the initiation rituals observed by the villagers with the help of village *bon* shamans delineates the social importance of *bon* shamanic rituals and rites or social worldview shared by the local people of Chochen. Thus, the selection procedure to the recognition of *bon* shamans in society is entirely a social concern, without the acceptance of a society he or she cannot be accepted as a *bon* ritual specialist. The elaborative, yet brief illustration of different rituals helps in understanding the social impact or the social significance of the *bon* rituals in day-to-

day life of the villagers of Chochen.

Further, spirit possession is one of the crucial elements of traditional *bonism*, where we can observe in the following chapters that both central and peripheral possession as mentioned by I.M Lewis taking place in the village of Chochen and its surrounding areas. And as Robert Merton has mentioned both Manifest and Latent functions can be witnessed in the attribute of the *bon* shamans of Chochen and its surrounding areas.

This chapter highlights the social significance of *bon* rituals, the shared knowledge and the social relationship between the locals and the supernatural realm, the mutual dependence of the locals with the divine representation present in nature through *bon* rituals. Further participation of the community in *bon* rites and rituals reflects the collective identity of the group which brings group solidarity in the village.

Who gets initiated as a *pawo* and *nejum*

According to Mircea Eliade, there are three ways of becoming a shaman: first, by spontaneous vocation (the “call” or “election”); second by hereditary transmission of the shamanic profession; and, third, by personal “quest” or, more rarely by the will of the clan. But, by whatever method he may have been designated, a shaman is recognized only after having received two kinds of instructions. The first is ecstatic (e.g., dreams, visions, trances); the second is traditional (e.g., shamanic techniques, names and functions of the spirits, mythology and genealogy of the clan, secret language). This twofold teaching imparted by the spirits and the old master shamans, constitutes initiation. (Eliade, Mircea: 1958, 87).

Similarly, an initiation ritual, in Sikkim, amongst the Bhutia Lhobo is a social affair. The *bon* shamans are socially recognized under the strict supervision of the *bon* specialist. And as Mircea Eliade mentions apart from call or election and hereditary transmission, ecstasy and traditional are major recognition process. Lhobo *Bon* shamans of Chochen and its adjoining areas had to undergo many tests to be socially accepted as a *bon* ritual specialist. Lhobo *Bon* religion and its ritual is a shared collective concern. *Bon* specialists along with few elders in the village along with the family members and member from the community comes to witness the event.

In Chochen, Firstly the sick individual through divination, if he or she is diagnosed as *bon* shaman, an initiation ritual is held where a tutelary deity is invoked under the supervision of the teacher *bon* shaman, if tutelary deity does not get

possessed in new shaman, then he or she is not considered as *bon* shaman though he/she is given another chance. In Chochen, *pawo* basically trace their descent line through the patrilineage likewise *nejum* trace their descent through the matrilineage. However, there might be cases where the *pawos* can trace their lineage through the matrilineage or vice versa depending on their tutelary deities (For example, in the case of one of the *pawo* from Chochen whose “Kabab” is deceased grandmother who was from Tibet and her tutelary deities were from Tibet. This *pawo* from “Chochen” invoked the deities which his grandmother possessed i.e he officiated the (Ya-lha) the deities from Tibet).

Initiation of *bon* shaman in Chochen.

Mircea Eliade states that, the term initiation in the most general sense denotes a body of rites and oral teachings whose purpose is to produce a decisive alteration in the religious and social status of the person to be initiated. In philosophical terms, initiation is equivalent to a basic change in existential condition; the novice emerges from his ordeal endowed with a totally different being from that which he possessed before his initiation; he has become another (Eliade, Mircea: 1958, X).

In the sphere of shamanism in the strict sense, the mystical experience is expressed in the shaman’s trance, real or feigned. The shaman is preeminently an ecstatic. Now on the plane of primitive religions ecstasy signifies the soul’s flight to heaven, or it’s wandering about the earth or, finally, its descent to the subterranean world, among the dead. The shamans undertake these ecstatic journeys for four reasons: first to meet the god of heaven face to face and bring him an offering from the community; second to seek the soul of the sick man, which has supposedly wandered away from his body or being carried off by demons; third to guide the soul of the dead man to its new abode; fourth, to add to his knowledge by frequenting higher beings. (Ibid, 95)

Unlike initiation ritual mentioned by Arnold Van Gannep and Victor Turner who studied initiation rituals during life crisis and an initiation of a boy in Ndembu society respectively. The neophytes or newly tested Lhopo *bon* shamans of Chochen and its adjoining areas are not separated from the society. Though they are found in a state where they are moving from one status to another, they are losing their previous identity into attaining new. They are found in a state of betwixt and between as term used by Victor Turner. However, in the case of *bon* shamans and its institution we find

no case of separation as stated by Arnold Van Ganepp and Victor Turner during the initiation rites and rituals. I argue that during the process of initiation especially what Mircea Eliade termed as initiatory sickness, the state of status-lessness, being sick, being paranoid and being addressed as mad, here we can witness a state of liminality, he is neither here nor there and he or she is neither dead nor alive. It also needs to be taken into note that unlike the initiation ritual or puberty rites or a boy initiation rite in Ndembu society who are separated and considered as impure, initiation of a Lhopo *bon* shaman and its ritual process is more of a privilege and prestige where the master shaman along with the new *bon* shaman are respected and honored and they go to visit sacred places to seek blessing and finally the neophyte is reincorporated in society as a socially accepted *bon* shamans.

Similarly, in Chochen teacher *bon* shaman along with the newly selected *bon* shaman, after going through the ordeal of becoming a *bon* shaman goes for a visit in sacred place of Chochen to seek the blessing of the guardian deities of Chochen. The detailed account of initiation ritual along with seasonal rites and rites of affliction is comprehended and illustrated to understand the social mechanism or the social functions of the *bon* shamans in Chochen. It would be incomplete and limited therefore; the detailed account of the sacred place along with the name of the protective guardian deities is taken into account. Due to paucity of literature on social significance of *bon* shamans and its rituals and the relationship between the humans and supernatural realm and lack of proper documentation in different parts of Sikkim, a detailed account of Lhopo *bon* rituals along with the names of the guardian deities and their social significance is highlighted in this chapter. This chapter also reflects the social relationship between the *bon* shamans and the lay people and their participation in different rites and rituals of *bon* shamans.

Further, Eliade mentions, Initiatory sickness closely follows the fundamental patterns of all initiations: First, torture at the hands of the demons or spirits, who play the masters of initiations. Second, ritual death, experienced by the patient as a descent to hell or an ascent to heaven; third, resurrection to a new mode of being- the mode of consecrated man that is, a man who can personally communicate with gods, demons, and spirits. Further he states that, whatever the nature of his sufferings may be, they have a role in making of the shaman only to the extent to which he gives them a religious significance. And, by the fact, accepts them as ordeals indispensable to his mystical transfiguration. The shaman's integration of a new

personality is in large part dependent on his being cured (Eliade, Mircea: 1958, 91).

Similarly, in Chochen and its adjoining areas most of the *bon* shamans who are diagnosed as *bon* shamans (*pawo*, *nejum* or *bongthing*) were sick for a shorter or a longer duration of time. The ailing individual who consults the *bon* shamans, after Mohtap (prediction) if predicted as *bon* shamans and reflects the symptoms of ritual specialist then an Ata Gokap (see in glossary) ritual is held. So, during the Ata Gokap ritual the sick individual if he/she is a genuine shaman then he/she is possessed by the tutelary deities or Kabab of the deceased *pawo* or *nejum* which is causing him/her illness.

In Chochen when a school going girl after Mohtap (prediction) was predicted as a ritual specialist and to establish which deity is her tutelary deity, Ata Gokap (see in glossary) ritual was held. Unlike Chochen in Tingchim North Sikkim, Yeshey Gonpo must be the first deity to take possession and introduce himself. If other deity takes possession, then the candidates will not be allowed to proceed as a *pawo* and the initiation ritual will end at that point although a second or third initiation may be attempted at a later stage (Balikci: 2008, 158). In Chochen (East Sikkim) during the Ata Gokap ritual the tutelary deities of the deceased *pawo* needs to speak through the possessed *pawo* or *nejum*, if the candidate is not able to establish its tutelary deities a second or third initiation may be attempted at a later stage as in the case of Tingchim. However, Ata Gokap ritual is a very expensive affair. The family has to pay a heavy amount to the ritual specialist who would be conducting the ritual and the overall expenditure for the ritual is very dear.

After an ailing individual is diagnosed as a *bon* shaman he or she will be taken under the guidance of senior *bon* shamans who would be considered as guru or teacher of newly diagnosed shaman. The diagnosis (When diagnosing the illness of a girl in Chochen, the higher lama after prediction said that she was affected by the Lhasung (ancestral deities) of their lineage. However, the higher lamas would not say whether he or she is *bon* shaman but they might say that he/she is affected by the Lhasung or the ancestral lineage deities. Therefore, they need to propitiate the pho lha mo lha or their ancestral deities) is basically done by the *bon* shamans. In Chochen, most of the *bon* specialists were being tested or diagnosed by the Ajo Chagu (*bongthing*) and late *pawo* Sangay. After the death of *pawo* Sangay, Ajo Chagu (*bongthing*) along with few of his junior *bon* shamans undertakes the diagnosing procedure and tests whether he/she is *bon* shaman. With the help of the rosary and using rice they perform a Moh

a prediction and through certain tests confirm whether they are the spirit mediums or not.

Most of the *pawo and nejum* whom I interviewed had one thing in common; they were initially sick for a longer or a shorter period of time. Some of the *bon* specialists said that they had “farchey” (negative consequences or misfortune) at home before being diagnosed as a Shaman. When they were sick, they consulted doctors and even various religious specialists because doctors were of little help to them. They visited various Gumpas (Buddhist monastery) and consulted with Rimponches (higher lamas). In fact, one of the *pawo* was severely ill; he was even admitted to the psychiatric ward. Most of the *nejum* before being diagnosed as a spirit medium were sick. They used to have a severe headache and heartache and so on. They used to act like a mad person, they were not conscious of what they were doing. One of the *nejum* when undergoing the process of being a shaman visited the Takku nay unconsciously at night where the supernatural entities reside. A newly diagnosed Nejum from Chochen actually needed a family member to look after her because most of the time she did not remember what she was doing and where she was going and whenever she used to hear the bells ringing and drums playing, a ritual being performed by other *bon* specialist, she used to get anxious and excited and followed the sound and would be performing in the rituals (she used to shake profusely and go into trance during the ritual). When the event got over, after she regained her consciousness, she said, she felt embarrassed and hurt and she often cried and she said that local people are not so fond of *nejums* though most of them perform rituals at their quarters or attended the rituals but people of community think that bonism is not a good religious practice and they even pray that no girl should be born as a *bon* specialist. This thought shared by the people sometimes provoked the newly initiated Nejum. And she even said that, she doesn't like going to the Rimponches (higher Buddhist lamas) and being blessed by them, she felt that she is more powerful than him and she said that it is the tutelary deities which made her feel like that, in fact, she mentioned that they are not even given a proper Cha-Wang (blessing) by the higher lamas.

Most of the *bon* shamans who were severely ill earlier after being diagnosed as shamans and propitiates the tutelary deities usually gets cured. And as Eliade states, whatever ordeal the *bon* shamans had to go through to become a shaman or not being a shaman (ailing individuals who consult higher lamas and other *bon* shamans to cure them) the shaman's integration of a new personality is in large part dependent on being

cured.

Before becoming a *pawo* and *nejum* a *bon* specialist especially *pawo* and *nejum*, they were sick. After Ata Gokap or after the establishment that he/she is a *bon* shaman, it is mandatory for the newly diagnosed shamans to do the Naykor (to visit the sacred place) for three times in important Nay of Chochen to be socially accepted or recognized as *bon* shamans. If *bon* shamans can afford they even visit Lho Khandro Sangphug or the secret caves of Dakinis, lies near the Phur Tsa Chu hot springs on the eastern bank of river Rangeet near Reshi, Dechen Phug or the cave of happiness near Pelling, Lhari Nymphug or even known as the cave of gods hill and Sharchoy Bephug near Rabongla (Yishey Doma; 2015, 83). If the *bon* shamans in Chochen and its adjoining areas are not able to afford the expenses of visiting the sacred caves of Sikkim, it is mandatory for them to seek refuge and visit the three important sacred place or Nay of Chochen, where the *bon* shamans have to take the blessings and guidance of the guardian deities of these sacred places. These guardian deities of the Nay are placed in the main altar and they guide the *bon* shamans during the ritual.

In Chochen, after being diagnosed as a *bon* Shaman by an elder or a Shaman expert, the newly initiated shaman has to do the naykor (pilgrimage) or visit the important sacred place to seek the blessing and acceptance of the local guardian deities as the *dungee* or student of the deceased *kabab* (it refers to a *pawo* or *nejum*'s spiritual ancestors to whom they may or may not be related) (Balikci, 2008:380).

The *bon* shamans before fully functioning as an established ritual specialist have to visit the three sacred places of Chochen. They have to visit these sacred sites and propitiate the guardian deity. Once every year for three consecutive years they have to visit these places. The Zindas along with few elder people and villagers from the locality along with the *pawo* (teacher) and the *dungee* (students) go for the visit to sacred place. The three important sacred places which the *bon* shamans in Chochen have to visit are:

1. Taku- nay (earlier known as Ney Yu Rinchen Sho) lies in the extreme east of Pakyong (East Sikkim). From Chochen via Lhatuk to Thek to Taku Nay it takes about 5 to 6 hours of walk. By vehicle it might take 45 minutes to reach the bottom of the Nay however to reach the destination it takes about another 45 minutes (from road to Taku nay).
2. Thung-Ka-Nay which falls on the way to Lhatuk takes about two to three hours of walk from Chochen. By taxi it takes about half an hour to reach from road to the

sacred place.

3. Chochen Lake or Pathing Cho is just below the road in Chochen.

These three important sacred places are visited and paid homage by the new *pawo* or *nejum* along with their teachers for three times in three years to be officially recognized or socially accepted and to seek blessing from the local guardian deities as the dungee of the deceased kabab in Chochen and its adjoining areas.

Before starting the journey, the ritual takes place in the Pathing Cho (Chochen Lake). A short ritual is performed by the *bon* shamans where he/she chants Khelen and offers a Serkyem by propitiating all the local deities and seeking permission and asks for blessing for a successful visit. Once a ritual is over the Zindas along with *bon* shaman's heads towards Taku Nay, after a long 3 to 4hrs of walk, the gate keeper Phyama Lapchey Kapu who resides above the bridge on the way to Taku Nay, this gate keeper needs to be appeased by Bon Shamans by offering tso (fruits) and chang (fermented millet) and to seek permission to open the gate of the sacred realm and to inform him of the purpose of their visit.

On reaching Taku Nay the ritual starts with offering the Sha-Nga (offering of red meat, especially a right hand of the ox is preferred) to the deities, *pawo* or *bongthing* chants a Khelen (prayers) by saying that they are performing this appeasement ritual Lhab Say (ritual) to seek blessing and recognition of the new *bon* shamans as the dungee (student) of the kabab and welcomes the local deities and asks them to attend the ritual and bless the newly initiated *bon* shamans. Especially this offer is made to the Pho Lha Masung and Cho Neysung who is the guardian deity of this area. After offering of Sha-Nga, in the evening the main ritual starts with offering of Sang-phen (see in glossary) and followed by propitiating the Dhay- Gay (local malevolent spirits). These Dhay Gay possess the *pawo/nejum* and these deities are offered the Tso and the *pawo/nejum* requests them not to inflict the people with illness and misfortune and appeases them with egg, fruits and biscuits which is basically Kachod or white offerings.

Earlier animals were sacrificed during *bon* rituals, however after intervention of Tibetan Buddhism sacrifice or killing of animals is stopped in Chochen and its surrounding areas, the *bon* specialist offers the red meat bought from the meat shop to appease the deities. Offering of red meat is not simply the matter of gift exchange as Hubert and Mauss rejected Robertson Smith's transformed Tylor's notion of sacrifice as a gift or bribe addressed to the gods by emphasizing that the totemic rite was a

“communion” in which humans and divines are identified through the sacrifice and consumption of the totemic animal and Hubert and Mauss were in favor of a more general description of sacrifice works. They pointed to two basic processes inherent in all form of sacrifice, sacralization and desacralization. An essentially profane offering is made sacred-consecrated, in effect- in order to act as the means of communication and communion between the sacred and the profane worlds. At the conclusion of the rite, however, a process of desacralization reestablishes the necessary distinction between these two worlds that make up day- to- day reality.

In a modified Durkheimian fashion, they concluded that sacrifice is “an act of abnegation” by which the individual recalls the presence of collective forces even as those forces are channeled to work to the advantage of the individuals involved in the sacrifice. Hubert and Mauss also suggested the idea, soon developed by others, that this sacrificial process functions to reestablish social equilibrium after it has been upset. Hence while Vedic sacrifices are invoked, individuals who hire the priest, supply the offerings and make known specific concerns and requests to gods, the activities and theological ideas of the ritual are rooted in the assumptions that ascribe a divine nature to essentially “social matters” and “collective forces”. (Bell, Catherine: 1997, 26). So as mentioned above, in the case of Chochen and its adjoining areas, offering of red meat does not simply imply a gift or bribe or a communion between the humans and the deities but the sacrificial process functions to reestablish social equilibrium which has been disturbed or upset by communicating or communion between the sacred and the profane world through profane offering.

After propitiating the Dhay Gay (ambivalent local deities) the ritual specialist along with the Zindas are offered food. Once the dinner is over, invocation of the deities in the main altar is started by the *pawo/nejum* (teacher) followed by the new *pawo* and during the ritual both the teacher and student *bon* shamans goes into trance and are possessed by the deities from the main altar, where different guardian deities along with the spirit of dead *pawo* or *nejum* or kabab of the *pawo* or *nejum* speaks through the possessed *pawo/nejum*.

The student (*dungee*) along with the teacher are possessed by the deities successively and these deities and Kabab possess the ritual specialist and speaks through them and predicts or answers even the doubts raised by the Zindas.

The ritual ends with *tso ben* or *tso phen* offering of *tso* to the deities in the main altar as well as to the gate-keeper *Phya Ma Lhabsay Kapu*.

Early next morning the ritual in Taku Nay ends with propitiating the deities from the main altar, first the teacher after that the dungee *bon* shamans in trance encircles the Hung- Kung or Nay Gay Uchi (see in glossary), carrying Pho Lha Masung torma in their head from the leftside of the huge rock After the rituals are over in Taku Nay again a long journey begins to Thung-ka Nay which takes of about 5to 6 hours walk from Taku nay, if lucky one might find a truck or a utility van or other vehicles along the way.

After reaching Thung Ka Nay, again a Khelen is said by the *pawo/nejum* (teacher) and he offers the Sha-nga to all the local deities present in the altar. The deities who are given special preference are the Pho Lha Ma Sung and Cho Dzochen. Cho Dzochen is the guardian deity of Thungka Nay. After sha-nga is being offered the *pawo/nejum* offers Nye- Gyub (Chinlab or blessings) to one of the zindas. In the late afternoon again, the ritual begins with Khelen (propitiating the deities from the main altar) and followed by Sang-Phen and again appeasing the Dhay-Gay (local malevolent spirits who are responsible for causing illness to the locals). Dhay Gay are appeased with tso, (eggs, fruits, rice and biscuits), which is known as Kachod or white offerings. These Dhay Gay are requested not to inflict the people with illness and misfortune by appeasing them with Kachod. After appeasing Dhay Gay, dinner is offered to the ritual specialist and to all the Zindas. After dinner *pawo* invokes the deities from the main altar and both teacher and the student go into trance and they are possessed by different deities from their main altar. Lastly, Tso- Phen is orated and Tso are offered to the deities in the main altar and as well as to the gate keeper Phya Ma Lhapchey Kapu is offered the Tso. After, spending two nights and two days in Taku-nay and Thung-Ka nay on the third or the final day the *pawo* along with the zingdas comes to Pathing Cho. In Pathing cho other family members (zindas) would be there to welcome all the people. After tea and breakfast, the ritual starts by orating Khelen where all the deities are invited for the ritual. Two altars were set up for the ritual (during my field visit to witness the procedure of initiation ritual). One altar was propitiated by the *pawos* (the master and the newly elected *pawo*) and another by the Ajo bongthing or Ajo Chagu (most respected and oldest *bon* shaman of Chochen). The rituals started simultaneously. Along with invoking the deities in the altar by the *pawos*, *bongthing* on the other side started by offering Sha-Nga to the deities in another altar. *Bongthing* started with Khelen and inviting Pho Lha Mo Lha and all the deities present in the altar for the occasion. And he offered the raw meat, Sha-Nga (right hand of ox) to the

deities. After offering of raw meat by the *bongthing* (Sha-Nga to the deities), *pawo* (teacher) with *Masung torma* on his head, along with two men carrying the Sha-Nga and *Phee-Ma-Dada* (cup filled with flour and topped with butter and *dada* (a bamboo stick wrapped with *khada* (white scarf)) would be encircling the *Pathing Cho* or *Pathing Lake*. Similarly, the *dungee* (students) performs the ritual in the same process where two persons would be assisting in carrying the Sha-Nga and *Phee- Ma Dada* who would be shouting and dancing and merrymaking or celebrating the official recognition or acceptance or blessing of new *pawo* from the local guardian deities who would be carrying a *Masung torma* above his head and encircling *Pathing Cho*.

After that the Sha-nga is given to the *bongthing* and he cuts the meat three times with a knife and orders the *Zindas* to cook the Sha-nga and then deities are offered the cooked meat which would be chopped in small pieces and offered to each deity in the altar. Even the crows are offered the meat. It is interesting to note that the crows would be kids who would be pretending as a crow and will be collecting the meat and *torma* or cooked rice offered by the *Bongthing*. *Bongthing* also offers the *nye-gyub* (menlom, blessings) to the *Zindas*. Simultaneously, at the other side two *pawos* would be invoking the deities from the main altar. On the last day the *Dhay Gay* (ambivalent deities) of *Haying Khaw* (lid) was not propitiated in the *Pathing Cho*. The guardian deities of *Chochen* were propitiated by the *pawos* and *Bongthing*. After orating the *Tso- Ben* and offering of *Tsoto* the deities by the *Pawo* the ritual comes to an end. After the ritual is over in *Pathing cho*, there would be another ritual at home in the night which is known as *Chimbab*. The last ritual on the last day of the visit to sacred place was held at night. The ritual was held at the newly recognized *Pawo's* house. This ritual is known as *Chimbhab* or *Chinlap bhapshay* or *Chinlap Shushey*. *Chinlab* means blessing and *bhap* means to “come down on”. *Chimbhab* is a ritual after acquiring the blessing from the guardian deities residing in different *Nay* (sacred place) in *Chochen*, this ritual is held to share the blessing in the family. The teacher and the student (*dungee*) perform the ritual together and propitiate all the local deities and the blessing they have acquired by taking the pilgrimage is shared amongst the family members as well as the people who attended the rituals. The ritual came to the end with propitiating the deities in the main altar and offering of *sang-phen* and appeasing *Dhay Gay* and offering them *tso* and requesting them not to inflict the people with illness.

After appeasing the *Dhay Gay* both the *pawos* were possessed by the deities from the

main altar consecutively. And ritual came to the end by oration of tso phen followed by offering of tso to the gate keeper (Phya Ma Lhab-Say Kapu). After the ritual was over the Zindas of the newly initiated *pawo* offered money and gifts to the *pawo* teacher and even gave gifts to the Ajo *bongthing*.

Hence, initiation rituals of Chochen and its adjoining areas are social affair. People from the community along with the *bon* shamans participate in this social process of an individual becoming a *bon* shaman. Recognition or social acceptance of *bon* shaman in Lhopo community of Chochen and its adjoining areas is not an easy matter. He/she has to go through tests to be socially accepted as Lhopo *bon* shaman. The veneration of nature and notion of sacredness attached to nature following with a belief that if these sacred places are defiled then it inflicts the community people with illness and misfortunes. This shows the collective social meaning shared by the locals of Chochen and its adjoining areas. Going against nature would be going against the community or collectivity i.e., society. When people from the village gather and visit these sacred places and witnesses this ritual, a sense of commonality and communal feeling is generated which binds the society and sense of solidarity is felt in the community.

An account of important *Bon* rituals

Following descriptions are an important account of *bon* rituals held in Chochen and its adjoining areas in different Bhutia (Lhopo) household.

Calendrical rites:

In Chochen apart from rites of affliction or ritual of illness, calendrical rites or more specifically seasonal rites are of most social importance. Calendrical rites give socially meaningful definitions to the passage of time, creating an ever-renewing cycle of days, months, and year. This type of rite makes time appear to be an ordered series of eternal re- beginning and repetitions. Calendrical rites occur periodically and predictably, accompanying seasonal changes in light, weather, agricultural work, and other social activities. Calendrical rituals can be roughly distinguished in terms of seasonal and commemorative celebrations. Seasonal celebrations are rooted in the activities of planting and harvesting for agriculturists or grazing and moving the herd for pastoralist (Bell, Catherine: 1997, 102). Ritual, Roy Rappaport in 1968 argued, not only regulates the interaction of one human community with another but also can regulate the

interaction of humans with local materials, foodstuffs, and animals-especially pigs in New Guinea case, since they are an important component of diet and the economy. Sketching tribal life as a series of exchanges that include everything from genetic matter to stone axes, Rappaport cast social processes like ritual as an intrinsic part of a much larger and embracing cultural ecosystem (ibid. 29).

Likewise, Zinda (the owner of the house where the shamanic rituals are held) of the Chochen perform shamanic rituals twice a year i.e in the Dawa Dinpo 7th month of the lunar calendar and Dawa Neepo 2nd month of the lunar calendar. At *bon* shamans' abode, rituals are held thrice a year i.e in Dawa Dinpo (seventh month), Dawa Neepo (second month), and Dawa Chukchee or even called Lossong Momee Lamchey (in the 11th month) of lunar calendar, ritual is held in the house of the *bon* shamans. During these rituals deities are offered with different kinds of seasonal foods, fruits and drinks which are sown in their fields.

Dawa Neepo rituals:

In Dawa Neepo the Zinda propitiate the Ya lha (the deities from Tibet) they perform the ritual with the help of *pawo and nejum* at their residence. The locals residing in the Pheri ward who are mostly Bhutias belonging from Phemphu Nadikpa lineage performs their rituals in the second month of the lunar calendar (Dawa Nepo). This ritual is performed because it is believed that deities who had come down towards the plains and who are going back up to the Himalayas are being offered food fruits and drinks. So, during Dawa Nepo rituals the Zindas offers Na chang (fermented wheat) to the deities. They propitiate the Ya lha which means the deities from Tibet (however, it needs to be noted that it is not only the deities from Tibet but they propitiate the deities from Ha Bhutan as well as the local guardian deities). They offer Yak meat during these rituals. In Pheri most the Bhutia households consult *pawo* Lhatuk (Pawo Lhatuk's Kabab is Ana Eden. Ana Eden was married to a man from Tibet. When she came back from Tibet and stayed in Ziling (one of the wards in 19- Lhatuk Chochen). She was severely ill and she was diagnosed as *nejum* and according to mohtap (prediction) it was the deities from the Tibet which she had to officiate. As Pawo Lhatuk is the grandson of Ana Eden and as his Kabab is Ana Eden, he has to propitiate the deities from Tibet).

Tracing the Kabab, their lineage and its tutelary deities is basically instructed and suggested mostly by Ajo Chagu (*bongthing*). Due to his knowledge and popularity, he

is even consulted by people from other parts of Sikkim.

Most of the households in Chochen still perform the *bon* shamanic rites except few who are the orthodox follower of Buddhism do not perform *bon* rituals at their house though they propitiate the *pho lha mo lha* (ancestral deities) and offers *sha nga* (see in glossary) once after every three years without performing the Dawa Dinpo and Dawa Nepo rituals.

Dawa Dinpo ritual.

Dawa Dinpo ritual which is held during the celebration of Pang Lhabso, the *bon* shamans in Chochen perform the rituals because it is believed that all the deities who are residing in the higher altitude moves towards the lower altitude areas (however it is unclear about the movements of the deities). Therefore, during this time the ritual specialist and the people of the locality invites the deities and offers newly harvested crops.

However, it needs to be noted that in the Dawa Dinpo ritual except the lineage belonging to Dimpen Wangchuk's sub-lineage Amcho and Zombo, have the representation of Khangchen Dzonga (the mountain deity of Sikkim) and Pawo Hungri, a *yul lha zib da* (local protective deities of Sikkim) in the altar. Dimpey Wangchuk sub-lineage, Amcho, Zombo invokes the local deities during the Dawa Dinpo ritual. Khangchen Dzonga is the most important local deity of Sikkim which is followed by Pawo Hungri and Yabdue Dzongchen (local protective deities) respectively. Consequently, apart from Amcho and Zombo sub-lineage of Dimpey Wangchuk other lineages of Dimpey Wangchuk propitiate Khangchen Dzonga along with the local guardian deities during Dawa Dinpo ritual.

Dawa Dinpo ritual is held for the welcome or invitation of the local deities for the occasion of Pang Lhabso. During the ritual, deities are invoked and the ritual specialist Pawo and Nejum requests the deities to bless the people with wealth, life, children, peace and harmony in the society. They are invited for the occasion and they are offered the "phue" (first newly harvested crops or fruits which is offered to the deities) of freshly harvested crops.

The Dawa Dinpo rituals starts with Khelen where all the deities which are represented in the altar are invited for the occasion {for Lhabso or celebration of Gaypu (kings or monarchs) Pang Lhabso (which are locally termed by the locals)}. The deities are invited by offering them newly harvested crops. In fact, Dawa Dinpo

rituals can be said to the newly harvested crop rituals. During this month maize, wheat and millet are harvested.

Khelen starts with propitiating the Phola Masung and Kangchen Dzonga and Cho Neysung the guardian deity of Taku Nay and Cho Dzochen which is the guardian deity of Thungka Nay along with all the other deities present in the altar. During the Khelen, deities are invoked and the ritual specialist *pawo* and *nejum* requests the deities to bless the people with wealth, life, children, peace and harmony in the society. They are invited for the occasion and they are offered the "phue" of freshly harvested crops. Maize Chang is offered by most of the household as maize is harvested during the month of August and September and maize is usually offered as "Lho Tho" (seasonal harvest) thanking the deities for the good harvest and offering the "Phue" to the deities.

Dawa Chukche rituals:

This ritual is exclusively held in the *bon* shaman's dwellings. However, there are few families in Chochen who offer Dawo Dinpo rituals as well as Dawa Chukchee rituals and there are families who perform shamanic rituals once a year depending upon economic conditions as well as their faith in shamanic endeavor. This ritual is basically held as a thanks giving to the ancestral deities. Sha-nga along with the yearly produce is offered to the local deities. During this time all the family members along with their relatives gather together and propitiate the pho lha mo lha. A Dawa Chukchee ritual is generally observed in *bon* shaman's residence and few other households for thanks giving and propitiating the ancestral deities and for the maintenance of peace and solidarity in the family and the society.

The Khelen chanted by the *bon* shamans in different rituals are different but the mantras like sang- phen and tso- phen chanted and the procedure of rituals and invocation of certain deities are similar in both Dawa Dinpo and Dawa Chukchee except depending on their respective lineage, invocation of few different deities are present in their respective altar.

Conclusion:

Social significance of *bon* shamanic ritual witnessed in Chochen and its surrounding areas, its reverence and the social meaning attached to their natural surroundings cannot be overlooked. The shared belief and their world view that their rocks, water, trees etc. are sacred and need to appease or propitiate the guardian deities for

abundance, peace and prosperity of the villagers reflects the social significance of bon shamanic rituals in the village. The offerings of white (Kachod or fruits) or a (Machod or red offerings) is not simply an exchange of gifts or bribe or a communion between the humans and the deities but the sacrificial process functions to reestablish social equilibrium which has been disturbed or upset by communicating or communion between the sacred and the profane world through profane offering.

Further, Durkheim clearly saw ritual as the means by which the individuals are brought together as a collective group. Rituals function to “strengthen the bonds attaching the individual to the society of which he is a member”. It does so not by the means of conscious act of affiliations but the experience of the collective representations as a simultaneously transcendent and immanent commonality- God above and the soul within (Bell Cathrine: 1997, 25).

Bon shamanic rites and rituals held in Chochen is a social affair. Spirit possession is one of the crucial element of traditional bonism and according to I.M.Lewis, there are two kinds of spirit possessions; central and peripheral possessions. In Chochen, majority of the people are agriculturist and earn their living through agriculture and generally depended on subsistence farming which are mostly seasonal and cardamom is the main cash crop which gives the villagers some money as compared to ginger, wheat or rice or millet or other seasonal agricultural products and only handful of villagers work outside the village as a govt. employee. As village was declared as the most backward village and *bon* shamans seems a very favorable position for many of the *bon* shamans in the village as through interview with *bon* shamans, I found out most of the *bon* shamans had less land holdings and less source of income as compared to other locals residing in the village. What I want to point here is when an individual is unable to maintain his power or status in a society due to a result of economic or other historic conditions, he/she tries to manipulate or try to balance their social conditions. Indeed, when I.M. Lewis talks about peripheral and central possession where the former states that the individual is able to manipulate his superiors without openly questioning their superiority. This kind of possession influences or affects both men and women where they manipulate either to uplift their status or achieve a balance in society or in circumstances where they are unable to advance to positions of power as a result of economic or other historic conditions and latter basically states the function of upholding and sustaining public morality. However, it needs to be noted that the *bon* shamans and their attributes should not be

taken as a mere manipulation or *bon* rituals as illusion. *Bon* religion is social and *Bon* religion plays a significant role in Bhutia Lhopo household of Chochen and its surrounding areas.

Robert Merton argues that, there are two types of functions of the spirit possessions. The manifest and the latent functions. In Chochen and its adjoining areas both types of functions could be witnessed because during illness or any kinds of discontentment people of Chochen and its adjoining areas consulted *bon* shamans and try to solve their issues. Therefore, in disruptive unstable social circumstances the villager's resort to prayers and consult a *bon* shaman which brings social stability in the village. Simultaneously, spirit possessions serve as a means of status achievement. The ritual practitioner whoever is believed to have a power and are influential in the community are not only consulted but they are enjoying a certain status and prestige in society.

Further, the Sikkimese *bon* shamans are the ritual specialists whose main social function is to maintain good relations with the household and the lineages ancestral gods. Though, Buddhism was confined in the palace chapel and its surrounding areas, it was said that earlier in the villages of Sikkim each patrilineage had their own *pawo* and *nejum* (Balicki: 2008, 145). In earlier days bonism played an important role in maintaining the socio- religious life of the Sikkimese people. However, with the gradual penetration of Buddhism, bonism started losing its essence. Villages in Sikkim were often visited by the lamas from Tibet or other adjoining areas of Sikkim which influenced the religious practices of the Sikkimese Lhopo villagers.

During 1990's there were only a handful of shamans (*bon*) found in Sikkim (ibid.145). Today most of the Bhutia Lhopo needs are fulfilled by the Tibetan Buddhism, they hardly have a need to consult Lhopo *bon* shamans and Bhutia (Lhopo) shamans in Sikkim are less in number and mostly confined to some of the remote villages in Sikkim. Due to this reason, if need arises the Bhutia (Lhopo) people often consults the shaman of other ethnic group (Lepcha, Tamang, Subba etc) in case of illness.

Interestingly, in Chochen and its adjoining areas which lie in the Eastern part of Sikkim, still we find traces of *bon* shamanic practices actively functioning in the villages. Almost all the household except one or two households perform the *bon* rituals at their house. Most of the household performs a ritual once or twice a year i.e during Dawa Dinpo (7th month of lunar calendar) or Dawa Neepo (2nd month of lunar

calendar) depending on their respective lineage and during Dawa Chukchee (11th month of lunar calendar) which is either executed by *bongthing*, *pawo* or *nejum*.

During illness, *bon* shamans are consulted and in accordance to the prediction carried out with the help of rosary, beads or Nah-foh (a prediction performed with the help of wheat) a ritual is performed by the ritual specialist.

However, due to current trends of developments it would be hard to say that, this reverence and the social importance given to their land and ancestors will be able to withstand or sustain the test of time and space.