

THE BHUTIA (LHOPO), SHAMANS OF SIKKIM:

A STUDY IN CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

A thesis submitted to the University of North Bengal for the award of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

BY

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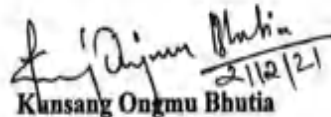
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December 2021

DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled *The Bhutia (Lhopo), Shamans of Sikkim: A Study in Change and Continuity* has been prepared by me under the supervision of Prof. Saswati Biswas, Department of Sociology, University of North Bengal. No part of this thesis has formed the basis for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.


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ANTI-PLAGIARISM REPORT

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Document Information

Analyzed document Kunsang Ongmu Bhuba_Sociology.pdf (D119568350)
Submitted 2021-11-23 06:54:00
Submitted by University of North Bengal
Submitter email nbuplg@nbu.ac.in
Similarity 1%
Analysis address nbuplg.nbu@analysis.unkund.com

Sources included in the report

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- W** URL: <https://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/en/newsdetail/index/3/B991/sikkims-forgotten-shamanic-buddhist-heritage>
Fetched: 2021-11-14 21:10:21  1

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis has been made possible with the immense support and encouragement of my teachers, respondents, family members and my dear friends. I take this opportunity to express my sense of gratitude to each one of them. My gratitude goes to University of North Bengal for providing the Ph.D programme.

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Saswati Biswas, Department of Sociology, University of North Bengal. This would not have been possible without her immense support, guidance, consistency and discipline in carrying out my work.

I would like to thank Prof. Sanjay K. Roy, Head of the Department of Sociology, University of North Bengal for all support and encouragements. I would like to thank other faculty members in the Department of Sociology, University of North Bengal for their valuable comments in different stages of my work.

I would like to thank Anna Balikci Denzongpa, Research Coordinator, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology for her generous help and suggestions during my course of fieldwork.

This work would not have been completed without the support and cooperation of the Bhutia (Lhopo) respondents as well as all the *bon* shamans residing in Chochen and its adjoining areas. A sincere thanks to all my respondents who contributed in the thesis by giving valuable information. My gratitude goes to Aku Kessang's family whom I addressed Aba (father) for accommodating me in their place for several months and treating me as one of their own family members.

I would like to thank Library members, non-teaching members of University of North Bengal for always being helpful and cooperative. I would also like to extend my thanks to Library members of Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Deorali, Gangtok and Librarian of Centre for Himalayan Studies for their generous help.

Immense thanks to the University Grants Commission in awarding me MANF (Maulana Azad National Fellowship) which solved the monetary problem in conducting the research.

My family for always standing with me through thick and thin and they have always been a blessing to me. Thank you for being there unconditionally and believing in me always.

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Abstract

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

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

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

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

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

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

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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 involuntary 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.

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
Thunggay	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.

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 bhaphay* 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* (Balikci: 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.

Chapter 4

Village Religion: Ritual of Illness Practiced amongst the Bhutia (Lhopo) Community of Sikkim

Introduction

Illness (see in glossary) in a Bhutia Lhopo tribal community in Chochen, a small hamlet in East Sikkim with 53 Bhutia household is associated with their social relationship or social interaction with nature, the living and the dead. The shared knowledge amongst the locals with nature or their environment where they consider the rocks, lakes and river streams as sacred and diluting or polluting these sacred places, afflict them with illness and misfortunes and sharing of this world view amongst the people plays an important role in connecting and reconnecting the people with their land and its people. *Bon* shamanic rites and rituals play a significant role in en-shaping the socio-cultural perspectives of the Bhutia Lhopo's life.

In this chapter an attempt is made to comprehend the cultural meaning embedded in illness and how illness experienced is socially shared amongst the Bhutia Lhopos in Chochen. In other words, how meaning and experience of illness is influenced or shaped by cultural and social settings. Therefore, this chapter tries to comprehend how an illness of an individual in the village is socially shared or conceptualized by the local people of Chochen.

This chapter is based on an in- depth interview and portrays the “insider's view” on the causes and diagnosis of illness perceived by the local villagers in a small village Chochen.

Socio- cultural conception of illness

In tribal society, the meaning attached to health and illness experiences are rooted in socio- cultural beliefs. “Culture provides a normative standard for decisions and ways of behaving and it is an important basis for defining health as well as making treatment choices” (McElroy & Jezewski, 2001) (Dixit, Mishra, Sharma,2008:4). Illness in a tribal society is embedded in culture. The causes of illness and its cure are rooted in its social setting. The tribal people believe that if the locals do not confine or confirm themselves with the norms and beliefs of society then they are inflicted with misfortune

and illness. Locals are of the view that if the sacredness of nature is defiled then they will be punished. Traditional understanding of health and illness is embedded in norms, values and beliefs. To quote, Weitz “an illness reflects more than simply the objective nature of the condition or behavior”. “Rather it reflects subjective judgment regarding its meaning” (Weitz, 1995) (Dixit, Mishra, Sharma, 2008:2). Consequently, the illness perceived needs to be looked beyond its objective nature. Over a period of time the subjective meaning attached to the illness might give us fair ideas about how illness is a social construction and how it is socially shared by the locals.

Jezewski (1990) defined “culture as a shared system of learned and shared codes or standards for perceiving, interpreting and interacting with others and with the environment” (McElroy & Jezawski, 2001, 191) (Dixit, Mishra, Sharma, 2008:4). Communities may have their own cultural guidelines related to illness conditions, modes of treatment and decision-making regarding health issues (Kakar, 1977) (Dixit, Mishra, Sharma, 2008:4). As noted by Helman (2001) “culture acts as a “lens” through which people perceive and interpret their world” (Dixit, Mishra, Sharma, 2008:4). “There exists a strong belief in many cultures that illness or misfortune is a result of possessions by spirit, bad deeds of past life, ghost, evil spirit and witchcraft” (Archer, 1947; Jakobson, 1998; Kakar, 1977) (Dixit, Mishra, Sharma, 2008:5).

According to Tylor in 1871, he defines “culture as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquire by man as a member of society” (Helman, 2007:2). Kessing and Stathern define, “culture as system of shared ideas, system of concepts and meanings that underlie and are expressed in the ways that human beings live”. From this definition one can see that culture is a set of guidelines (both explicit and implicit) that individuals inherit as the member of particular society, and that tell them how to view the world, how to experience it emotionally, and how to behave in it in relation to the other people, to supernatural forces of gods, and to the natural environment. It also provides them with the way of transmitting these guidelines to the next generation- by the use of symbols, language, art and ritual. To some extent, culture can be seen as an inherited ‘lens’ through which the individual perceives and understands the world that he inhabits and learns how to live within it. Growing up within any society is a form of enculturation, whereby the individual slowly acquires the cultural lens of that society. Without such a shared perception of the world, both the cohesion and continuity of any human group would be impossible (ibid).

Tribal religion and its rituals are the “collective representation” of the beliefs and an accumulation of conceived social reality which are being passed on from generation to generation, symbolized in material objects in the form of rituals. Further Durkheim himself asserts that religious representations are collective representations which are the expression of collective realities. Durkheim would argue that collective representations originated in religion, with its fundamental notions of gods and spirits (Durkheim, 1913a (ii) (6) and t.1975a:171, Pickering, 14). Similarly, the rituals and representation of deities in the altar and the shared knowledge of rituals either based on seasonal rites or rites of illness are the expressions of collective realities, the shared worldview of the tribes. Durkheim starts, with the assumption that knowledge can only be established through representations. In a slightly similar vein, he wrote that people cannot become attached to external objects unless they imagine them in some fashion: ‘they exist and live in us in the form of the representation expressing them’.

By representation knowledge is derived and through them the person can visualize a world beyond that of his immediate senses. In an academic debate in 1913, he said: Collective representations originate only when they are embodied in material/objects, things, or beings of every sort-figures, movements, sounds, words, and so on-that symbolize and delineate them in some outward appearance. For it is only by expressing their feelings, by translating them into signs, by symbolizing them externally, that the individual consciences, which are, by nature, closed to each other, can feel that they are communicating and are in unison. (Pickering,13).

Therefore, the tribal religion and its ritual which are embedded in its cultural roots are the collective representation of the beliefs and religious practices which are symbolized in the form of deities (benevolent, malevolent or ambivalent) manifested externally during rituals. The deities represented in the altar during rituals represents different individual deities, residing in nature having different functions. Consequently, they believe that if they do not conform, to the beliefs and practices of their society then they will be inflicted with illness. Malinowski rightly states that the social function of ritual was to create and enhance emotional solidarity within the community. Every individual or group in their life has to grapple with a range of anxieties, sufferings, fears, problems arising out of severe problems such as epidemics, death etc. in such moment of tensions and emotional strain, rituals help reaffirm solidarity with the group by creating a sense of security and oneness with other members of the group. The experience of rituals, thus unite them through its

systematized and symbolic actions which create a new integrative state of mind for the members of the group.

Hence, an attempt is made in this chapter, to understand the meaning of illness through tribal perspectives. So, in this chapter an in-depth understanding of the illness perceived by the Bhutia Lhopo tribe of Sikkim in a, small village named Chochen will be highlighted.

Causes of illness

Illness in Chochen is believed by the locals to be rooted in their social and cultural settings. Illness is feared by the local people of Chochen and consulting Lhopo *bon* shaman and lamas prior to the visit to doctor is necessary for them because according to the local people, it is believed that if the illness is caused by the Nepoh (the supernatural entity who is responsible for inflicting the individual with illness and misfortune) than consulting a doctor may be fatal and futile. Therefore, the villagers initially consult the ritual specialist to find out whether the illness is caused by Nepoh or not. Shamans and lamas might be consulted simultaneously or if former does not work, they consult the latter but people these days give more preference in consulting with the higher Lamas known as Rimponche. Similarly, Paul mentions that among the Sherpas, most diseases are thought to result from having offended or neglected some supernatural being that populates the Sherpa universe (1976:144) (Balikci,2008:120).In Chochen, Illness as perceived by the locals is basically attributed to Nepoh which can be caused by pollution or Drib (Bhutia term for pollution) and polluting the sacred lakes, rivers and rocks where locals believes that local protective deities reside who are considered to be ambivalent as these local deities can bring both fortune if propitiated properly or bring wrath if they are neglected, offended or polluted. Local people are even inflicted with Nepoh like the Shimo and Shinday (it is being explained below).

In Chochen lake or as the locals address it as Pathing cho (lake) resides the serpent deities (local people perceives lu as serpent deities). A study conducted by David H. Holmberg among the Tamangs of Nepal mentions that Tamang perceives lu as a being who live in the earth and are associated with water and imagine them to be amphibian or reptile which human cannot see (Holmberg, 1996, 99). In Chochen eastern part of Sikkim, lu are imagined as serpent deities who resides in huge rocks and it can also be found in water. The lu deities residing in the Chumee (a spring water)

are the aquatic deities who are also imagined as serpent deities. For Gyasumdo Tibetans of Nepal, the *klu* live in a kingdom beneath the earth or at the bottom of lakes and streams, and they also may reside in hearth inside the home. (Mumford, 1990, 94). Thaka Amay lu (lu's mother), Lumay Urung Phuti (white lu), Lumay Sizo Phuti (white lu), Bhuroko {lhu nay sabda (black lu)} are the lu found in Chochen and polluting these sacred areas inflict the people with illness (it is believed by the locals that white lu are benevolent deities whereas black lu are the ambivalent deities).

It might induce the ailing individual with ailment like rashes and swelling and local people believe that if they undergo such ailment than they know that it is because of Lu Nay Sabda, black lu (the wrathful serpent deities who inflict the people). Local people believe that Lu staying in this huge black rock are wrathful and white Lu too who are imagined by the villagers to be residing in white rocks can inflict the people with illness if they are disturbed and the elder's advice the youngsters not to litter the surroundings where the lu resides. Lu are serpent deities, if the surroundings are littered and made dirty, it causes drib or pollutes the lu and it is believed that if the lu's eyes and ears are infected by this drib or pollution, it inflicts the person with the same type of illness. Lu can affect not only the person who is responsible for polluting the surroundings but also to those whose Lungta (a Bhutia term for fate) is weak.

Boroko (the black Lu or Lu Nay Sabda who resides near the Pathing Cho) causes skin irritation. Machong Lama Kincho is also the Lu Gyab (the guardian of Lu). If an individual afflicted from lu, even after propitiating the lu deities is not healed than Machong Kincho the guardian of Lu (Lu Gyab) is propitiated by the shamans. If the illness is caused by Lu the villagers immediately consult the *bon* shamans or the lamas and they believe that it is not advisable to visit a doctor. Lu ngha (chanting of mantras or prayers) is performed by the *bon* shamans and few lamas where they chant mantras and lamas usually perform a Shapten (Buddhist prayers) like Lu-song or Lu-tor to appease the Lu deities.

Likewise, Shemo is caused when an ailing individual is inflicted by the spirits of the dead person and it is believed that Shemo is caused by the dead person who might have died without fulfilling his desires and is still longing to fulfill them by inflicting the people and according to *nejum* a lady *bon* shaman, the Shemo inflicted person would be having a pain similar to the pain which was experienced by the deceased person. If consulted to *bon* shaman, in mohtop (prediction) if it is found that the illness

is caused due to Shemo than, this shemo of the dead person is offered the food and drinks (if the deceased person used to drink alcohol when he was alive). The offering to the dead, if an individual is inflicted by Shemo is even done by any members of the family who knows how to chant the Khelen and he/she does not necessarily need to be a *bon* shaman. He/she says the Khelen by saying that as he or she (the sick individual) is suffering from the same pain the deceased person had endured during his/her last days and request the deceased not to trouble the person who is sick and appeases the dead individual with food and drinks and request him to leave. Khelen consists of four sections, purification, invitation, offering and dismissal (Balikci, 2008: 380).

Senday in a Bhutia Lhopo community is caused by the living person who has negative or evil eye or thoughts. The individual who is affected by Shinday or Senday might experience an ailment like a foul smell coming through mouth and have bloated stomach. Even, among the Bondos highlanders, the notion of evil eyes was used to explain illness “When anyone leads a happy life, earns more or sends children to school, other people in the village become envious. Such envious attitude provokes the neighbours to cast an evil eye. Evil eye results in illness and consequently death”. Such belief is found in other tribal and rural cultures also (Ghosh, 2002; Jakobson, 1998) (Dixit, Mishra, and Sharma, 2008: 17). Ghosh (2002), in the context of Lataifa, Egypt, noted that the envious attitude generally grows in a situation of asymmetry and imbalance in social relationships due to condition of production and change. Even among the Bondos highlander it was found that the envious attitude emerges because of imbalance or unequal social positioning (Dixit, Mishra and Sharma, 2008: 17). Even among the Bhutia Lhopo community of Chochen illness attributed to Shindey or evil eye i.e., emerging out of imbalance and unequal social positioning. *Nejum* also stated that the deities which are invoked during the ritual who are kept in the lower echelons and which are usually placed horizontally in small tables are the Dhay Gays who are considered as the ambivalent deities and they are generally responsible for illness if they are not appeased properly and they are responsible for causing illness to the local people. The different Dhay gay in the altar causes different types of illness and *bon* shamans through Mohtap (prediction or divination) and also by examining the symptoms of the illness of the sick person, identifies which Dhay Gay have inflicted the people. For example, Pay dong Lama Kincho (name of a malevolent deity) is the Nhay da or Nhay Ghay Da-Ku (guardian of illness) he is even known as Lho Cho

Gaypu, Lho Lama Kincho or Duk Gay Cheysung, Rimcha Daku who resides at Algara (Ba-Dum –La) in Kalimpong in West Bengal is responsible for illness in most cases. The individual inflicted by Paydong Lama Kincho suffers from symptoms like swelling of body, feeling of being pierced in the body, headache and fever.

Singibari Dhay Gay (this deity is malicious and it resides below the bridge in Chochen) causes headache and this deity is appeased by offering Kachod (white offerings like the fruits and rice and drinks).

Machong Lama Kincho (this deity represents the Gyempey Daku or the guardian deity of Machong Gumpa) causes unstable breathing and burning of stomach. However, this Dhay Gay is not so malicious as compared to other Dhay Gay.

Cho Ha lha Gapu, Chum Adong Phuti (deities from Ha in Bhutan and in Tibet respectively) causes swelling of body, coughing, vomiting, and diarrhea. These malevolent deities are offered bya- chang (fermented rice), five pieces of pork meat and these deities are even known as Fha k dhay (the malevolent deities resembling pig).

Gensa Kincho causes skin irritation (Gensa Kincho is the Da-Ku or deity which follows the bride to the groom's house, this deity is propitiated by the people who stays in Pheri belonging from Phempu Nadikpa lineages) and if it is not propitiated properly, it might inflict the groom's family or the bride herself.

It is very important to note that in Chochen, establishing the causes of illness through Mohtap or divination is performed by the *pawo* or *nejum* and appeasing of this DhayGay is executed by the *bongthing*.

If the illness of an individual is caused by the Dhay Gay or Nepoh than the allopathic medicine will not be effective in healing the patient, therefore this Dhay Gay needs to be propitiated and appeased for curing or for the allopathic medicine to work.

After diagnosing the illness by Lhopo *bon* shamans through divination or mohtap, they perform the rituals to cure the ailing individual by appeasing the ambivalent deities.

The local people along with the *bon* shamans of Chochen are very afraid to mention the name of the deities which causes illness because this might offend these malevolent deities. They are considered as evil or ambivalent spirits who are believed to be tamed and subdued by the higher lamas or Rimponches and the locals are afraid that if they mention their names, they might be active again and start inflicting the

people. There are respondents in Chochen who are literally against the *bon* shamanic worship and considers *bon* shamanic practices as a demon worshipper {bhoot mansako (which is a Nepali dialect to refer to demon worshipper)} and considers Lhopo *bon* shamans responsible for invoking the malevolent spirits causing harm to the villagers and I agree with Balikci that, it could be the result of the influence of conventional Buddhism which tends to portray high Buddhist deities as the only true providers and protectors capable of offering more than temporary relief from human sufferings. (Balikci, 2008, 123).

In Sikkim firstly with the coming up of Guru Rimponche in the 8th century A.D and again with the advent of 16th Gyalwa Karmapa in 1960's, it is said that many local malevolent spirits have been tamed. Both the Rimponche condemned the animal sacrifice offered to the local deities by the *bon* shamans during their rituals. However, in Chochen it was not until the intervention of the Phulchung Tulku (higher Buddhist Lama) in the middle of 1970s who came from Tibet that the sacrifice of animals was stopped by him and there are many tales of him subduing the local malevolent spirits and are offered Kachod (white offerings like rice and eggs) and stopped the offering of Machod (sacrificing animals).

The above-mentioned deities are the collective representations which are the expression of collective realities perceived by the locals (Pickering, 296). The above-mentioned fact that certain areas in the village are considered sacred and defilement of that location leads to illness or misfortune reflects the social fact or shared worldview of the villagers. The subjective meaning attached to their nature or environment in turn controlled the social actions of the local people and maintained social order in a society.

Case study on Diagnosing the illness and cure for the illness.

These are few cases of diagnosing and finding a cure for the illness suggested by the *bon* shamans which was witnessed during my stay in the field.

Case 1

When a small kid (nephew's son of the *nejum* Tashi) was sick, the *nejum* was consulted and in her Mohtap (prediction through divination) it was predicted that the illness in the kid is caused due to Shemo of long dead cousin and also the ambivalent deities who

stays in the huge jungle and Boksi (a term in nepali) or barmo in Bhutia Lhopo, a type of witchcraft based on envy and she told that this death spirit needs to be appeased by offering the Cha Sur Phe Sur (a combination of champa (roasted and grinded rice), butter and tea leaves which would be burned in the fire) and to change the path which leads towards the *nejums* nephews house.

Case 2

Another case is cow having difficulty when delivering a baby was initially consulted to the village compounder and even after his intervention when medicine was not working the *nejum* was being consulted. And *nejum* after mohtap (prediction) predicted that cow is having difficulty because she is affected by nepoh and the afflicting spirits are the deities who stay in the jungle and suggested the owner to appease them with eggs and needs to propitiate the Phee Ghukhen (Gyab) and Byachang Gay Dhaku(Din)(name of malevolent deities).

Case 3

As the lady of the house living in the Tadong ward had been ill frequently from past three years. She had a stone in gall bladder and operated (2016). She said, in the same month (September2017) she fell sick again so she consulted *pawo* Latuk and Ajo Chagu (a *bongthing*). Ajo Chagu in Mohtop found that they have to appease the ancestral deities' pho lha mo lha. So, a ritual was being performed where (Sha-nga) was offered to pho lha mo lha (ancestral deities).

After that *bonthing* performed Ngha (prayers) in chum (rice) putting Gasee (turmeric) told her to eat and use it whenever she is not keeping well. He was even consulted for mohtap because one of the *pawo* said to the sister of the sick lady that some misfortune like death might occur in Daw Geypo and Gupo (8th and 9th month of the lunar calendar), she was really afraid and asked Ajo Chagu to check whether it is true or not, but Ajo said after mohtap (divination) not to worry and assured them, nothing is going to happen, if any misfortune occurs, he will be held responsible.

Case 4

Another case was of a girl who was studying in class eleven had been sick for several years and her body trembled and she hissed like a snake and all the family member thought that she might be possessed by some serpent deities or lu. They consulted most

of the higher lamas and even consulted bon shamans. The *pawo* asked the family of the sick child to perform bon shamanic rituals. The *pawo* performed an Ata Gokap (see in glossary) ritual to diagnose her illness and during ritual it was found out that the Shemo of her paternal grandmother was affecting her who was also a shaman but she was officially not recognized as shaman as her husband was an orthodox Buddhist lama and did not believe in traditional shamanic rites and rituals however this dead grandmother already has her dungee (her disciples).

He was an uncle of the girl who is presently sick. Ana Zamyang (deceased grandmother of the sick girl) is the Kabab (it refers to spiritual ancestors of which the *bon* shamans may or may not be related) of the *pawo* Tanding and during the Ata Gokap ritual when the girl was possessed by the deceased Ana Zamyong, she said that as her dungee is not performing the rites properly and she wants another dungee to propitiate the ancestors. And finally, it was decided that as the sick girl's uncle is already initiated shaman, he should be allowed to perform the ancestral shamanic practices as the girl is still studying and will be married someday and hence, will not be able to perform or continue the ancestral rites and rituals. Therefore, negotiation rituals were held where all deities were invited in the altar along with Ana Zamyong and the deal was negotiated. A Shanga was offered to cure her illness.

From the above-mentioned cases it can be understood that illness in Chochen and its adjoining areas is a social construct. The social and cultural meanings are attached to illness. When an individual become sick in the village the locals consult *bon* shaman. They even consult *bon* shamans whether to show doctors or not, whether allopathy medicine will work or not. Thus, Illness in the village is not just attributed to scientific reasons but to other social causes which is rooted in the society and there cannot be no other better consultant than the *bon* shamans who are the specialist who knows best regarding the diagnosis and cure for illness in the village.

Conclusion

Sociological concept of illness gives a fair idea about how individual in a society share a common social and cultural meaning embedded in illness. According to Kapferer, illness demonically conceived is not reducible to terms independent of demonic conception.... [and] is above all a socio-cultural construct to be understood first and foremost at this level and in its own cultural and social terms (Kapferer,1983:87)

(Balikci,2008:122). Similarly, in Chochen too, the illness needs to be understood in its own cultural and social terms. Therefore, illness in Chochen is not just comprehended at scientific level but it is also rooted or embedded in cultural and social conditions. The world-view shared by the local people through internalization or attaching subjective meaning to the objective reality where local people believe that their surrounding is inhabited by different local deities who are capable of bringing both fortune and misfortune, health and illness portrays the social and cultural connotation attached with the social well-being of the village. Further, bon religion and its rituals which are embedded in its cultural roots are the collective representation of the beliefs and religious practices which are symbolized in the form of deities (benevolent, malevolent or ambivalent) manifested externally during rituals which the locals believe are the protective deities residing in different corners of the village.

Chapter 5

Relationship between Lamas and Shamans

Sikkim from its inception was based on a Shamanic view of universe, where ancestors and protectors resided in its high mountains and deities of all kinds populated its country side (Balikci, 2008:3). Anna argues that from its inception Sikkim remained a Buddhist kingdom where the shamanic world view remained unchallenged by the missionary lamas. However, contrary to her argument though missionary Lamas incorporated the local deity in Buddhist rendition. For example, in order to convert the Animist Lepcha into Buddhist, their deity Kangchen Dzonga was added into Buddhist rendition by the Nyigma Lama Lhatsun Chenpo Namkha Jigme (Balikci, 2008:23) and diluted their religious belief system. It should be noted that in several Himalayan Buddhist literature, the local deities were considered as wild and malevolent and ambiguous and they are said to be tamed and subdued and not considered powerful or at par with other Buddhist deity. When the higher lamas tamed the local malevolent spirits, some were added to the Buddhist pantheon and other malevolent deities which shamans appeased were said to be subdued and were instructed by the higher lamas not to appease them further and never to utter their names which if done, then those malevolent deities might become active and alive and inflict misfortunes on the people. The generation of fear in Sikkim and particularly in Thimchim and in Chochen, the villagers have been made to feel ashamed of pursuing their shamanic belief and practices (Balikci 2008:25).

If these examples are to be noted then it cannot be said that shamanic world view remained unchallenged since its beginning in Sikkim and I argue that deterioration or weakening of the Lhopo *bon* shamanic institution today is due to these implications and imposition of the soft power exerted by the Tibetan Buddhism towards *bon* shamanic practices from its inception. Buddhism in the beginning, in order to bring the people under the Buddhist fold, strategized and designed Buddhism in such a way which can be accepted, acknowledged and adapted by the locals without being felt that their belief is under threat.

When Buddhism as a pantheon along with different sects emerged from Tibet it overshadowed the entire, small Tibeto-Burman speaking peoples' religious realm. Sikkimese borderlands both before and during the Chogyal rule provided the space of

being a contact zone where Tibetan Buddhism from Tibet came in contact with the *bon* religion of Lhopo community of Sikkim.

In fact, Tibetan Buddhism was made a state religion and King was considered as the Dharma Raja (protector of state religion). During the reign of Chogyals monasteries were the main sources of social interaction. Conventional Buddhism started as proselytizing religion and it held the Bhutia Lhopo of Sikkim and other Tibeto – Burman speaking people under its fold. (Samuel, 2013:77). Tibeto- Burman speaking people wherever they might have settled, have their origin rooted in Tibet but what is interesting is to note that every Tibeto– Burman entity have their own flavor, distinctiveness especially with reference to their own languages, customs and religion which are in a way very different from that of the Tibet. Sikkim cannot be studied or comprehended in isolation without taking Tibet into account. Yet, Sikkim is not Tibet- as many Sikkimese states- the Sikkimese are not Tibetans (Mullard: 2011, 2). The infiltration of religious ideology along with many other factors of modernity has weakened the Shamanic indigenous belief among Lhopos of Sikkim. Nirmal Chandra Sinha, states that “Even in Tibet, the progress of Buddhism was by no means smooth for the first two hundred years as it had to reckon with the hostility of the native religion. The *bon* was deeply rooted not only in the mind of the common man; it was strongly entrenched in the court itself. Ministers and even members of the royalty were often ambivalent and some continued die-hard” (Hochotsang: 2008, 214).

Mumford in his study found out that in Gyasumdo ‘a contemporary clash between Buddhist lamas and Gurung shamans where the older shamanic layer is still being challenged by Tibetan Lamaism in a manner analogous to the confrontation that must have occurred again and again in rural Tibet in the past(1989:6-7)(Balicki :2008,19).Even in the article, ‘Case of disappearing Shamans’, Sherry B.Ortner (1995:355-390) talks about the Shamans of Sherpas (Tibeto-Burman speaking group) of Nepal nearing the border of Tibet, she states that Sherpas were once dominated by the shamanic universe but due to the pressure emanating from the Buddhist religious establishment, the Sherpas , Shamanic cosmology have lost its ground. When Ortner arrived in the field in 1966, there was no single shaman practicing in Solu, Nepal. The construction of fourteen celibate monasteries in the region over a period of fifty years had effectively managed to eradicate shamanism in the course of their campaign of religious upgrading (1995:358-59). The monk and the lamas out- rightly rejected the

skills of the Shamans considering it as unreliable, ineffective and sinful, the lay people along with the shamans accepted the verdict of the lamas and the monks. The study carried out by Sophie Day in Ladakh describes about a form of shamanism which managed to adapt itself and openly survive within a Buddhist framework.

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 (Balikci,2008:3). The Sherpa's due to the pressure exerted by the celibate lamas started consulting the shamans from different ethnic communities whereas the Ladhaki Lhapa oracles found a way to survive by adapting or merging themselves within the Buddhist structure.

Buddhism is revered by majority of the Bhutia Lhopo people today and the *bon* shamans and their practices are considered inferior by the Lhopo people themselves but the irony is, the language and the dialect with which Buddhism is professed is different and more Tibetan oriented and *bon* shamans propitiates in the local dialect as he/she is a specialist who is well attuned to the local supernatural entities. It is even more astonishing to note that, a similar case can be observed among the Bondos of Orissa highland who have their own dialect Munda , in conversation with the lowland Hindu neighbors' they employ Oriya as Oriya is the language of the dominant group and they even perceive that, when it comes to propitiation many prayers and magical formulae it is been spoken in Oriya, because Bondos think it proper that the deities and spirit should be addressed in "superior language".(Furer-Haimendorf: 1982:319)

Unlike Ladakh in Sikkim, monasteries are not associated in initiating or validating the role of *bon* shamans by the conventional Buddhist lamas. In fact, even in Ladakh despite village oracles being recognized by the monastery, they are merely a lay ritual specialist and are accorded less esteem than their monastic counterparts for they are associated with the lower reaches of the pantheon and with inferior ritual techniques (Sophie Day: 1989,2).

Buddhism though infiltrated or endangered the existence of Lhopo *bon* shamans but yet again it cannot be said that shamanic practices in Sikkim is not functional at all as it is reflected through many events which took place recently. Though Buddhism has overshadowed the *bon* shamans of Sikkim but it never totally effaced the survival

of the ancient traditions and they have included the shamanic deities into their pantheon in the recent past. And even *bon* shamans have incorporated or assimilated the Buddhist deities in their practices. The importance of shamans is still there in Sikkim as people still do consult them during their illness.

Samuel notes that what he calls the shamanic mode of operation or Mumfords 'ancient matrix' in Tibetan societies was constantly under attack either overtly or implicitly by Buddhism but it continually reconstituted itself throughout Tibetan history, it provided a background against which Buddhism took shape and in terms of which it had to justify itself (1993:6). Ortner also pointed that even though shamanism seems no longer to exist among the Sherpa's it may still exist in other forms for example by using shamans from other ethnic groups and the popularity of the tulku (reincarnate lama) who may be considered as an "upgraded shaman" (1995:381-82) (Balikci:2008,20).

Therefore, the event which unfolded in the recent past when nature was questioned is worth mentioning and analyzing. There are many events that occurred which indicates how people are still connected with their nature, their universe in Sikkim. The case of Kabi- Lunchok protest in North Sikkim, Rathong-chu case of West Sikkim (1977) and even the ACT (Affected Citizens of Teesta) of the Dzongu

North Sikkim. All these agitations and the frustration of the mass, busted out because new developmental projects were being introduced in these areas which would be totally destroying their revered places that is 'nature'. The local people of these areas were so aggrieved they came to the forefront and raised their voices. True preservation and continuity of biodiversity can only be done taking into account the sentiments and beliefs of the local people (Nongbri: 2006). The sustained relationship between nature and man is probably because of such beliefs where in the locals revered the sacred Lakes, Mountains and Nature and going against the nature would be, going against the beliefs of the people. When earthquake struck in September 18, 2011, North Sikkim was literally affected. Most of the people I heard them saying, Mother Nature was offended by the destruction that people posed on nature. On the way to North Sikkim namely, Chungthang to Lachung there are big tunnels being dug under (Teesta-Urza) right through the base of the huge rocky cliffs, making the place look shabby and deplorable. Most of the local people get dejected and laments on the turmoil of their environment. The affinity of the people with nature clearly depicts that the perception

of the people is still connected to the Shamanic view of universe. Therefore, for the sustenance of nature, the local beliefs play a pivotal role.

Ritual practitioner of Chochen (bon shamans and the lamas)

Among the Bhutia Lhopo community of Chochen, the Lhopo *bon* Shamans are still performing *bon* shamanic rituals. However, in other parts of Sikkim either there are no traces of *bon* shamans or a very few Lhopo shamans are found. The Bhutia Lhopo shamans are scattered in different wards of 19th-Lhatuk Chochen Gram Panchayat Unit and they are actively participating in *bon* shamanistic ritual held in the village. There are older as well as newly initiated shamans who are actively functioning in the adjoining villages of Chochen. The *bon* shamans like Ajo Chagu (*bongthing*) who passed away in recent past due to illness in December 2019, Ani Tashim (*nejum*), *pawo* Kunga, *nejum* Narem and few more are the *bon* shamans who were actively participating in Chochen. The most popular shaman *pawo* Sangay who used to work together with Ajo Chagu (*bongthing*) in dealing with different and difficult cases passed away in 2015. During my field visit, Ajo Chagu along with Ani Tashim and few other *bon* shamans worked together to solve difficult cases in the villages. Ajo Chagu's death is certainly a major loss to the villagers as well as to the *bon* shamans. Ajo chagu was the senior most, respected and most knowledgeable amongst the *bon* shamans in Chochen and its connecting areas.

In 21-Lhatuk Chochen constituency, with the advent of Pathing Rimponche, he had instructed the people as well as *bon* shamans to stop killing of animals and sacrificing them for the rituals. Since then, the killing of animals was stopped for the shamanic rituals. In Shotak (a village which lay in extreme eastern part of Sikkim which falls on the way to North Sikkim) which happens to be my native place, I remember during my school days Pathing Rimponche visiting our place and performing a Shapten (rituals) in our village for many years and still today in the village, it is believed that he had subdued many malevolent deities. He also burnt the paraphernalia of the last *nejum* who had passed way and instructed her family not to continue shamanic rituals any longer.

The infrastructure of Sikkim before merger was not well connected and developed. Monarchical regime was not wealthy enough for maintaining a developed infrastructure or constructing Gumpas or monasteries in the remote villages of Sikkim.

During those days, Gumpas were the main place for social interactions (Balikci, 2008:24). Gumpas were made in few important locations where people used to meet once every year during the Dupche (Annual Buddhist Rituals). In Phodong (north Sikkim) still the people belonging to the adjoining areas meet during the Dupche and Kheykong (a group representing the native people who own the land) still contribute their share either in the form of money or other grains like rice and Bayo or Sahyo (boiled and beaten rice) for the occasion. However, in Chochen, Machong Gumpa is the main Gumpa where people assemble during the yearly Annual Buddhist rituals (Dupche) unlike Phodong Gumpa the contribution and the presence of different people belonging to different adjoining areas is not mandatory. The monk uses the fund provided by the state and the money voluntarily offered by the people of the locality. Chochen Mani Lhagang was constructed recently and a woman from different Lhopo households along with the *nejums* make their presence during the important Buddhist occasions.

In Chochen ward which falls under 21 Nathong -Machong constituency, there are more Bhutia Lhopo shamans as compared to other districts of Sikkim, and this ward has remained isolated due to blockage of roads and lack of proper communication. This area was considered as the most backward area in 2016 by SHAGGY (Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojna), a programme held in Chochen Lake and was attended by the former M.P (Member of Parliament) P.D Rai and Area M.L.A (Member of Legislative Assembly) D.T Lepcha. It was a programme where different central and State scheme Yojnas were channelized and implemented to alleviate the living conditions of the people living in this area. The Airtel connectivity tower was also constructed in 2017 unfortunately it does not function regularly.

In Chochen due to a terrible landslide which occurred sixteen to seventeen years ago, there was massive public property damage and road remained blocked for many years and road had always been the problem and Pakyong being the nearest junction was not developed those days as it is today. Therefore, people of Chochen used to go all the way to Rongli by foot to obtain their basic groceries.

From the above mentioned, it seems that the influence of the Gumpas was not strong during the monarchial regime. However, during the advent of Phulchung Tulku (Pathing Rimponche) there was interference in the practices of *bon* shamanic rituals. He stopped the offering of red (killing animals) where animals were required to be

sacrificed for the *bon* shamanic rituals and villagers said that he subdued many malevolent deities and added them in the Buddhist pantheon. Under his supervision the Lamas from the main Machong Gumpa had instructed the villagers that if animals are sacrificed then they will be heavily fined and taken out of village association (Mohhlha). During Pathing Rimponche's stay in Barapathing there were few shamans in the area as Rimponche had strong influence in the area. Villagers consulted him during illness and death of the villagers. Pathing Rimponche checked the *bon* shamanic practices and due to this reason, there were few shamans during his stay in 19-Lhatuk Chochen. After his death, more *bon* shamans have surfaced who are actively participating in these areas.

In the recent past there are other Rimponches who are entering in these areas. Thumi Tulku who is originally from Bhutan and who stays in Deorali, Gangtok is making his presence in different Buddhist rituals held in these areas and he is even constructing Pheri Gumpa and has brought Guru Rimponches Kudung (statue) to the important sacred places in Chochen. He is even planning to construct Sheda in these areas. As he is not permanently staying in these areas and his Gumpa is still under-construction, he is yet to become more influential in these areas. According to Thumi Tulku shamans and lamas are different ritual specialist. Shamans represent Zigten Gay Lha (worldly deities that are not enlightened) and their Sungma (protective deity's powers) are not powerful. They possess Mey phey day phey (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 (prayer hall) rather they set their altar outside Choesam as they feel that their prediction does not become clear and vivid and their prediction becomes vague. Thumi Tulku said that in Bhutan Zay Khempu and Zongchen Khenchen rimponche have subdued all the malevolent spirits in Bhutan and he further said that it will be better if they don't invoke or possess these ambivalent malevolent spirits.

In Chochen, Older Lamas as compared to the middle-aged Lamas (especially those Lamas who had gone outside of the village to pursue higher Buddhist study) do not have a problem with shamanic rites and rituals and they do not hesitate to perform the yearly shamanic rites at their abode. Even in the dwelling of the few younger and the middle-aged lamas of Chochen, shamanic rites are performed but they said that they are more reluctant in performing these shamanic practices especially held in their

abode. They are hesitantly performing this rite because either their late grandmother, aunt or their parents are *bon* shamans and they are afraid that if they offend their *Za-sung* or their ancestral deities' *pho lha molha*, *farchay* (misfortunes) may afflict their family members. However, when asked what rituals would they prefer? They said that they feel Buddhist rites and rituals are better.

Unlike Tingchim, a study carried out by Balikci two decades ago in northern part of Sikkim, Lamas and shamans do not perform their ritual together in Chochen. Shamans and Lamas perform their rituals independently and separately. In Chochen and its adjoining areas, shamanic seasonal rites are held till date. However, in Chochen the shamanic practices cannot escape without being criticized or questioned by the organized Buddhist structure and its few orthodox followers.

In Tingchim, when need arose they consulted other shamans belonging to other ethnic groups. However, in Chochen, as this village is Bhutia dominated area, so, they do not have other ethnic community near their premises, so they do not consult other shamans belonging to other ethnic group as the villagers of Thimchim.

Unlike Thimchim who despite 16th Karmapa effort to eliminate the practice of animal sacrifice in the early 1960's still felt that the most effective cure when death is threatening will be animal sacrifice (Balikci, 26). However, in Chochen, with the coming up of Pathing Rimponche, who tried to eradicate the sacrifice of animals, though it was difficult to influence and suppress those practices at the beginning but eventually when I was in the field, people no longer felt or had the strong belief that animals need to be sacrificed for curing illness or appeasing those local deities. However, they offered the *pho lha mo lha* (ancestral deities) *sha-nga*, the right hand of the ox which is being killed by the butcher.

Every house hold in Thimchim, without exception, performed bi-annual harvest offerings to thank their providers the *pho lha mo lha*. Even in Chochen, seasonal rites are performed but only in a few households where they invite *bon* shamans (*pawo*, *nejum*) to perform the seasonal rites at home. Dawa Chukche rituals (described in chapter 3) are exclusively held in the *bon* shaman's dwellings, however, there are few families in Chochen who offered Dawa Dinpo rituals as well as Dawa Chukchee rituals. There are families who performed once a year or once in three years and only during illness and these families only offered *sha-nga* to the local pantheon or guardian deity

and these rituals are mostly performed by *bongthing* or the member of the family who knows the Khelen of those rituals.

Further, the impact of education and influence of orthodox conventional Buddhism and the families whose members are working outside of the village either in Gangtok or other areas and whose financial status is sound have stopped appeasing *bon* shamanic deities. Most of school going students did not like the practices of the age-old traditions. The former member of Panchayat of Chochen (2013-2017) was literally against the *bon* shamanic practices, even his father who was a monk opposed shamanic practices. The member of Panchayat's mother who was diagnosed as a *bon* shaman was not allowed to practice the *bon* shamanic rituals by her husband who was a stern orthodox Buddhist monk. The lama who happened to be the apprentice of Pathing Rimponche refuted the *bon* shamanic practices. However, few lamas along with some of the villagers mentioned the fact that earlier *bon* shamans were more powerful and could perform many mysterious magical things but these days shamans are not powerful and said rather fake in many senses.

Thus, in Chochen, most of the households in Chochen consulted lamas, *bongthing*, *pawo*, *nejum* as well as Doctors. Initially, if they are sick, they either consulted *bongthing* or *pawo* or *nejum* then they consulted the doctors because they feel that if they are affected by their wrongdoings or their negligence towards their local deities then they will not be cured by going to the doctors, infact they believe that patient becomes more severe if they consult a doctor without referring *bon* shamans first. Hence, they (most of the respondents or household in Chochen) consult the *bon* specialist or Lamas. Except few households whose children have gone outside the village to study or those people who are residing in Gangtok have left their age-old tradition. Few households in Chochen have left because of the political conflict which happened during the election of Gram Panchayat in the village. There were two candidates, one candidate who was the son of *bongthing* (an influential *bongthing* in the village) and another agriculturist who won the election. Since, then few of his supporters along with him have left performing *bon* (rituals). Most of the youths, especially the school going students did not like the *bon* shamanic practices. Most of the respondents in early thirties and mid-thirties especially who are educated are ambiguous about the *bon* practices and said that they are more compelled to follow the *bon* rites as they are afraid that if any malevolent spirits as well as the local spirits if

not appeased through rituals might inflict them with illness and misfortunes. There are few households who consult *bongthing*, doctor and Lama and not *pawo* or *nejum* who are being possessed by the deities. Except few households, 53 households with 309 population approx. residing in the Chochen area mostly consult the *bongthing*, *pawo*, *nejum* along with Lamas.

The reason why it still thrives in this region is because of its settings and its lack of strong Buddhist influence. The main Gumpa in Machong is far and was not strong enough to influence the people in its adjoining areas. The infrastructure and the economic condition of the people of Chochen is another reason. Majority of villagers in Chochen were farmers and depended on subsistence farming and they belong to lower income group. In case of emergency during illness villagers consulted *bon* shamans, lamas and depending on the seriousness of illness they either went to nearby public health centers in Machong or in Pakyong. Only in major illness they came to Gangtok. These are the main reasons for the persistence of *bon* shamanic practices in this region as people still consulted *bon* shamans during difficult times.

However, by observing the recent developments taking place in a small village Chochen, the development programs initiated by the State and the developments in infrastructure, roads and communication and recent construction of home stays near the Chochen lake by the tourism department of Sikkim and even intervention of Thumi Tulku who had a missionary vision to Buddhicize the area and bring people under the strict Buddhist fold and students both monastic and formal education seekers who are going outside the village might not hold the same sentiments towards *bon* shamanistic practices in days to come as the people who are staying in the village. Infact, in Chochen village today, there is conflict among the locals and shamans due to various reason. For eg. Due to political reasons and another reason is when a *nejum* predicted that an illness in a patient is caused by the shemo (illness caused by the death spirit) of a dead relative. The near ones of the relative got offended and there was some kind of tension generated between some of the locals and the *nejum* and there was a verbal spat between them.

Consequently, some of the villagers are performing *bon* shamanic rites as they feel they are compelled to perform the rites and they are ambiguous and doubtful and some locals are literally against performing such rituals as they believe in higher lamas and their teachings. It is very likely that with these developments taking place in

Chochen, the status of *bon* shamans, their importance and the number of *bon* shamans practicing in the area might not remain same in future as it is today. Adding to the matter, death of Ajo Chagu is a major setback or loss in the growth of influence of *bon* shamanic practices in Chochen.

Conclusion

Buddhism and shamanism are different religious entities. However, when understanding the significance and change in the practice of *bon* shamanism, nature of practice of Buddhism in the region cannot be ignored and studying of former without latter would be incomplete when understanding the prominence and sustenance of *bon* shamanic institution. And Buddhism and shamanism cannot be studied in isolation. Therefore, in order to understand the prominence of *bon* shamanic practices, the nature of practice of Buddhism needs to be considered. Therefore, in this chapter I have tried to highlight the relationship of lamas and shamans by comprehending their nature of affiliation in religious sphere in Sikkim particularly in a small village Chochen.

Anna argues, that the decline of shamanism, however is not synonymous with the decline of the shamanic world view (Balikci, 2008:33). However, I would like to add that, even if shamanic worldview survives in Sikkim, the shamanic world view will be limited in Tibetan scripts and only chanted during annual Buddhist ritual or during illness but the essence of *bon* shamanic cultural worldview, the importance of their local space would be confined to those Tibetan scripts and those effigies which are made during rituals conducted by Buddhist lamas. However, the local people as well the coming generations will not be able to relate themselves with the cultural practices followed by their ancestors. The ritual which is professed in their own local dialect Lhoke.

Therefore, the inter-subjective meaning attached with their sacred landscapes where they relate themselves with their nature, locality, their land and its myth which their forefathers had perceived and cherished will become meaningless as in cases of other parts of Sikkim and further in Tingchim and in Chochen, the villagers reflecting or practicing shamanic ritual at home are ridiculed or made to feel ashamed of following *bon* practices and left in a state of humiliation which further deteriorates and weakens the *bon* shamanic practices in Sikkim.

The generation of fear, when higher lamas subdue and tames a malevolent deity, the villagers are instructed not to utter the names of these malevolent deity because it

is believed that these deities might get active and inflicts the people with illness. And particularly in Thimchim and in Chochen and in different villages in Sikkim, the villagers have been made to feel ashamed of pursuing their shamanic belief and practices (Balicki 2008:25).

Further, when I had a casual conversation with a monk from Chalamthang (Eastern part of Sikkim) who had recently finished his retreat said that shamanic practices are not good and he further added that even during prediction (Mohtap) “those days” shamanic deities were malevolent and most of illness were attributed to them however “these days” these deities are less prominent and they hardly find those malevolent deities affecting the people these days as they hardly see them during prediction. He further, said that, “we held a ritual in Gumpa where these local deities who are tamed and subdued are appeased once in a year”. And even the younger village lamas of Chochen now like the Lopen Dugyal of Thimchim who earlier used to chant those mantras to appease local deities now after going into retreat hesitates to perform the rituals to appease the local pantheon, infact when asked the name or purpose of those malevolent or shamanic deities they hesitate, ignore or pretend not knowing about them. Some of the lamas who have gone outside of the village to study or have gone for retreat of three years three month three days might not hold the same view as the village older lamas and if questions are asked regarding *bon* shamanic practices in their village, then they get skeptical or simply sneer at the questions. One respondent from Chochen (lama who had gone for retreat in Nepal) dubiously, said that, the *bon* shamanic practices could be valid and cannot say that the deities they are propitiating is not valid. Though, his family used to perform *bon* shamanic rites in their abode earlier but now they do not perform those rituals at his home.

Above mentioned instances along with the Death of the senior *bongthing* in 2019, the installation of Tibetan Guru Statues in the sacred cave of Chochen and further development of network of road deteriorates and weakens the age-old cultural practices of Chochen.

Chapter 6

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sikkim.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Source: *Fieldwork (2016)*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Source: *Fieldwork (2016)*

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

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

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

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

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

Source: *Fieldwork (2016)*

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

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

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

Conclusions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 7

Role of the State

Sikkim, an erstwhile Himalayan kingdom, a land inhabited by different ethnic groups, Bhutia Lepcha and Nepali, became the twenty- second state of Indian republic in 1975. It is situated in the western part of the eastern Himalayas and because of its geographical position; the state enjoys a political and strategic importance. It is encircled by three international boundaries, Nepal in the West, Bhutan in the East and China in the North. This location along the Himalayan crossroads has been, historically, both a blessing and a curse for Sikkim and its people. Due to its location, the history of Sikkim is not peaceful one. Like most states, the history of Sikkim is intertwined with the histories of its neighbours (Mullard Saul: 2011, 1).

In Sikkim during monarchical regime Tibetan Buddhism was made a state religion. Three lamas from Tibet anointed Phuntsok Namgyal as the Chogyal or king of Sikkim in 1642 and conferred the title of Chogyal meaning Dharma raja or spiritual king. During their visit one of the Nyigma Lama Lhatsun Chenpo Namkha Jigmee while trying to convert the Animist Lepcha into Buddhist, their deity Kangchen Dzonga was added into Buddhist pantheon in order to bring the indigenous Lepchas under the Buddhist fold. Khangchen Dzonga, considered wild and untamed which was worshipped by the native Lepchas was brought under the Buddhist fold by taming the deity (Balikci, 2008:23). Further, Chakdor Namgyal the third Chogyal or king of Sikkim advocated a policy of sending each son from each family to Buddhist monastery for compulsory monastic education. Tibetan Buddhism gradually infiltrated into remote parts of Sikkim.

In the seventeenth century in the neighbouring country Tibet, Clerical Buddhism (is associated with scholarship, philosophical, analysis and monastic discipline (Balikci: 2008, 21) (Samuel: 1993) as mentioned by Samuel was not strong. In the peripheral areas of centralized Tibet, *bon* shaman along with the lamas played a pivotal role, in fact majority of the population was influenced by bonism in Tibet. Even, in Sikkim though Tibetan Buddhism became the state religion in seventeenth century, monarchy was not wealthy and strong enough to establish its influence in all parts of Sikkim. Rumtek Monastery, Phodong Monastery, Pemayangtse Monastery were the important Buddhist centre's during the Chogyal regime. Though Machong Gumpa

which falls under Barapathing during monarchical regime was the branch of Pema Yangtse Monastery, the Gumpa (monastery) did not have a direct and strong influence of the Chogyals and the monks. It was later, after the advent of higher lamas like 16th Karmapa in Sikkim and Pathing Rimponche or commonly named as Phulchung Tulku in Chochen and its surrounding areas, whose intervention affected the growth of *bon* shamanic practices in Sikkim and its adjoining areas.

Other factors like the British occupation of Sikkim which was after the conflict of 1888-89, the British imperial government of India established its direct authority over Sikkim impaired the progress of *bon* shamanic institution. When Claude White (first political officer) took up his position, Sikkim was lacking in most of the structures of modern government. Therefore, he began financing modernization initiatives such as the education of Sikkimese youths in British India and the introduction of allopathic or what is popularly known as western medicine. Missionaries and the British government of India contributed to the early development of western medicine as well as western education in Sikkim (Mckay, 25). The advent of British Indian government and an introduction of western medicine and western education, significantly changed the social outlook of the Sikkimese society. Different courses of action, an amalgamation of culture of modern western society experienced and exposed by the British imperials to the Primitive feudal Sikkimese society had a major impact on the social life of the Sikkimese people. Altogether, the diffusion of culture of modern western society, adversely affected the attitude of Lhopo people towards primitive religious institutions.

However, the major alteration in the Lhopo *bon* shamanic rites started with the visit of higher Buddhist lamas, the intervention of monarchical state of Sikkim and the policies adopted by the British imperial government in consolidating their power in Sikkim. Introduction of western medicine and setting up of dispensaries and allowing missionaries to advocate western education to the Sikkimese youth impinged on the socio-religious life of the Sikkimese people.

The influence of higher Tibetan lamas in Sikkim had a major influence in the religious belief system of the people of Sikkim. Due to its porous border as well as a strong political as well as religious connection of the Chogyals with Tibet brought many changes in the socio-political life of the people of Sikkim were brought in. Advent of Guru Rimponche, Lhatsun Chempo and later Karmapa in Sikkim had a huge

influence of Tibetan Buddhism in Sikkim and it was believed by the locals that these higher lamas have either subdued or tamed the ambivalent deities residing in different parts of Sikkim and it needs to be noted that most of these ambivalent deities were the deities propitiated by the *bon* shamans of Sikkim. These deities were considered as the worldly deities who are not enlightened and some of the Buddhist lamas and the villagers said that propitiation of these deities is the main reason why illness is caused in the villages.

After the regime of the British imperial India and merger of Sikkim with mainstream India, there were major developments in Sikkim. Different parts of rural Sikkim were connected and exposed to the modern global culture. The acceptance and adaptation of the modern western culture as well as new Indian policies made Sikkim more approachable and accessible to the global world. The primitive folk culture became more vulnerable and exposed to the modern developments.

Post-merger there were religious as well as economic developments in the state of Sikkim. Coming of his Holiness Dalai lama to Sikkim and Bhutia Lhopo being conferred as the Schedule tribe of Sikkim also instigated other ethnic groups to follow Buddhist rituals. Further developments like the construction of hydel power project in Sikkim in the sacred places of Sikkim highly enraged the Sikkimese Bhutia Lhopo (Balikci: 2008, 340). Introduction of new governmental policies of providing Bhatta to the shamans. The state govt. of Sikkim now provides Bhatta (allowances) to the ritual practitioner of Sikkim in order to preserve the primitive folk culture. Though it encourages the locals to carry forward their age-old traditions but notwithstanding these policies the number of Lhopo *bon* shamans is comparatively less than the other shamans belonging to different ethnic groups in Sikkim. And it is sad to say that, only handful of Lhopo *bon* shamans are found in the few rural areas of Sikkim.

The Bhatta (allowances) is provided to the *bon* shamans of Chochen by the social welfare department of Sikkim annually. The Bhatta is given by the state to enhance and preserve and encourage the *bon* shamans to continue the folk tradition which is fading away. 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.

7.1 Conclusion

Sikkim had always been a favorable arena for Buddhist religion to flourish. Though Sikkim after merger had tried to preserve its culture but traditional *bon* religion which is rooted in the Bhutia Lhopo community might not be able to sustain its traditional rites and rituals in days to come. Though few local protective deities propitiated by the *bon* shamans might be added in the Buddhist pantheon appeased by the local lamas of respective areas but all the deities which are propitiated by the *bon* shamans are not included in the Buddhist rendition. Hence, the essence of *bon* shamans and their practices in their community loses its meaning.

Chapter 8

Summary and Conclusion

Introduction

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

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

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

Further, in order to understand the influence of Tibetan Buddhism amongst the Bhutia (Lhopo) the relationship between lamas and shamans is studied as this study

unveils how with the coming up of the Tibetan Buddhism, the Shamanic institution is either absorbed or rejected by the organized religious structure. The study also portrays, how the perception of older and younger generation has molded up in different time and space with regards to the *bon* shamanic worldly affairs. The study also tries to access the community participation in the study area.

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

Introducing the Field Area.

For this study, I had selected, *bon* shamans residing in Chochen and its surrounding areas and lamas of Chochen along with the Bhutia (Lhopo) community of Chochen as the universe of the present study. The area which I have chosen is 21- Nathang Machong Constituency, these areas have 7 Gram Panchayat Units and 38 wards. Though I have interviewed all the *bon* shamans found in different wards of 19 Lhatuk-Chochen Gram Panchayat Unit (GPU), which has 6 wards and among these wards I have chosen Chochen ward to comprehend my area of study as this area is Bhutia (Lhopo) dominated area with more *bon* Shamans as compared to other wards. However, due to less spread of *bon* shamans in Chochen I have interviewed all the *bon* shamans found in Chochen as well as in other wards of 19 Lhatuk-Chochen GPU. 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.

Initially, I started my fieldwork from Linkey in 2015 and conducted an elementary survey. The method of choosing the area of study was Purposive Random Sampling. It is an ethnographic research based on intensive field work. I had participated in most of the *bon* rituals carried out by the *bon* shamans as well as the lamas of Chochen since 2015 to 2019. I have tried to document all the seasonal rites as well as initiation rituals performed by the *bon* shamans of Chochen.

According to Panchayat (Chochen Ward) records there are 68 households in Chochen with the total population of 337 people. 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. This research is an ethnographic research

based on intensive field work. An effort is made to study a sociological study of the *bon* rites and rituals held in the village of Chochen. An intensive field work is conducted to study a sociological study of Bhutia Lhopo *bon* religion.

Further, an un-structured interview was conducted to interview the respondents who are currently residing in the village. I interviewed 27 households along with few other members from the family who represent the older and the younger generation. The rationale behind interviewing the older and younger generation of the family was to understand their world view or their perception and attitude towards *bon* shamanic tradition. An unstructured interview was conducted and those data were categorized according to their age groups. To understand their worldview regarding the age-old tradition, their modes of treatment or their preference of treatment whom they consult during illness is taken into consideration.

My respondent especially the Chochen village community people consisted of 50% of the total households. Other respondents whom I had interviewed were all the Bhutia (Lhopo) *bon* shamans (residing in Chochen and its adjoining wards) and the lamas residing in Chochen.

Most of the people residing in Chochen consulted both Lhopo *bon* Shamans and Lamas. Lamaism and *bon* religion determine the socio- religious life of the Bhutia Lhopo community in Chochen ward no.4. After conducting the field work, I found out almost all the households except one or two households in Chochen consulted *bon* Shamans to perform various *bon* rituals.

Social and Economic Profile of the Villagers of Chochen.

Linkey (ward) the main door 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 illustrated as 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 farmer. 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 thrive in Chochen village is because majority of people in Chochen are agriculturists. Another reason is, economically most of the villagers belongs to lower income group and coming all the way to Gangtok for treatment will be problem for them unless they are seriously ill. Easy access, low cost and availability of local *bon* shamans in their own locality during emergency, would be another alternative to the villagers for them to consult *bon* shamans. Further as compared with Tibetan Buddhism, *bon* shamanic practices is economical. In fact, few of the respondents whom I had interviewed said that they even find, performing *bon* rituals at their abode expensive and comparing *bon* shamanic rituals with Buddhism, the latter is far more expensive than the former ritual practices.

Majority of *bon* shamans whom I had interviewed were farmers and the female *bon* shamans were housewives. *Bon* shamans in Chochen and its adjoining wards are part time ritual specialists. They are an agriculturist 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. In Sikkim, in order to encourage the practices and for conservation of age-old traditional religion and welfare of the practitioner an allowance is provided by the state Social and Welfare Department of Sikkim.

Social Significance of *bon* Rituals held in Chochen.

The *bon* shamanic ritual witnessed in Chochen and its surrounding areas are of prime social importance to the locals residing in the areas. The reverence and the social meaning attached to their natural surroundings cannot be overlooked. The fact that the shared belief and their world view that their rocks, water, trees etc. are sacred and needs to be appeased or propitiated 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 re-establish 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 elements of traditional bonism. 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 kind of discontentment, people of Chochen and its adjoining areas, consult *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 to the palace chapel and its surrounding areas, it was said that earlier in the villages of Sikkim each patrilineage had its own *pawo* and *nejum* (Balikci: 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 Tibetan Buddhism and modern means of livelihood, bonism started losing its essence. Villages in Sikkim were often visited by the lamas from Tibet or other adjoining areas of Sikkim after the Chinese invasion in 1950's which influenced the religious practices of the Sikkimese Lhopo villagers. During 1990's there were only a handful of Lhopo *bon* shamans 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

bon shamans who 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 consult 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 households except one or two households perform the *bon* rituals at their house. Most of the households perform 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.

Rituals of Illness Practiced by the Villagers of Chochen.

The Sociological concept of illness gives a fair deal of ideas about how individual in a society share a common social and cultural meaning embedded in illness. According to Kapferer, illness demonically conceived is not reducible to terms independent of demonic conception.... [And] is above all a socio-cultural construct to be understood first and foremost at this level and in its own cultural and social terms (Kapferer, 1983:87) (Balikci, 2008:122). Similarly, in Chochen too, the illness needs to be understood in its own cultural and social terms. Therefore, illness in Chochen is not just comprehended at scientific level but it is also rooted or embedded in cultural and social conditions. The world-view shared by the local people through internalization or attaching subjective meaning to the objective reality where local people believing that their surrounding is inhabited by different local deities who are capable of bringing both fortune and misfortune, health and illness portrays the social and cultural connotation attached with the social well-being of the village. Further, *bon* religion and its ritual which are embedded in its cultural roots are the collective representation of the beliefs and religious practices which are symbolized in the form of deities (benevolent, malevolent or ambivalent) manifested externally during rituals which the locals believe that they are the protective deities residing in different corners of the village.

Factors Responsible for the Decline of Bhutia Lhopo *Bon* Traditional Institution.

In Sikkim, intrusion of different external factors has changed the status of *bon* shamanic institution. The numbers of *bon* practitioners are decreasing and *bon* institution is weakened, as in many parts of Sikkim, especially amongst the Bhutia Lhopo dominated areas we will not be able to find a single Lhopo *bon* shaman. Today in Sikkim, there are only few rural areas where we can find handful of Bhutia Lhopo *bon* shamans who are performing *bon* rites and rituals. In Sikkim the external factors like intervention of Tibetan Buddhism, introduction of modern education by British India and Christian missionary and later the spread of education supported by the durbar or Chogyals of Sikkim, introduction of different network of road connecting different villages are few vital reasons which posed threat to the practice of age-old traditions.

When Tibetan Buddhism was introduced in Sikkim, *though* Sikkim was a shamanic view of universe, advent of Guru Rimponche and later other higher lamas who came to Sikkim post -Chinese invasion in Tibet, tamed and subdued many *bon* shamanic deities by including those tamed deities in the Buddhist pantheon. And further instructed the villagers not to utter the name of the deities which had been subdued. As these subdued deities might inflict them with illness from this generation of fear as well as villagers been made to feel ashamed of pursuing their shamanic belief, I argue that the status of *bon* Shamans and their practices today is due to these implications and imposition of the soft power exerted by the Buddhist structure on *bon* shamanic institution from its inception.

Buddhism since beginning, in order to bring the Sikkimese people under the Buddhist fold, strategized and designed Buddhism in such a way which can be accepted, acknowledged and adapted by the locals without being felt that their belief is under threat. However, these strategies led to the weakening of the shamanic institution.

Other factors such as introduction of western medicine during advent of British India in Sikkim and post- merger many primary health centers in villages and introduction of modern technology, easy road connectivity and change in means of livelihood i.e., shift from agricultural practice to other semi- skilled occupation have

changed the approach of the people's outlook towards traditional belief system. Particularly in Chochen (East Sikkim) and its adjoining wards, there are *bon* shamans who are still practicing but at the same time we can see the gradual changes in the attitude and perception of the locals taking place in these areas.

Most of the household in Chochen consulted Lamas, *bongthing*, *pawo*, *nejum* as well as doctors. Depending on the severity of an illness people consulted different health specialist. Initially if they are sick, they either consult *bongthing* or *pawo* or *nejum* than they consult the doctors because they feel that if they are affected by their wrongdoings or their negligence towards their local deities then they will not be cured by going to the doctors, in fact they believe that ailment becomes more severe. Hence, they (most of the respondents or household in Chochen) consult the *bon* specialist or Lamas. As most of the villagers of Chochen are agriculturists and they belong to a low-income group, coming all the way from Chochen to Gangtok is very costly. Therefore, depending on the severity of illness they either go to Machong PHC (Primary Health Centres) or Pakyong hospital and in case of severe illness, they go to hospitals in Gangtok. However, there are few households whose children have gone outside village to study and stays in the outskirts of Gangtok town or those people who are residing in Gangtok do not consult *bon* shamans during illness.

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

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

During illness, apart from the social and cultural implications there are reflections of socio- psycho reasons as well because most of the people in Chochen at times consult *bon* specialist out of fear or out of need and hope. Fear because if illness

is caused due to provocations or ill treatment to local guardian deities then the locals believe that ailments of individuals will become more severe. Need or hope because if a patient cannot be healed by the scientific treatment, they think why not consult the traditional healers, as the consultant's main purpose is to get their patient cured. Why not follow an alternative method which is practiced by the locals in their villages? Why not consult a specialist who is believed to have healed the other people in the villages? This also shows their thought, their worldview which is strongly influenced by their inclination towards their age-old cultural practices. However, their reliance on *bon* shamanic practices is dependent upon the existence of *bon* specialist who are already very less in numbers in Chochen.

The 53 households with 309 population approx. residing in the area mostly consults the *bongthing*, *pawo*, *nejum* along with lamas except few households due to political conflict in the village. There are few categories of people in Chochen and its adjoining wards who do not consult *pawo* or *nejum* who gets possessed and goes into trance but consults just *bongthing* (a *bon* shamans who does not go into trance and gets possessed) and lamas who are considered less dramatic.

The one important reason why Lhopo *bon* shamanic practices are still thriving and still holds the beliefs of the people in Chochen is because most of the villagers in Chochen are farmer and agriculturist and they depend on subsistence farming and do not have surplus production for sale and agriculture is their main source of livelihood. Most of the people belong to lower income group and economically they are not well-to- do for them to get their treatment done in Gangtok. So, the villagers in Chochen seek help from the local *bon* specialist and the local Public Health Centres. Another reason could be because of the connectivity or development of roads and other source of communication as Chochen had remained aloof from the main area such as Pakyong and Gangtok because of blockage of road or frequent landslide which occurred in these areas for a long time. And in 2017 Airtel network tower was installed but unfortunately that too did not function well.

Anna writes, at the end of the nineteenth century, every patrilineage in Tingchim had its own *pawo* and *nejum* while today, there are hardly a half a dozen Lhopo *pawo* and *nejum* still practicing in Sikkim. According to her, not only construction of celibate monasteries but the introduction of the cardamom cash crop in Sikkim and construction of an extensive network of roads, may be the important factors for the decline of

numbers of Lhopo *bon* shamans in Tingchim. The gradual construction of a network of roads facilitated the marketing of the cardamom and travel to important monasteries, and Tibetan Rinpoche who started taking refuge in Sikkim after the Chinese takeover of their country in 1959. And roads made it equally easy to travel to Gangtok to visit its doctors and hospital (2008, 32-33). Therefore, the important reason why *bon* shamanism still thrives in Chochen (which is just one and half hour distance from the main town Gangtok) is due to continuous landslide during monsoon season, roads often remained blocked. Villagers though produced cardamom cash crop but its production is not high and they get small amount of money by selling those products. Economically the income of villagers was not good.

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

And further, Tibetan Buddhism incorporation of few religious elements of *bon* religion in their modes of religious practices indicates the socio- cultural process of Universalization “a social process where there is an upward spread of element of village culture (Little Tradition) into Great Tradition as Mckim Marriott states it, taking place in Chochen. Therefore, we can understand that even if there will be crisis of *bon* specialist but *bon* shamanic worldview would not be totally eradicated from socio-cultural practices of Bhutia Lhopo community. But one major significant point is villagers or younger generation will be socially ignorant about their cultural practices and there is weakening of their feelings of sense of belongingness towards their community, nature and land as *bon* shamans are the main torch bearer of the Bhutia Lhopo age-old traditional cultural practices or traditional folk religion. Though few elements of *bon* religion is incorporated in Tibetan Buddhism and in Tibetan language texts, it will be professed or acknowledged only at the whims of the Buddhist Lamas.

Consequently, in his study of Mckim Marriott “Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization”, in a village named Kishan Garhi in Uttar Pradesh, when observing the religious practices of these villages, he states that, “we see evidence of accretion and of transmutation in form without rationalization of the accumulated and transformed elements” (Marriott: 1955, 218). In Chochen too, I found that the *bon* shamans along with the villagers when asked regarding the significance of performing of certain *bon* rites and rituals they give different version for performing the *bon* rites

and rituals held in their abode. There is lack of certainty or sense of confusion infusing regarding the significance of practice of certain *bon* rituals amongst the villagers of Chochen. It could be because of accretion and transmutation influenced by exposure to different religious practices witnessed by the villagers of Chochen. Witnessing of these events are leading towards dilution and weakening of age old *bon* traditions.

Conclusions

Buddhism and *bon* shamanism are two different religious entities. However now both *bon* shamanism and Tibetan Buddhism have become a way of life of the people of Chochen. Except from few households of Chochen most of the villagers still consult *bon* shamans during illness and misfortune and further, we witness upward filtration of few religious element of *bon* religion in Buddhist pantheon and as, Anna argues, that the decline of shamanism, however is not synonymous with the decline of the shamanic world view (Balikci, 2008:33). I would like to add that, even if shamanic worldview survives in Sikkim, the shamanic world view will be limited in Tibetan scripts and addition of few *bon* deities in the few household rituals held in the villages of Chochen but the essence of *bon* shamanic cultural worldview, the importance of their local space would be confined in those scripts and effigies which are made during rituals conducted by Buddhist lamas. However, the local people as well the coming generations will not be able to relate themselves with the cultural practices followed by their ancestors, the ritual which is professed in their own local dialect Lhoke.

Therefore, the inter-subjective meaning attached with their sacred landscapes where they relate themselves with their nature, locality, their land and its myth which their forefathers had perceived and cherished will become meaningless as in cases of other parts of Sikkim and further, in Tingchim and in Chochen, the villagers reflecting or practicing shamanic ritual at home are ridiculed or made to feel ashamed of following *bon* practices and left in a state of humiliation which further deteriorates and weakens the *bon* shamanic practices in Sikkim.

The generation of fear, when a higher lama subdues and tames a malevolent deity, the villagers are instructed not to utter the names of these malevolent deities because it is believed that these deities might get active and inflicts the people with illness. And particularly in Tingchim and in Chochen and in different villages in Sikkim, the villagers have been made to feel ashamed of pursuing their shamanic belief and practices (Balikci 2008:25). All these instances weaken the *bon* shamanic practices in

Sikkim. Further, due to current trends of developments it would be hard to say that, the reverence and the social importance given to their land and ancestors will not be able to withstand or sustain the test of time and space. The development that would be taking in Chochen is going to influence the practice of *bon* religion in days to come. According to the source, since December 2020, a national highway will be constructed towards Changu via Pakyong (East Sikkim) and the villagers of Chochen whose land was taken by army was highly compensated. No people got less than nine lakhs, the highest recipient in Chochen got one crore thirty lakhs.

The reason why *bon* shamans are still found in Chochen is because Chochen is a village where majority of the Bhutia Lhopo villagers are agriculturist and agriculture being the main source of livelihood and *bon* rituals are related with agricultural activities of the villagers. Economically too, they belonged from a low-income group and this village had remained isolated for many years because of road connectivity and further in 2016, Chochen was considered as the most backward village. However, now introduction of new national highway and receiving of huge compensation is going to change the source of livelihood and lifestyle of the people of Chochen and this new developments in the village will adversely affect the growth of age-old traditional cultural practices.

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Appendix I

Glossary

Ata-Go Kap ritual: it is an initiation ritual which is performed after Mohtap or prediction is confirmed that the ailing individual is *bon* shaman and this ritual tries to detect which deity is affecting the ailing individual. After prediction the sick or the troubled individual is guided to go into séances by keeping kato (wodden cup with effigies placed inside it) above his/her head to specify which tutelary deities are possessing him/her). A white piece of cloth is wrapped around three bamboo sticks arranged vertically in a conical shape, which is placed over the head of ailing individual with a Kathey or Kato representing Chum Rinzing (wodden cup with effigy) to establish which deity is inflicting the individual.

Ajo Chagu: the senior *bon* shaman was really annoyed with another *bon* shaman who performed Ata Gokap ritual because he thought another *pawo* performed this ritual offhandedly. Ajo Chagu, he suggested to other *bon* shamans that after Mohtap if he/she is diagnosed as *bon* shaman then the *bon* shamans needs to consult to the family and other relatives and through proper inspection and confirmation regarding the case then perform Ata Gokap ritual to detect which tutelary deities he/she is possessing and he suggested other junior *bon* shamans not to perform Ata Gokap ritual casually as this is an important ritual.

Sang phen: it is chanted which actually describes about the shing(wood) and the tree of sang(incense). “*Sha lo Pay Ghey Lha Shing Thung, Lho LoTakey Shing, Nup Lho Passang Zensing Thung, Choe Lha Pay Ka Lhasing Thung, Yu Lo langbu Shing.....*” Offers Khelen during Sangben. “*Shing Chow Thung lha Gey Pay Shing, Kay Thung Gey Kula Shing, Chimo Gaychen Zay Pay Shing, Lay Nengbay Lha Lo Sangphee Zay....*” She/he (*pawo* or *nejum*) is reciting a Sangben [chanting prayers by offering incense or sang (Bhutia lhopo term for incense)]by invoking all the deities who resides in East, West, North and South.

Nay Gay Uchi: The *bon* shamans especially the *pawo* and the *nejum* takes a round of the Nay Gay Uchi (top of huge rocky cliff) where there is a water accumulated in a small hollow which never dries in the top of the Nay (sacred place) and it is believed that if that water dries then some misfortune might be afflicted to the people of the village. Inside this small hollow where water is accumulated, three tortoises (Reebay) reside

which is basically a tortoise shaped stone. It is believed that during the Chey Cheynga (15th day according to lunar calendar) these tortoises make a noise. By carrying Masong toma the *bon* shamans take a round around the nay's uchi in anti-clock direction (Urung Phen Gay Yen Kyo, encircling in anti- clock wise). Below the rocky cliff to the left side of the cliff is reserved for the *bon* shamans who takes the round of the nay anti clock wise and on the right it is said that Guru Rimponche have meditated in that place and all the Lamas perform rituals in that place which is known as Dhamba Chey Gay Yen Kyo where lamas and their followers encircles the Nay in clock wise direction.

Taku Nay: Traditionally it is said that (narrated by the senior Nejum Tashim) *bon* shamans belonging to Dimpey Wangchuk lineage should visit Thungka Nay first followed by Taku Nay and then at Pathing Cho (Chochen lake) and *bon* shamans belonging from the Adong pa lineage should first visit Taku Nay, Thungka nay and Pathing Cho (Chochen nay) respectively. Since, their ancestors followed this tradition Lhopo *bon* shamans of Chochen were supposed to follow that accordingly. However, these days *nejum* said that for their convenience or for less consumption of their time they visit Takku nay first which is the farthest, it's about 1 and half hour distance from Pathing Cho then they move on to the Thung Ka Nay and lastly to the Pathing Cho Nay where they first performed their ritual.

Offering of sha-nga: Offering of red, especially a right hand of the ox to the ancestral deities. Offering of sha nga and officiating pho lha mo lha (their lineage deities) is performed with the help of ritual specialist like *bongthing or pawo* or the eldest son who had learned the offering of sha nga phen, during the offering of sha-nga the *bon* specialist does not go into trance and the divination does not occur like the rituals performed by the *nejum* and *pawo* in the month of Dawa Dinpo and Dawa Neepo.

Illness: In general, the social conception of illness or the perception of illness among the Bhutia Lhopos of Sikkim is similar in most of the cases. However, the name, social history or myth shared and social functions of the local guardian deities inhabiting in their respective local areas of Sikkim is different and therefore it makes it more distinctive as compared to the local deities inhabiting in other parts of Sikkim. Similarly, the studies conducted in northern part of Sikkim (Lamas, Shamans and Ancestors) by Balikci in 1995 and its illustration on the ritual of illness embedded in culture is similar in most cases but the names and function of the local guardian deities (responsible for bringing prosperity or inflicting people if offended) inhabiting in the local areas of Chochen (East Sikkim) and Tingchim (North Sikkim) are different.

Appendix II

Tormas (effigies) in the altar representing different supernatural entities (shown in Appendix IV)

In Sikkim, all the surroundings and its environment are inhabited by supernatural beings. From, rock to lake and mountains etc. are inhabited by supernatural entity. Therefore, people living in the surrounding are very cautious or protective of their surrounding because they believe that if they destroy or pollute the surrounding sacred areas, they will be inflicted with misfortunes and illness. The local people are hesitant about the new development initiative brought in the local areas as it destroys the natural surrounding where the deities reside and the locals are afraid of the wrath which might inflict the villagers.

In Sikkim, depending on the lineage and their ancestors place of migration and religious influences witnessed by them and the local deities found or worshipped by the locals in their respective areas differ and, in few cases, similarity can also be found.

Following are the names of the deities invoked by the *bon* shamans of Chochen and its adjoining wards. The following ritual was held at Ajo Chagu's abode, the popular *bongthing* in Chochen. He was the eldest *bon* shaman and consulted by many people during illness. Ajo Chagu belongs to Adongpa lineage therefore he appeases the Adongpa's Phola Molha. The deities representing in the main altar are as follows.

1. Pho-Lha Masung – Pho-Lha-Chempo-Masung-Khung-Dung, this torma (effigy) represent the most important deity of the *bon* shamans of Chochen. This deity is responsible for taming, controlling and directing all the ambivalent deities present in the altar. Pho Lha Masung represent the male ancestor deity and it is invoked to bless the family with son.
2. Cho Go Rimbo- this torma(effigy) represent the deity residing in Taku Nay, *nejum* offers tso (fruits) to appease this deity and this deity is also addressed as Cho Sang Lo Ko Chen by *bongthing* and *bongthing* offers Sha-Nga to this deity.
3. Cho Ney Sung- this torma(effigy) represent the guardian deity of Taku Nay, he bestows long life to the people.
4. Cho Zochen: this torma(effigy) represent the guardian deity of Thungka Nay. He blesses people with children to those people who ask for children and even confers people with

long life.

5. Pawo-Nejum-Yidam- this torma(effigy) represent the power (Shakti) of *bon* Shamans.
6. Chen Kalibo- a male ancestral deity (Pho lha) and also a son of Cho Zochen (guardian deity of Thungka Nay).
7. Chen Pinsto Namgay- a male ancestral deity (Pho lha) and also a son of Cho Zochen (guardian deity of Thungka Nay).
8. Chen Cho Key Dorjee- a male ancestral deity (Pho lha) and also a son of Cho Zochen (guardian deity of Thungka Nay).
9. Nay Gay Chi Kyo Norbu- a male ancestral deity (Pho lha) and also a son of Cho Zochen (guardian deity of Thungka Nay).
10. Chi Kyo Norbu Dhenchey- a male ancestral deity (Pho lha) and also a son of Cho Zochen (guardian deity of Thungka Nay).
11. Chikyo Hura Member- a male ancestral deity (Pho lha) and also a son of Cho Zochen (guardian deity of Thungka Nay).
12. Nay Gay Zachen (Nay Gyi Zabdi Phomo): from number 6 to 12, these deities are the sons of Cho Zochen, they are all the Pho Lha's (male ancestral deities) who resides in Thungka Nay and torma(effigies) representing number 1 to 12 embodies the Pho lha (male ancestral deities).
13. Lhasung of Adongpa: Adong Lha (Pho Lha)-this torma (effigy) represents their lineage deities.
14. Gen Sa Kincho: this torma represents the Kincho of the Adongpa lineage. Pheri (name of ward) Lha. This deity is the Gyabda (protective deity) which basically goes along with the daughter of the house to the groom house after marriage. Therefore, the daughters especially belonging from the Phempu- Nadikpa lineage from Pheri ward needs to propitiate this deity with the help of *bon* shamans in the groom's house.
15. Dongka Kincho (Adong Kincho) – lineage deity of Adongpa lineage.
16. Chey Ding Kincho (Adong Kincho)- lineage deity of Adongpa lineage.
17. Chumi Kincho – lineage deity of Adongpa lineage.
18. Chum Singdum: Pheyui Phatey, this torma represents the deity who carries a fire and possesses the *nejum* who dances during the ritual to ward off the Shemo, Shindey. This deity is even referred as Chuma Singey Dzungchen. In Buddhist ritual Singdumay torkyap is performed by the Buddhist lamas.
19. Cho Shepo: prediction is done with the help of this deity. He looks into the mirror [Sa Ko Millow (a mirror)]and helps in prediction. The possessed *nejum* holds a mirror in her hand and recites the prediction as supposedly spoken by this deity.

20. Chum Machong: she is wife of Cho Shepo (deity representing number 19) and she carries ngachung (two sided drums) in her head and *nejum* during ritual when possessed by this deity dances in trance by carrying a ngachung (two sided drums) in her head.
21. Aeso (phetu) Dampay Dhule: this torma (effigy) represents the Lhasung (guardian deity) or the deity of lineage of Adongpa's.
22. Gosung Phyama Labsay Kapu: this torma represents the Lhasung (protective deity) and he is the gatekeeper or the guard of Takku nay (sacred place in Chochen). This deity is act as a guard during different *bon* rituals held in the village and during the visit to the Nay (sacred place) this deity is propitiated near the bridge (as this deity is believed to be residing near the bridge) on the way to Taku Nay seeking permission to enter to the Nay.
23. Chomay Yuring Lhamu: this torma represents the Choda or Daku or the guardian deity of the Pathing (Chochen Lake) she is also known as Thaka Amay lu (an aquatic deity), a mother of 108 lu.
24. Chomay Samten Dem: this torma represents the Choda or Daku or the guardian deity of the Pathing Cho, Chochen Lake.
25. Chum Rinzing: this torma represents the Adongpas Khendum, Mochem or prediction is done with the help of this deity. She is also one of Adongpa's sisters.
26. Rizong Pema Dem: this tormas represents the Adongpas Khendum (a female deity of Adongpa lineage)
27. Rizong Thin Ong Dem: this torma represents the Adongpas Khendum (a female deity of Adongpa lineage)
28. Ana Kincho (Adong Pamu) (Kabab of Adong): Kabab of Adongpas.
29. Kabab Ana Tshering Diki: Kabab of *nejum* Tashi. She is the mother of *nejum* Tashim of Chochen.
30. *Pawo* Gayching: *Pawo* Gayching was the maternal uncle (*azang*) of *nejum* Tashim. *Pawo* Gayching was the kabab (In this context,ka means 'speech' or 'order' and bab means 'to come down on'. A kabab corresponds to a *pawo* or *nejum*'s spiritual ascendant to whom he may or may not be related. A new *pawo* or *nejum* must be the spiritual descent of a previous shaman or kabab from whom he or she will magically inherit his or her powers and qualities (Balikci,2008:380) of her mother.
31. *Pawo* Kancha: he was the kabab of *pawo* Sangay. He was an Adonga lineage *pawo*.
32. Ajo *pawo* Sangay: *pawo* Sangay was even popularly known as Dothi Ajo in the village. He was the teacher of *nejum* Tashim and *pawo* Lhatuk.

Two small plates, placed beside the left and right side of the main altar represents the Shya Chum or Khendum (female deities) and Gyabda or the Daku (the gaurds of the Khendum) respectively. In the left side where the deities of Shya Chum are placed, these are representations of deities such as Yab Yamay Gaypu (father), Yum Mani Phimu (mother), Chum Zambaling Gay Khendum (daughter).

The three plates which are placed in the lower shelf represents the ambivalent deities who are malevolent at times. Most of the illness caused to the villages in Chochen is attributed to the deities illustrated below. The *bon* shamans by looking at the symptoms as well as through mohtap (prediction) finds the causes of illness and accordingly different deities are appeased with the foods and drinks whatever the malevolent deities prefer. The following description illustrates the representation of the ambivalent deities from left to right as showed in the altar.

Plate 1.

1. Machong Lama Kincho- this deity represents the Gyempey Daku (Machong Gumpa) or the guardian deity of Machong Gumpa.
2. Phenkyo Ana Nejum - she is wife of Machong Lama Kincho and she is *nejum*.
3. Phak Say Pay Chen- Yo- Ku, servants of Machong Lama Kincho.
4. Pho Chu Gay Dee - Yo-Ku, servants of Machong Lama Kincho.
5. Dokshing Amay Chomay - Yo-ku's (servants) wife.
6. Lha Dem Gay Mehmu -Yo-Ku's(servants) wife.
7. Rongay Lama Kincho- Gyabda or the Daku (protective deity) of Rongay Gumpa in Gangtok.
8. Paybu Na Do Khendum- wife of Rongay Lama Kincho (protective deity).
9. Pa Bu Chen Chomay- Yo- Ku, servants of Rongay Lama Kincho (protective deity).
10. Namnang Chen Chomay- Yo-Ku, servants of Rongay Lama Kincho (protective deity).
11. Cha- Kyung Nay Pay Dhay- guard of Pha- Bu- Gaypu.

It should be noted that the tormas (effigies) representing the ambivalent deities of Machong and Rongay (Gangtok) are faced each other where Machong is kept from the right and Gangtok (Rongay) in the left.

Plate 2.

Plate in the middle (plate2) represents the following:

1. Lho Cho Gaypu, stays at Algara (Ba-Dum-La)
2. Lho Lama Kincho- Duk Gay (Bhutan's) Cheysung (protective deity), Rimcha Daku this malevolent deity causes different illness.
3. Sohtho Ma Da Khendum- wife of Lama Kincho
4. Chen Go Rab Tanding- guard of Lho Lama Kincho.
5. Chen Yabdey: Rimcha Gay Daku (a deity which causes illness)
6. Aba Bongthing
7. Amo Phemo
8. Phen Do Motay Chay Kha Pho Kha.

Plate 3.

The third plate (plate 3) represents the following:

Hee Lha (Yul Lha) the local Dhay Gay (ambivalent deities). These deities reside in the surroundings of Chochen. Most of the illness is attributed to these deities residing in different corners of Chochen. By examining the symptoms and through predictions the *bon* shamans can predict the illness of an individual. According to the illness caused by different deities, they are appeased accordingly to their preference.

1. Lama Kincho Lamay Yeten Nopu (Gay Pu)- a local malevolent deity.
2. Lenpu (Yo-Ku)- servants of lama Yeten Nopu.
3. Doru Chen Chomay- local malevolent deity.
4. Menchu Chen Chomay- local malevolent deity
5. Lhusing Chen Chomay- local malevolent deity.
6. Chuba Ghey Dhay- local malevolent deity.
7. Singey Bari Chen- local malevolent deity.
8. Chumbo Thek See Lay Nepo- local malevolent deity.
9. Reeba Chen-local malevolent deity
10. Khaa Khyuepay Chen-local malevolent deity.
11. Somching Gay Dhay-local malevolent deity.
12. Phyara Gey Mehmu-local malevolent deity.

Appendix III

Mythical objects found in Taku Nay

In the ground or at the entrance of the Nay (sacred place) there are pictures of the Buddhist deities as well as Hindu's deities inside the cave or Nay. Many Hindus as well as Buddhist followers visit the Nay and most of the people residing in Rolep ward especially belonging from Rai ethnic group also consider this place as their sacred place of worship.

Once we reach Taku Nay, the surroundings of this sacred site are encircled by many mythical objects. Footprint of a tiger engraved in the stone is found at the bottom of the huge rocky cliff. There is Dedu Amey Cho Kyong, it is spring water which never dries and it is believed that this spring water is offering of water (Chup) to the deities residing in that place. Taku Nay is even referred by the locals as Takcho Nindey Duphu as in earlier days tigers used to drink water from this place. Later this place was visited by Guru Rinpoche and it is believed that he meditated in that place. It is believed that Guru Rinpoche had ridden a tiger and gone to Paro Taksang (a sacred place) in Bhutan from that place. A small opening or hollow wall could be seen where Guru had gone towards the Paro Taksang in Bhutan. It is even said by the locals that even if they are unable to visit the sacred place, Paro Taksang in Bhutan visiting Takku Nay would suffice.

Lyay Gay De Sem Pheesa (differentiates between the good and evil people) the one who is considered good people he/she can go through the openings of the stone one who is evil gets stuck in the stone. This particular place is at the right side of the Nay near the place where Guru Rinpoche had meditated.

Other mythical objects found in Nay is Yenchi (a round cylindrical shaped stone). Yenchi basically is a local term used for chopping board. It is believed that Cho Ngada Samdu takes the soul (Namshey) to the Yenchi (also known as Khungdo). It is in this Yenchi, the bodies are being divided and distributed among the local deities. The hands, legs and chest are being offered to Cho Neysung (the guardian deity of Taku Nay). All intestines are offered to Amgu Lam who resides in the stream below the bridge. In those days it was a huge stream where there was a footprint of elephant in the middle of the stream, however, now it has been destroyed by huge storm. Now there is

a small stream. There is an impression of Khendum Ghey Kohzey or Ye Bhundari (imprint of feet of the female *bon* shaman) on the surface of the Yenchi.

Tak Ghey Kohzhey, tiger's footprint is found inside the entrance of the lower cave.

Below the Nay (sacred placed) Guru Rimponche Kohzey (foot print) is found.

Dem Kamay Nay-an image of cow breast. It is believed that lucky ones can see the milk oozing out of the breast during Chey Chaynga (15th day according to lunar calendar) and Namkhong (30th day according to lunar calendar).

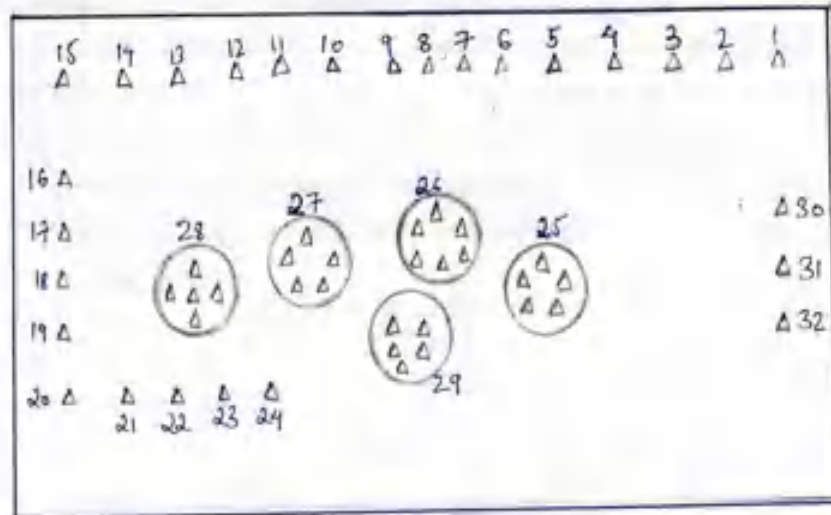
Recently Taku Nay was visited by Tumi Tulku who is originally from Bhutan but stays in Deorali Gangtok, had brought Guru Rinpoche Kudung (statue) in the Nay in the month of December and placed it in the location where Guru Rinpoche had meditated.

So, Cho Neysung is the Neyda, the guardian deity of Taku Nay who gives long life to the people who seeks for long life. The guard of the deity who stays below the nay near the stream is named Phyama Lhapsay Kapu. The other guard of the deity named Shari Dzungchen stays in a wide forest above Rongli beyond Lamaten.

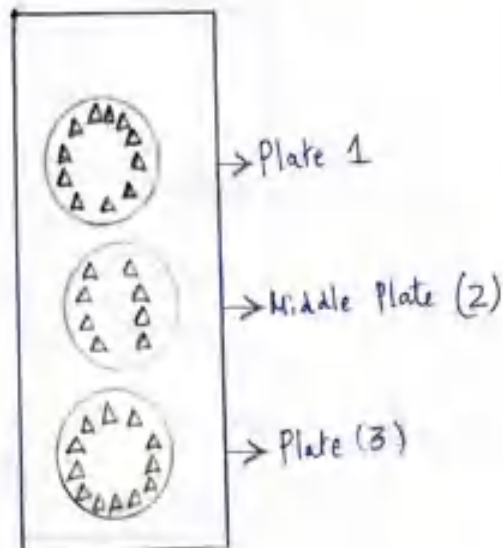
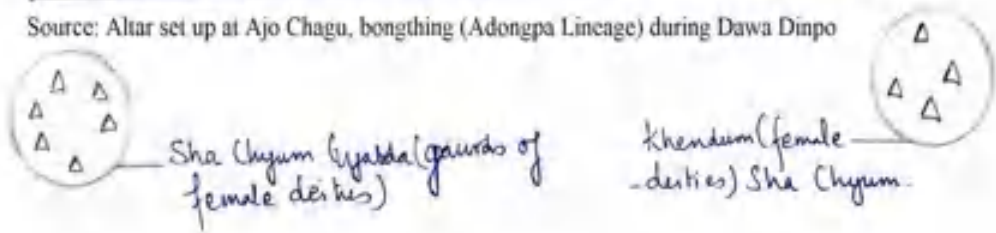
Nay Gay Uchi (top of huge rocky cliff) where there is water accumulated in a small hollow which never dries in the top of the Nay and it is believed that if that water dries then some misfortune might be afflicted to the people of the village. Inside this small hollow where water is accumulated, three tortoise (Reebay) resides which is basically a tortoise shaped stone. It is believed that during Chey Chaynga (15th day of lunar calendar) these tortoise makes a noise.

Appendix IV

Tormas (effigies) in the altar representing different supernatural entities



Source: Altar set up at Ajo Chagu, bongthing (Adongpa Lineage) during Dawa Dinpo



Appendix V



Source: *Fieldwork 2016*

Installation of Guru Statue by Thumi tulku in Thungka Nay



Source: *Fieldwork 2016*

Installation of Guru statue by Thumi tulku in Thungka Nay



Source: *Fieldwork 2016*

Local monk taking measures to install a Buddhist Guru inTaku Nay



Source: *Fieldwork 2016*

Ajo Chagu, Bonthing offering to pho-lha-mho lha(ancestral deities)



Source: *Fieldwork 31st December 2017*

Pawo (male bon shamans)



Source: *Fieldwork 31st December 2017*

Pawo performing during ritual



Source: *Fieldwork 31st December 2017*

Nejum(female *bon* shamans)



Source: *Fieldwork 31st December 2017*

Representation of different deities in main altar during Dawa Dinpo(7th month of lunar calendar) ritual



Source: *Fieldwork 31st December 2017*

Offerings to the Dhay Gay (ambivalent deities) during Dawa Dinpo(7th month of lunar calendar) ritual



Source: *Fieldwork 31st December 2017*

Ajo Chagu, Bongthing offering sha-nga



Source: *Fieldwork 29th December 2017*

Respondents heading for two days trips towards sacred places of Chochen



Source: *Field work 29th December 2017*

Worshipping Guru rimponche in Taku Nay



Source: *Field work 29th December 2017 (Mythical Object Found in Taku Nay)*
Lyay Gay De Sem Pheesa (differentiates between the good and evil)



Source: *Fieldwork 2017 (Mythical Object Found in Taku Nay)*
Nay Gay Uchi (top of huge rocky cliff) and its three mythical tortoises (reebay)



Source: *Fieldwork 2017 (Mythical Object Found in Taku Nay)*

Nay Gay Uchi (top of huge rocky cliff) and its three mythical tortoises (reebay)



Source: *Field work 29th December 2017 (Mythical Object Found in Taku Nay)*

Yenchi (a rpund cylindrical shaped stone)



Source: *Field work 29th December 2017 (Mythical Object Found in Taku Nay)*

Footprint of a tiger



Source: *Fieldwork 29th December 2017*

Setting up of *bon* shamanic altar in left side of Taku Nay



Source: *Fieldwork 29th December 2017*

Bonshaamans encircling in Chochen Lake

Appendix VI

ISSN 0975-0142, Peer Reviewed Journal, JSD, Vol. 2(3), 2017, 18201, Ranchi.

Demystifying Shamanism In Contemporary Sikkim: Some Observations among the Bhutia (Lhopo) of Sikkim

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Abstract

Religion as such is very problematic to define. David Riches however, have intervened religion beyond the commonsensical notion (ideological and cosmological sense) whereby the term religion might reasonably be used to describe certain socio-intellectual processes by which human beings contemplate the social. (Riches, 1994:361). Therefore to answer the questions as how shamanism as an institution is the key to religion or how Shamanism as an traditional religious institution is helpful in comprehending the religion, it can be illustrated through the deeper understanding of social processes of religion in the simpler social structures with the help of theoretical understanding such as *Communitas* which will be discussed in the following may give us an idea how Shamanism could be pertinent in understanding as a key to religion, as religion along with its ritual plays a very important role in making and remaking of a society.

Locating Shamans and Shamanism among the Bhutia (Lhopo) Community of Sikkim

The term Shaman is probably originated from the Tungus language and as Reinhard (1976:14) explains, it had already been clearly defined by Shirokogoroff (1935:269) that 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..... (Balkci, 2008:14).

According to Mircea Eliade in technique of Ecstasy limits the definition to the notion of soul flight:

The Shaman specialized in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the

underworld (1954:5) and Reinhard explains the discrepancy between the both definitions:

He says it is due to Eliade's historical interpretation which is supposed to show that the soul journey aspect in prior times was of primary importance among the Tungus and spirit possession was a later development. (Balicki, 2008:14).

Balicki in her study of rituals practitioners of Sikkim, she uses the term Bon to refer to Tingchims (which lies at the Northern part of Sikkim) 'folk religion or what has also been termed 'nameless religion' or 'pagan tradition' since this term was also used by the villagers themselves.

Interestingly Nebesky -Wojkowitz had also noted that the Sikkimese pawo and nejun are regarded by the Buddhist as typical representatives of the Bon creed. Actually, they seem to be the remnant of the earlier unorganized Bon (1956: 425) (Balicki: 2008, 13).

There was different terms employed to refer to the various ritual specialist who were present among other Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhist populations, term such as 'spirit mediums' (Bergle 1976) 'oracles'(Day 1990), intercessors (Jest 1976) and 'Shamans' (Ortner 1995, Holmberg 1989). (Balicki: 2008, 14).

However Balicki (2008) had chosen the term 'Shaman' in defining the Tingchim Bon rituals specialist among the Bhutia (Lhopo)¹ because their practice to some extent were related to Eliade's concept of soul flight and Shirokogoroff's notion of master of spirits. Further she compared the Shamans of Sikkim found in Tingchim with North Asia among the Daur Mongols linking the similarities (Balicki: 2008,17) where she tries to locate Sikkimese Shamanism on the very Southern edge of the Siberian complex (Balicki: 2008, 17).

Similarly, we can also find that as Tibet and some Himalayan populations are on the margins of the Siberian complex the features of Himalayan practices represents versions of Siberian Shamanism as well as other South Asian components in Himalayan religions. So, Geoffrey Samuel for these reasons he defined Shamanism in analytic terms rather than to identify it as a specifically Siberian phenomenon.

Therefore, Shamanism can also be defined as a primitive unorganized religious institution with strong roots in nature and ancestor worshipping, and generally associated with the worshipping

of supreme god overall. The shaman, on the other hand, exercises certain priestly functions; his/her powers are concerned with practices of healing and divination, a capability that he/she exercises and gained out of intimate relations with the supernatural world. Shamans as such are religious healer, a healing priest and a medicine man that have their ritual practices rooted in the traditional religion. They are significantly known for their healing practices and folk medicinal attributes. A Shamanism 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 their respective forefathers. In fact it is the generic form of certain religious practices which is still prevailing in our society, though modified or extinct or absorbed into the hierarchy of structured religious institutions, these practices upheld 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.

The traces of Shamanism in Sikkim: a historical overview and its contemporary manifestations

Sikkim from its inception was based on a Shamanic view of universe, where ancestors and protectors resided in its high mountains and delves of all kinds populated its country side (Balkci, 2008:3) for eg. Yul (Lha) Zibda², Chen, Chomay,³ Lu⁴ etc resides in different localities in Sikkim. When Buddhism as a pantheon along with different sects emerged from Tibet it overshadowed the entire small Tibeto-Burman speaking peoples' religious realm. Sikkimese borderlands both before and during the Chogyal rule provided the space of being a contact zone where a Tibetan Buddhism from Tibet came in contact with the local Bon religion of Lhopo community of Sikkim.

In fact, Tibetan Buddhism was made a State religion and King was considered as the Dharma Raja (protector of State religion) in Sikkim. Conventional Buddhism started as proselytization and it held the Bhutia Lhopo of Sikkim and other Tibeto - Burman speaking people under its fold. Tibeto- Burman speaking people wherever they might have been settled, have their origin rooted in Tibet but what is interesting is to note that every Tibeto - Burman entity has their own flavor, distinctiveness especially with reference to their own languages, customs and religion which are in a way different from that of the Tibet. Sikkim cannot be studied or comprehended in

isolation without taking Tibet into account. Yet, Sikkim is not Tibet- as many Sikkimese states- the Sikkimese are not Tibetans (Mullard, 2011:2). The infiltration of religious ideology along with many other factors of modernity has weakened the Shamanic indigenous belief among Lhopos of Sikkim. Nirmal Chandra Sinha, the first Tibetologist in Sikkim, states that "Even in Tibet, the progress of Buddhism was by no means smooth for the first two hundred years as it had to reckon with the hostility of the native religion. The Bon was deeply rooted not only in the mind of the common man; it was strongly entrenched in the court itself. Ministers and even members of the royalty were often ambivalent and some continued die-hard" Even in the article, 'Case of disappearing Shamans', Sherry B. Ortner (1995: 355-390) talks about the Shamans of Sherpas (Tibeto-Burman speaking group) of Nepal nearing the border of Tibet, she states that Sherpas were once dominated by the Shamanic universe but due to the pressure emanating from the Buddhist religious establishment, the Sherpas, Shamanic cosmology have lost its ground. The Monk or the higher Lamas out- rightly rejected the skills of the Shamans considering it as unreliable, ineffective and sinful; the lay people along with the Shamans accepted the verdict of the higher Lamas and the monks. 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 (Balicki, 2008:3)

Anna argues 20 years ago, Bhutia Lhopo Shamans found in the Northern part of Sikkim(Tingchim) have not only remained independent of the Buddhist establishment but Buddhism and Shamanism was coexisting parallel in the village level because the non-celibate village Lamas and the Shamans at times performed together. However, she states that the problem is not with the non-celibate village Lamas but the younger Lamas who go out of the village for higher studies of Buddhism have a problem after returning to village.

Buddhism is revered by majority of the Bhutia Lhopo people today and the Bon shamans and their practices are considered as inferior or impure at times by the Lhopo people themselves but the irony is, the language and the dialect with which the Buddhism is professed is different and more Tibetan oriented and Bon Shamans Professes or officiates in the local dialect as he/she is a specialist

who is well attuned to the local supernatural entities and speaks through local dialects. A similar case can be observed and it is astonishing to note that among the Bondos of Orissa highland who have their own dialect Munda, in conversation with the lowland Hindu neighbors they employ Oriya as Oriya is the language of the dominant group and they even perceive that, when it comes to propitiation many prayers and magical formulae it is been spoken in Oriya, because Bondos think it proper that the deities and spirit should be addressed in "superior language".(Furer-Haimendorf: 1982: 319). Similarly, the Buddhist people refer or venerate Buddhism which they consider more organized and principled rather than the unstructured religious practices which is considered inferior, unorganized and professed in local dialect with no written scripts and taught or passed on their knowledge orally.

Buddhism though infiltrated or endangered the existence of Lhopo Bon Shamans but yet again it can't be said that Shamanic practices in Sikkim is not functional at all as it is reflected through many events which took place recently. Though Buddhism has overshadowed the Bon Shamans of Sikkim but it never totally effaced the survival of the ancient traditions and they have included the Shamanic deities into their pantheon in the recent past and even Shamans have incorporated or assimilated the Buddhist deities in their practices (Ballal:2008). The importance of Shamans is still there in Sikkim as people still do consult them during their illness and misfortune. Therefore, the event which unfolded in the recent past when the nature was questioned is worth mentioning and analyzing. There are many events that occurred which indicates how people are still connected with their nature, their universe in Sikkim. The case of Kabi-Lunchok protest in North Sikkim and Raibong-chu case of the West Sikkim (1977) and even the AGT (Affected Citizens of Teesta) of the Dzongu North Sikkim. All this agitation and the frustration of the mass, busted out because new developmental projects were being introduced in these areas which would be totally destroying their revered places that is the 'nature'. The local people of these areas were so aggravated they came on the forefront and raised their voices. Indeed, true preservation and continuity of biodiversity can only be done taking into account the sentiments and beliefs of the local people. The sustained relationship between the nature and man is probably because of such beliefs where in the locals revered the sacred Lakes, Mountains and Nature and going against the nature

would be, going against the beliefs of the people (Nongbrt 2008). When earthquake struck in September 18, 2011, North Sikkim was literally affected. Most of the people I heard them saying, the Mother Nature was offended by the destruction that people posed on the nature. On the way to North Sikkim namely, Chungthang to Lachung(Teesta-Utza) there are big tunnel being dug under right through the base of the huge rocky cliffs, making place look shabby and deplorable. And most of the local people gets dejected and laments on the turmoil of their environment. The affinity of the people toward the nature clearly depicts that the perception of the people is still connected to the nature or Shamanic view of universe. Therefore, for the sustenance of the nature, the local beliefs play a pivotal role.

Conceptualizing Shamanism theoretically

The social process of Bon Shamanic institution as undergoing in the Sikkimese Lhopo community is being understood through the concept of Liminality⁵ and Communitas. Buddhism and Bon Lhopo Shamans are two dialectically opposed entity and both the institution are even mutually indispensable human conditions which could be drawn out from the current events mentioned above, where people believed in both the entity. However on the one hand, Tibetan Buddhism is the normative social structure, social status, rank, self secularity and essence as categorized by Turner. On the other hand, Lhopo Bonism is in a realm of Liminality because it is in a phase where it is losing its previous essence and is in a state of ambiguity, a realm of statuslessness and even considered inferior and impure⁶ at times (where Turner in Ndembu rituals mentions that during a certain rituals of circumcision among the children of Ndembu society the transition stages from boyhood to adulthood which is marked by the initiation rites is considered as an impure or Liminal state). Transition is impure; it is well accounted even in a book "Purity and Danger" 1966 written by Dr. Mary Douglas, she holds that, in effect what is unclear and contradictory (from the perspectives of social definition) tends to be regarded as (ritually) unclean (losing its social values). From her standpoint, one would expect to find that transitional beings are particularly polluting, since they are neither one thing nor another, or may be both; or neither here nor there; or may even be nowhere (in terms of any recognized cultural topography), and are at the very least "betwixt and between" all the recognized fixed points in space-time of structural classifications. (Turner, 1967:97). Shamanism

personifies marginality. It stands in the "betwixt and between" the transitional state that Victor Turner calls it as Liminality. The Shamanic realm is sandwiched between their own tradition and the intrusion of Tibetan Buddhism leaving them in a stage where they are neither here nor there and due to these factors they might be considered inferior or impure at times as transitional beings are considered polluting. The incorporation of the higher Buddhist deities in their altar and the reactions of the conventional Buddhist Lamas towards the Bon Shamans clearly portray the status of the Bon Shamans today that He/she is struggling between the juncture of two worlds.

According to Turner in the phase of Liminality, *Communitas*⁷ is formed, where an entity which is spontaneously formed is based on common humanity and equality rather than recognized hierarchy, *Communitas* has positive values associated with good fellowship, spontaneously warm contact, unhierarchies, undifferentiated social relations. So during the rites and rituals of the Shamans *Communitas* is formed, if we follow the Durkheimian Tradition, he asserts, 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 Shamans 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. So during the rituals the notions of Bon Shamans being inferior or impure to that of the Tibetan Buddhism is suspended and a new community or a full scale *Communitas* of equal beings of longer or shorter duration may be formed. According to Turner, this sense of *Communitas* is created as the Bon shamans distance themselves from "mundane structures and their social identities", leading to homogenization of status. (Turner, 1967:23). So during ritual, a heightened feeling of energy is generated which Durkheim termed it as 'collective effervescence', that in turn leads to the unification within the group. After the manifestation of the events, when they enter into the normal life, the Shamans might go through the same dictum dictated by the structure which is characterized by inequality, hierarchy and difference. Adding to the point, it is told for instance, that 'permanent structural inferiors'

and those who lives are egalitarian in the normative secular realm may have elaborate hierarchy and 'the trappings of secular structure' rather than *Communitas* in ritual. Thus, the structurally inferior aspire to symbolic structural superiority..... the structurally superior aspire to symbolic *Communitas* and undergo penance to achieve it. Through the dialectical social processes of ritual, man acts on his needs to participate in both modalities. Such has been the cases among the Lhopo Shamans and the Tibetan Buddhism, though Shamanism is trapped in the "secular structures" yet again, the needs of the lay man in both the religious cosmos makes them sustain and the participants with respect to both the lay man as well as the Shamans and Lamas to participate in a long run. Though Bon Shamanism might be regarded as inferior or in a state of Liminality when compared to Buddhism as majority of the Bhutia Lhopo are Buddhist and people at times ridicule Bon practices but when a ritual is held a strong sense of collective effervescence is felt or shared among the people of the community, this generation of feeling without hierarchy and status is what Victor Turner terms it as *Communitas*. A feeling of equality, statuslessness is generated when a Bon ritual is being performed by the Bon Shamans. There are no questions of their authority or their structure when the rites and rituals are being performed by the bon specialist. However, when the rites and rituals are over and when they come to their normal routine they will again be trapped in the same "normative structure" where they are considered inferior to that of Buddhism.

Conclusion

Shamanism a key to religion with the help of a theoretical understanding discloses the fact that when any simpler religion such as Bonism if penetrated deeply through different approaches may actually highlight the problem in questions as to why, even if it exists, why and how is it functioning and even if it isn't, why is it happening so. The paper focused on the current trend of Bon Shamanic practices found among the Bhutia Lhopo in Sikkim after more than two decades of study carried out by Anna Balikci in Northern part of Sikkim (Tingchim). The current Bon Shamanic practices can be comprehended with the relevance of Arnold Van Ganepps notion of Liminality and Victor Turner's *Communitas*. Due to the pressure emanating from the Orthodox Buddhism, Lhopo Bon Shamans are rarely found in Sikkim and the one who are found are in the remote

rural areas that are less in numbers and had to compromise or undergo many changes in their Bon practices which in turn have affected the very essence of their Bonlem religion. With the penetration of orthodox Buddhism, the Shamanism which to certain extent reflected the purest elementary form of traditional religious life is threatened and have started dwindling. Only a few Lhopo community in the few rural areas have the privilege of consulting with their Lhopo Bon Shamans and if need arises the Lhopo community people who doesn't have their own Lhopo Shamans often consults to Shamans belonging from other ethnic group.

The relevance of Liminality and Communitas actually comprehends the theoretical understanding of the performance of the Bon rituals held in a simple social structure of Bhutia Lhopo community of Sikkim, where it portrays how Bon Shamanism when in a state of Liminality- the state of betwixt or between or state of ambiguity where they have less Bon followers and less Bon-specialist and under constant gaze of orthodox Buddhism experiences a stage where they can actually have an full projections or experience of the power of their authority without status, hierarchy and inferiority during the performance of a ritual, a heightened feeling of energy is generated which Turner terms it as Communitas.

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Notes

1. Siddhese Lhopo are an indigenous ethnic group or Sikkim who are believed to be the descents 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 Baikol refers to them as Lhopo which seems to be the term they themselves prefer. (Baikol: 2008, 3) and Lhopos are the minority in the state. After Sikkim's merger with the India the Schedule Tribe Order of 1976 included other tribal groups like the Sherpas, Dukpas, Tibetans, Dophapas, Kagatry, Yolmos, Chumbipas in the category of Bhutia therefore Bhutia is a generic term.
2. The local guardian deity. For eg. It is believed that near the palace Teukhakhang there is a small lake where Ajo Bondah resides and he is regarded as the birth deity or Kyi-Lah of the people of Gangtok and Enchey Gyelpu is considered as the Yul-fha of all the Gangtokians, it is a territorial deities which spiritually dominates the Gangtokians.
3. Chen-chomay-chen chomay are the deities who resides in the spring water (Chu-mee). It is believed that women who are pregnant are not supposed to go near the spring water because locals believe that there might be high chances of miscarriage. It can be said that the notion of purity and pollution is observed by the locals. However, Chen Chomay are also ambiguous deity they are wrathful and destructive in nature, therefore a proper propitiation is needed to appease these ambiguous deities who are believed to be tamed by the higher lamas.
4. Local aquatic deities.
5. Victor Turner borrowed the term Liminality from Van Gennep. Liminality is the stage of ambiguity during the ritual where one passes through the realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming stage. Though Van Gennep has used the term Liminality to understand the rites of passage but Turner applied to all the rituals. Turners main argument is, there are two dialectically opposed and mutually indispensable human conditions. On the one hand, there is the normative realm of social structure, social status, rank, property, self secularity and essence. On the other hand, there is the realm of Liminality, a realm of statuslessness, equality, poverty, self denial, sanctity and edulgence. (Gardner: 1971, 451)
6. Impure because most of the Orthodox Buddhist and the Lamas consider Bon Shamanic practices as inferior and they even say that they (Bon specialist) worship or invoke the demons, to protect their traditional unorganized religion from further allegation and threat they even sacrificed

the sacrifices of the animals which had been the main offerings in their rituals which Buddhism considers killings as a heinous sin.

7. **Communitas** is defined as a spontaneously generated relationship between leveled and equal-total and individuated human beings stripped of structural attributes. The bonds of **Communitas** are marked by spirit of fraternity and comradeship. (Bilu,1988:302). Following Victor Turner in the 'ritual process', one may see such **Communitas** as the product of anti-structure which is the ideological rejection of the idea of structure itself. (Gardner:1971, 450-451)

Appendix VII





INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR

ON

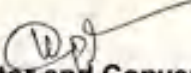
EXPLORING SOUTH ASIA: STATE, RELIGION AND SOCIETY

8th and 9th March, 2017


Organized By: Department of History, University of Gour Banga



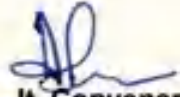
*This is to certify that Mr/Mrs/Dr./Professor. Ms. Lunsang Ongom Bhutia.....
of Department of Sociology, North Bengal University..... Participated/ Presented a paper
entitled "Lamas and Shamans of Sikkim: Sacred Issues and Concerns".....
in the International Seminar on Exploring South Asia: State, Religion and Society, held at Department of History,
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RESEARCH SCHOLARS' WORKSHOP (RSW)

October 15, 2015



Organized by

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This is to certify that MS. KUNSANG ONGMU BHUTIA has participated in the deliberations of the Research Scholars' Workshop (RSW) organized by the Department of Sociology, NBU on October 15, 2015. The title of her presentation is DEMYSTIFYING SHAMANISM IN CONTEMPORARY SIKKIM. SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE BHUTIA LHOPO OF SIKKIM.

Saswati Biswas
(PROF. SASWATI BISWAS)
HEAD

Swatahsiddha Sarkar
(DR. SWATAHSIDDHA SARKAR)
RSW CONVENOR