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Shamanism: A Brief overview and an Analytical Study of the Shamanistic Rituals of the Lhopo Community of Sikkim with special focus on Red Offering

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Abstract: This project attempts to look at the rituals of the Lhopo community in Sikkim. The first part of the essay undertakes a brief overview of shamanism around the world to contextualize the practice of shamanism in Sikkim. While there are discussions about different rituals followed by the indigenous Lhopo community in Sikkim, the main thrust of this project has been to see how Buddhist colonization from Tibet has brought about cultural changes in the region, especially in the case of animal sacrifices or red offering.

Keywords: *red offering, Lhopo, Buddhism, shamanism*

Introduction

The etymology of the term ‘*shamanism*’ may be traced to the Manchu-Tungus word *šaman*; the verb ‘*ša*’- (‘to know’) emerges if it is further broken down. Thus at least one literal translation of the word could be ‘one who knows’. Shamans have been found in different ethnic groups the world over. Often found in indigenous hunter-gatherer cultures, shamans are usually accepted as the beings that can alter their state of awareness and induct themselves into trances to achieve contact in the realm of spirits. They are known to go on “soul journeys” by dint of their specialist ability to alter their consciousness and interact with a realm to which human beings do not have any

access. Shamanism embodies the practices that include the roles of diviner, healer, counsellor and at times a religious leader. For centuries, shamanism has been practised following a multitude of forms and procedures. The practice transcends the mystic and mythic roles that are most commonly associated with it.

Shamanism is a ritualistic-spiritual process by which one purposely shifts perspective. There are different means by which perspective-shift is achieved (meditative/contemplative techniques, use of entheogens, abstinences, fasting, sleep deprivation, other austerities, and/or utilizing an illness or fever), but the initial impulse is auto-induced rather than imposed upon the individual by others. Shamanism refers primarily to the techniques employed for achieving changes in consciousness – especially ecstatic consciousness – and secondarily to the body of religious thought and practice in which the personage of the shaman plays a central role. One of the most interesting features of shamanism is that it spans across continents and is deeply embedded into the culture of many different traditions. Interestingly, most of the practices and beliefs are very similar despite the distance (Eliade 1964). “When anthropologists began studying shamanism, they discovered that shamans in cultures separated by thousands of miles and without any knowledge of each other developed healing and ceremonial approaches that were almost identical” (Robert Michael Place *et al*, 2008). Buyandelgeriyn (2013) noted that, shamans used rituals to lighten the burden of the many uncertainties that the people faced in contemporary society and established ethnic identity by using the past to explain the present. Blaming the decline of traditional beliefs for the loss of national culture, they claimed that the way to preserve and strengthen ethnic identity was to revive shamanism (Bulgakova 2008). The study of shamanistic wisdom is losing its momentum because of modernization day by day. Though the realm of shamanic practices was of great importance in anthropological enquiries, with the change of time, and perception of people, such specialists are no more valued in the socio-economic contexts. With the decreasing importance of traditional values, such traditional practices under shamanism are on the verge of vanishing. When the world is endeavouring to look at the indigenous knowledge system to be applied for the all-round development of the people, the scope for discovering the shamanistic practices is really revamped. Shamanistic knowledge system, though primarily based on magico-

religious practices, has multidimensional application for the wellbeing of the people in a traditional society. The study of shamanism as such, is a very old practice for the sake of ethnographic study, but to study it with a developmental prospective may be highly prized in view of its updated application for the modern society.

Continental variations of shamanism

Discoveries are likely to provide new insights about the diverse roles that shamans performed, and they illustrate that shamans were among the first political leaders in the New World, holding offices that also make them priests in an anthropological sense as well. Traditionally anthropologists have defined priests as members of the corporate structure who manipulate spirits. Priests hold full-time office whereas shamans are conceptualized as being part-time religious practitioners who often employ attributes of both, and could be called as shaman-priests.

When it comes to the question of shamanic practices, the West American history of shamanism draws our attention first because of its readiness in accepting new cultural aspects. History says Latin American countries are more prone to practice shamanism than North American countries. In countries like Mexico, Brazil, Arizona etc, the practice of shamanism could be found from a very early time. Shamanic spiritual journeys are depicted on Chihuahuan polychrome vessels made during the Medio period (A.D. 1200-1450) of the Casas Grandes Culture in an area that includes northern Mexico, southern New Mexico and Arizona, and west Texas. As will be discussed more fully below, shamans are represented as effigy vessels of males kneeling and smoking, and as dancing anthropomorphic bird figures painted on jars. Designs such as serpents, sashes, pound signs, and small circles with central dots that are associated with the effigies of smokers distinguish them from female effigies and polychrome vessels decorated with geometric designs. Two of the designs (pound signs and small circles with a central dot found on the legs and chest) that characterize the smokers are also associated with specific figures painted on jars. These individuals are frequently depicted in odd stances, perhaps indicating dancing, and wearing plumed-serpent headdresses and kilts (ritual paraphernalia), suggesting that they are involved in ceremonial activities (Narby 2004). In a few cases, painted individuals with pound signs on their

chesters are depicted as macaw- or horned-headed humans. By tracing the designs on the smokers, dancers, and macaw-headed humans, a transformation sequence of males smoking, dancing, and metamorphosing into supernatural entities can be observed. These individuals represent shamans who are depicted in various stages of a "classic shamanic journey" traveling to and from the spirit world.

‘Southern’ shamanism of the San, Andamanese and Australian regions differ substantially from the well-known ‘classical’ Siberian one found in various forms in large parts of Eurasia and the Americas (“Laurasia”). The typical southern (“Gondwana”) shamanistic features of heat rising up the spine are linked to medieval Indian Kundalini Yoga and some representations in Palaeolithic art. This process is an important aspect of the change of consciousness initiated by shamanistic initiation and practice; it is best known in its Siberian version, treated by many well-known specialists, including R. Hamayon. In shamanistic belief, the world is filled by spirits that affect all living beings. In our present context, it is important to underline the change of consciousness that the shamanic adept undergoes and that the fully developed shaman experiences each time he performs a shamanic session. Spirits exist and play important roles both in individual lives and in human society; they can be good or evil. The shaman can communicate with the spirit world. The male or female adept, after a sudden crisis, believes that he is chosen, is then recreated and educated by the spirits. He becomes an ‘embodiment’ of his spirit guardian or helping spirit (‘familiar’) or of his double, an (external) soul in animal form. He then is able to travel to the other worlds to communicate with the gods and spirits, in a state of ecstasy exhibited in his rituals. The shaman employs trance-inducing techniques to incite visionary ecstasy and to go on ‘vision quests’. This is achieved by music (drumming), dancing, recitation of certain texts, mantras, etc. The shaman’s spirit can leave the body to enter the supernatural world to search for answers. He evokes animal images as spirit guides, omens, and message-bearers. He can treat sickness caused by evil spirits. The shaman can tell the future by crystal gazing, throwing bones or runes; he can also perform many other forms of divination. Shamanism requires special knowledge and abilities, usually learned during a long apprenticeship. Shamans are not tied to individual religions and usually

operate outside them. They work alone (although some take on an apprentice or a minor shamanic helper). They have a number of functions, which depend very much on their respective cultures.

The entire range of Himalayan Region consists of folk healers who possess notable facts of herbs. This wisdom on the medicinal herbs was passed on by the folk healers from one generation to another. It is they who developed the health care practices through rigorous tests. Their expertise on the field was calculated by the number of years they have spent dealing with this. The knowledge of the folk healers were not only religious in nature but had a deep rooted rationality. People belonging to the Himalayan community received this knowledge by the taking note of the proverbs, folklores, legends, customs and myths. At the ideational level it is a holistic approach to balance life forces within the person and harmonize his or her relation with family, society, vocation, ecology, and the supernatural forces. The psychospiritual aspects of a disease are interesting and the healing practices aim to invoke the cultural symbolism to heal the person. There is often an aura of mysticism around many of these healing practices, reinforced by legends, fables and folklores.

Dissimilarities in shamanism occur when it is seen to be practised in different cultures or countries or continents. In Latin American practice of shamanism the specific use of tobacco varied greatly from group to group. Tobacco has been one of the most important and widely used psychoactive plants consumed by New World shamans. It is believed to be one of the first plants used to initiate ecstasy trances in the New World, and it is associated with pipe ceremonialism and bird imagery in groups throughout the Americas. It was and is still consumed in a number of ways such as chewing, licking, eating, snuffing, and enema; although smoking was the most common means of ingestion, smoking was the most effective and preferred form of consumption. Shaman-priest rulers smoked and chewed tobacco, deprived themselves of sleep, fasted, and continually prayed to initiate their trance states and thereby induce visions to communicate with the supernatural deities and become supernatural beings. The Prayer Rock District of north-eastern Arizona, had several pipes with nicotine residues, a Lino Gray jar containing well-preserved

tobacco remains, and yucca leaf packets containing tobacco and lime. Lime (calcium carbonate) is commonly used in tobacco mixtures to increase the hallucinogenic effects of the nicotine.

In addition to tobacco culture, architectural traits and goods from West Mexico, the Casas Grandes region is characterized by finely made and intricately decorated polychrome vessels. These vessels included effigies of human males and females, macaws, owls, snakes, badgers, fish, lizards, and large animals such as mountain sheep, which often bear a striking resemblance to Mesoamerican imagery. The effigy vessels are detailed enough to allow the determination of the sex of human figures and the specific species of some animals. These aspects of shamanic practices are different from the traditional ways of shamanist practice.

The shamanic traits in practice we find in Eurasia or Laurasia have also few differences or dissimilarities from traditional ways. From the point of view of regional specificity, it can be said that Siberian shamans may behave, according to our modern standards, in a psychotic fashion. Local Siberians, on the contrary, interpret this as the initiatory ‘possession’ by a spirit who demands that the selected person becomes a shaman. However, the shaman does not remain ‘possessed’ after the initial crisis but undergoes a long period of training by other shamans. He can then freely call on his spirit (the familiar), when he wishes to go into trance. All of this is quite unlike the involuntary ‘possession’ by some kind of demon or spirit. In some societies, shamans acquire a personality split into two spirits; this includes shamanic dress and attributes, the role or function of the other sex or gender fluidity and/or same-sex sexual orientation. This, however is not quite common a phenomenon in traditional Shamanic practice.

In Southern shamanism (Gondwana Area) the San (Khoi-San, Bushmen) have dances producing trance, during which they travel, like all shamans, over the earth or to the spirit world. This is like the Siberian shamans’ descent and ascent to the sky. Trance is often expressed as death, flying, floating or even as drowning. Initiation is of a rather prolonged nature, but the San do not yet have the ‘classical’ dissection and transubstantiation of the shaman’s body- perhaps except for the fact that they change into a flying eland antelope when in trance. ‘Initiation’ is a psychotic annihilative part of Shamanic practice in order to become a shaman. ‘Initiation’ could happen in

three ways: by ‘dying’, by going into the jungle, by meeting spirits in dreams. Certain men or boys could even communicate with the spirits in extraordinary dreams, such as of the spirit of a dead person, or of spirits of the forest or sea. Initially, a person was contacted by the spirits, for example when having been unconscious (‘dead’) for up to 12 hours and this is evident in Andamanese shamanism. Andamanese shamans were called *Oko-jumu*, dreamers. The term means ‘one who speaks from dreams’, from *jumu* ‘dream.’ Like the San, they were in contact with the dangerous primordial power inherent in all objects (*ot-kimil*, *gumul*), which means ‘hot’. This power is dangerous. People in contact with it are the *Oko-jumu*. The shamans dream, meet the spirits in the jungle, ‘die’ and return to life. This initiation process is rare in other part of the continent.

Australian shamans (*karadji*, *maban*) are usually called ‘clever men’. Like their Andamanese counterparts, they undergo symbolic death and descent into a cave or ascent to heaven. However, the difference lies in the technique of riding on the Rainbow Snake. In their transformation to shamans, their internal organs are removed and a new set is inserted consisting of stones or of small rainbow snakes and crystals. This procedure symbolizes their transformation of consciousness; the fractured crystals with their multi-coloured, rainbowlike being evoke the primordial Rainbow Serpent.

In India shamanism is being practiced from ancient times to present date in various parts of the country. Santal Shamanism (Bodding 2001) covering a wide area of Samabalpur and Maurbhangh districts of Odisha has its origin in myth. The first Guru is the Sun God (Chando Bonga) known as Dharam Guru. From Sun God shamanistic knowledge (*Birda*) was transmitted to Kamru, a person in Santal society. The Santal shamanistic institution is called “GURU AKHLA” where disciples (Chela) are skilled on shamanistic knowledge. The Guru Akhla is usually located either at the courtyard of Ojha’s house or in the middle of village with boundary made of bamboo. Usually women are prohibited to step in but in some cases they are permitted. The prohibition is imposed upon to avoid entry of women during menstruation. Another reason for restriction is women who are believed to be witch can pollute the institution by malevolent powers. Drinking liquor and eating meat inside the house of Guru Akhla is strictly prohibited. Individuals

who desire to become Ojha, take admission into the institution. Age factor is not taken into consideration at the time of admission. An initiation ceremony is performed in the form of worship by the shaman. The sessions take place in the evening. A person can be a shaman within seven days, but it may also take one year. Interesting part of the teaching process is that, Guru does not transfer power to his disciples. He only teaches them the techniques of worship, which include drawing symbolic depictions, process of diagnosis, names of deities and spirits and *Jharni Mantar* (21 in number). Power comes to them by complete submission and deep meditation. Those who follow the rules and regulations of the shamanistic process strictly, get the knowledge and power directly from the deities usually in a dream. It is also a fact that a person can be shaman without a guru, but common belief indicates that a young shaman has to obey someone (senior shaman) as his guru. Guru protects him from the attack of witches during worship. Completion of the course ends with an examination known as, “Sid Atang”. Transmission of Shamanistic knowledge is non-hereditary in nature. But in some cases son has to continue the shamanistic tradition of the family.

Lhopo Community and their beliefs in supernatural entities

As the title of the paper suggests, this research actually ventures into an analysis of the shamanistic practices performed by the Lhopo community. So at the very beginning, an overview of the community is much needed. The origin, history, process of social development and migration of the Lohopo community are still a subject of speculation and debate. *The History of Sikkim* (Namgyal, 1908) mainly relates and makes a little mention of the origins of Sikkimese Lhopos such as the inhabitants of the Tingchim Village. It is believed that in the year 1642 Tibetan settlers from the neighbouring valleys like Chumbi, Ha and Kham Minyak established a kingdom and their descendants call themselves Lhopo. According to this view, 'Lhopo' has arrived from 'lho pa' which means 'people from the south'. Whereas according to the Indian Constitution, Sikkimese Lhopo people are referred to as 'Bhutias'.

Sikkim is regarded as a 'beyul' or 'sacred hidden land' by the inhabitants of this region. According to the History of Sikkim, it is believed that initially Sikkim was under the guardianship of Indra and Chenresig. However in the eighth century, Guru Rinpoche came to Sikkim and

“exorcised the land of all evil spirits, and rid it of all obstacles that would tend to obstruct or disturb the course of devotional practices” (Namgyal 1908: 10). The people believe that in this process, he tamed many evil spirits as well as supernatural entities and made them the protector deities of the atmosphere, life, society etcetera of the native population. This belief is still prevalent. So supernatural entities even today play a very important role in shaping their worldview as well as social, psychological and physical environment in which they live. Lhopo community of Sikkim is not an exception. Anna Balikci (2008:85) in her book *Lamas Shamans and Ancestors: Village Religion in Sikkim* states that-“there are many more spirits and deities inhabiting the environment of Sikkim than there are human beings.” The inhabitants believe that nearly every mountain, hilltop, prominent rock, mountain pass, valley, old tree, lake, river etcetera is considered as residence of some supernatural being. Resultantly almost every aspect of their life from birth to death is interconnected with the supernatural beings. In this situation the natives of the place reside along with them and entertain an intimate relationship. In this section of the essay, our endeavour would be to explore different types of supernatural entities associated with the community. Their traits, nature, disposition, way of residing and acting would also be looked into. Simultaneously we would explore how the humans manage to cope with these supernatural spirits and deities.

As mentioned earlier, the supernatural beings or deities who inhabit or travel through the landscape of the region are numerous and of different types. Some of them are benevolent and protective, whereas some of them are malevolent and destructive. Here, we would focus primarily on two broad types.

1.1 Pho Lha Mo Lha:

“Pho Lha Mo Lha” are those supernatural entities of the region who have been tamed properly by Guru Rimpoche and will no longer harm the population unexpectedly. Rather they would protect the community. Thus they are regarded as the ancestors and lineage protectors of the region and its population. The native people invoke them on different occasions. They believe that *pho lha mo lha* have the ability to provide sons and good harvests, to avert death in case of illness, to predict obstacles and misfortunes, to create a platform for discussion in case of quarrels, to protect

villagers from curses and, to protect the interests of lineage members. These favours are indirectly sought through various rituals during which the pho lha mo lha are first invited and satisfied with their favourite offerings. The pho lha mo lha are divided into two general categories - the indigenous non-Buddhist supernatural beings and Buddhist religious figures. However the people believe that both act as lineage protectors. Some of the non-Buddhist supernatural spirits of the pho lha mo lha group are discussed below:

- I. *Yesha Gonpo* who is also referred to as Mahākāla, and is worshiped as a helpful territorial god and a member of the pho lha mo lha.
- II. Kangchendzönga is the mountain deity of Sikkim. As Pho lha, he is considered the chief of all local supernatural beings of Sikkim, as well as the owner of the land and warrior god of the Sikkimese people.
- III. *Masang Khungdu* is a mountain deity. He is the most important lineage protector, the great Pho lha and victorious leader. For the men of the lineage he helps them in the wars. In the case of the women he protects them on their way from their brother's house to their husband's. It is said that he rules the sun and the moon, which all worldly deities regard as the highest supernatural beings.
- IV. *Bolha Gomchen Chenpo* is a territorial deity living in a very large cave.
- V. *Ajo Dongbong* is a Lepcha ancestor worshipped by Lhopos all over Sikkim. He is regarded as the grandfather of Highland. He is a typical case of a troublesome spirit who was bribed into submission by being elevated into the ranks of the Pho lha. He now resides on a mountain peak next to Kangchendzönga; he still causes trouble to villagers and needs to be regularly appeased.

1.2 Nöpa:

Unlike the Pho lha mo lha, there are some supernatural entities who are still considered partly wild or untamed. They have their beneficial supernatural powers through which they can benefit the community. But at the same time they can be easily provoked and can bring illness and misfortune

to the entire community. Even they can be misused by skilled persons to harm others or take revenge. Guru Rimpoche had tamed these local *nöpa*, but later the forefathers of Lhopo community corrupted them by offering animals. Since then, their powers cannot always be used solely for the interests of the villagers. Rather it can also be used against them.

The different classes of beings to which the ambiguous *nöpa* belongs are numerous. Chief among them are the *degye* or eight classes of spirits and the *ajo anyo*, - the Lepcha and Limbu supernatural beings who have been adopted by the Lhopos. Some of the important *nöpas* are mentioned below:

- I. *Ajo Goka* (also known as *Tsong Goka*) or *Kame Ajo* is the grandfather from the lowlands. This ambivalent spirit from Nepal is actually a Limbu ancestor recognised by Lhopos all over Sikkim. His wife is *LenjiAnyo* also known as *Ilam Pende*. *Ajo Goka* is honoured at harvest rituals by the Lhopos throughout Sikkim. During their worship the devotees have to dedicate and sacrifice a pig that is below three years of age.
- II. *LenjiAnyo* is a Lepcha ancestor and the grandmother or guardian of the cardamom plant, the cash crop of the Lhopos and Lepchas. She is given an offering in a ritual in the fields before the harvest is taken away from her.
- III. *Ship AnyoPende* and *GabarPende* are Lepcha grandmother spirits who live in the attics of the houses. These are the protectors of the house, of its food stores, animals and possessions.
- IV. *TingbungAnyo Pende* is the guardian of poison.

Rituals and worship

As the Lhopo community of Sikkim is very much dependent on the nature and supernatural entities residing in the land, they very often worship them. Often times they perform several rituals. In this section of the paper we will discuss some of these rituals. They mainly perform these rituals enumerated below in some crucial and general contexts:

- I. Agricultural to hunting and gathering
- II. Illness to good health (which we'll see in healing portion),
- III. Marriage to house-building,
- IV. Childbirth to death.

There are some specific reasons for the performance of these rituals. Like in the agricultural context, they believe if they are preparing a new field by cleaning the old forest for crops to grow, they are also violating the balanced order of the spirits dominion. Killing farm animals is also considered as dangerous and threatening to the village's supernatural population. For that reason to keep an amicable relationship with the supernatural beings, they perform the rituals. So is with the case of house-building and entering into a new house. In marriage, their ritual is to take blessings from their ancestral God and to live happily ever-after. In Death rituals, things get more complex as compared to childbirth. As every aspect of their surrounding is has a supernatural owner, they need to show respect by some precise ritual offerings.

Rituals are held by *pawo*, the *nejum* and the *bongthing* and also by the lamas. These rituals are done for prevention of disasters. In harvesting and agricultural activities, they perform *biatsi* and *natsi*. The first one is the summer time ritualistic offering related to rice harvesting and the latter is performed during winter at the time of wheat harvesting. These are individually performed in their respective households. But as the common people cannot directly interact with the supernatural beings, these are done by the *pawo*, *bongthing*, and the lamas; each of them offers the harvest to different entities.

- I. The *pawo* on one hand will make the offerings to the *pho lha mo lha*, the *bongthing* will do it for *ajo anyo* and *nopa*, on the other hand the lama will offer to the *kongso*. Before starting the ritual the rice torma is prepared, depicting the *pho lha mo lha*. In that ritual they offer grain, *biasu*, *tsampa*, cooked rice, *chang*, flower, and butter lamps. *Khelen* is the oral ritual text which is performed by each of them in every ritual. All the above offerings are done by the *pawo*.

II. Along with them *latsen* ('owner of farming and the crops') and *ajo anyo* are also worshipped by Lhopos. Miniature bamboo pots with a straw are used. These are filled with fermented grain. Then these are wrapped in a piece of banana leaf and buttered in some way. According to their taste, in front of each pot different elements are offered – rice, *biasu*, boiled eggs, ginger, flowers, butter lamps.

III. *Kongso* is done by the *lamas*. In that case they offer meat before the altar.

Apart from these individual rituals, there are certain group rituals, performed by the villagers. *Nesol* is a ritual where offerings are made to *Kangchendzonga* and all the deities of the land. *Yulcho* ritual for *lenji Anyo* (owner of cardamom) is performed by the *bongthing*. *Losung* is considered as the farmer's New Year ritual in which grains are offered to the monastery. Before and after construction of the house, purification of house and house warming also have rituals. At the starting point of the construction a goat is sacrificed and its blood is offered to the spirit, *Dul* and *cen*, to free the event from any unwanted misfortune.

The ritual which is performed in the inauguration of a new house is called- *khim sa tashi*, where women visit the house and bring smaller donations of rupees 50 along with a bag of *chang* (Yishey 2021). Later two people per household are invited seven or eight months after the completion. The ceremonies related to childbirth in any family are performed by *bongthing*; third day ceremony is vital for a new born because from that time the child is considered to be born in the land originally. A small loft like structure is built above bamboo poles and with bamboo leaves. And the new born baby's arms are tied with a five coloured thread. A box, open by the top, resembles the traditional 'capcho' with three stones placed in them. Each stone represents different residing deities. Thus their ritualistic performance merges with the supernatural elements of their surroundings.

Shamanic healing and altered states of consciousness

All the cultures over the world have their own shared ideas of what makes people sick, what makes them well and how people can maintain good health over time. Following their shared set of ideas about illness, healers across the world might work on different premises and pursue diverse practices, however, the main goal is to cure sickness and maintain good health. In the context of Sikkim, shamanism has its own conception and perception of illness and the suitable process of

recovering from the same. Among the Lhopo community of Sikkim the shamans who are usually considered as ritual specialists play a vital role in the domain of healing also. As a form of healing shamanism involves channelling of spirits from the other world by shamans as mediums in order to cure their clients of various illnesses. Before starting the process of healing, it is necessary to establish the cause behind the illness. The shamans need to diagnose whether the illness is 'natural' or caused by a supernatural entity. In the context of shamanism, illness can be attributed to different supernatural causes – it can be caused by a nopa who gets offended by the patient's or someone else's wrongdoings, it can be the consequence of 'drib'(pollution) as the presence of drib in a locality provokes the nopa to take revenge by causing disease. It may also result from witchcraft which is known as 'barmo' or from curses known as 'cherka'. In this case someone instructs the nopa with the help of religious specialists to inflict the illness. And it can also be the result of the patient's own karma. But illness is not always attributed to supernatural causes; sometimes it can be natural or contagious. If the bongthing had initially diagnosed that the disease is a natural one and not caused by nopa, then patients may also go for medical treatment. But if the illness is caused by nopa, no medical treatment will work until the required rituals are performed.

Access to the spiritual world prevails in most of the communities in Sikkim. Basically the shamanic experts and the Buddhist Lamas perform some special kind of rituals only to get access to the spiritual world. When a pawo is called in to detect the cause of the illness, first he suggests some rituals to be performed to detect whether the patient is inflicted by an evil spirit or it is any other illness. If it is identified as a nopa case, then the pawo suggests a process to detect the particular nopa or evil spirit and its reasons to inflict the patient and if it is not a nopa case then the pawo suggests medical treatment (Kapur 2021). The pawo will divine by counting his rosary beads or grains of rice scattered on a plate if this is a simple case. But he will go into a trance or altered states of consciousness by saying his mantras to detect the case if the patient is very serious and the family is anxious for a more accurate and effective divination. In order to start the divination the pawo sits in a particular position and orders any senior member or relative of the patient's family to sit in front of him and also orders him to ask the necessary questions while he is in a trance like position. Then he says some mantras to go into trance and once the pawo succeeds in undergoing a trance, he invites the troubling nopa to take possession of him and use his body to

introduce himself expressing why he is troubling the sick person and stating what ritual offerings would appease him. The person interacting with the nopa will always be a senior member or a relative of the patient who knows how to negotiate with these troubling beings. When the nopa finally enters the pawo's body, the senior member of the family who stands in front of the pawo starts questioning the evil spirit and in turn the spirit answers through the mouth of the pawo. Then the nopa is asked what it desires in return for leaving the inflicted body. The nopa through the mouth of the pawo reveals its demands and desires. Sometimes the nopa asks for animal sacrifice. When the causes and intentions of nopa inflicting the patient are known to all, the rituals of appeasing and fulfilling the nopa's desires are performed and the nopa leaves the body. Thus the pawo enters into the spiritual world and detects the causes of their inflicting human body. The pawo also gets to know about their desires, intentions, likes and dislikes. By undergoing a trance the shamans experience that the nopas live in a world of their own that is completely separated from the human world and the nopas do not harm or inflict any people if they are not disturbed or angered by human activities.

The rituals in which offerings are made to nopa for curing a person's illness are collectively called 'shapten'. Basically in most cases the first offering which is made to nopa is called 'labyong'; it consists of cooked rice, boiled eggs, flowers and butter lamps which are served on a banana leaf. The villagers hope that the offended nopa will be satisfied with the 'labyong' and leave the patient in peace because this is the least expensive offering. If the patient's condition does not improve after performing this then the bongthing may recommend that an animal should be sacrificed as a second offering. But the villagers mostly try to avoid the red sacrifice as long as possible not only because it is considered as sinful according to the Buddhist principles but also because this is more expensive than the vegetarian offerings.

The red offering is usually considered to be the most effective healing method. If there is a need to sacrifice an animal's life, the bongthing and the pawo will officiate it together. While the pawo diagnoses the course through possession, the bongthing performs the required ritual. The killing of the animal could be done by a man of the family outside the house. The blood of the animal and the pieces of meat will be offered to the troubling nopa on a plate by the bongthing. Along with cows, oxen and pigs, chickens are also sacrificed for pleasing a malevolent nopa. If the patient does not recover after performing a sacrificial ritual the family may look for ritual specialist beyond the village, sometimes they also consult the Buddhist Lamas and perform Buddhist healing rituals. At the end it can be said that the shamanic healing system interrelates the body, the social environment and the supernatural domain. According to the shamanic principles a body needs to balance its earthly surroundings and the supernatural entities that exist within it. And whenever a person is out of balance, he/she falls ill. The ritual specialists help the patient to get back balance by performing the required rituals.

Animal sacrifice in shamanic Lhopo community

Red Offerings have been a ritualistic act just to avoid any kind of casualties provided by the ambivalent community of supernatural beings. With the presentation of red offerings come the binary opposites of life and death, sin and purity, vegan and non-vegan. Since the mythological procedure of improvising and reciprocating ritual performances has been non-consistently linear, animal sacrifice as a worshipped practice has changed its way many times. Several tribal cultures evidently perform life sacrifice for primitive religious or ritualistic beliefs. Alongside there are other fast spreading influences of vigorous philosophers and religious leaders which come to diminish these practices by its more humane way of life and living. Sikkimese *bon* religion is an example of this kind of the primitive culture where animal sacrifice has been a regular custom. There were several Buddhist invasions in the form of purer religion to make peace with these rituals of the Sikkimese tribal culture. Every time Buddhism entered the Sikkimese territory it faced the existence of Shamanistic tradition. We will discuss three aspects of Animal Sacrifice here:

To satisfy supernatural deities:

Sikkimese bon religion believes in Relationalism; it signifies a concord between the elements of the surrounding world and the spiritual sphere. This concept is similar to a Tibetan Buddhist concept called 'Tendrem'. Villagers, lamas and colloquial Shamans believe that in order to lead a happy life in the world of interrelatedness one has to dedicate devotion and worship to the local supernatural deities and the protectors. This invoking is an expectancy of being protected and not being harmed by these local ambiguous deities of the local territory. One of the many ways to appease the ambivalent beings is a 'dedicated offering' for these malevolent spirits. The custom of keeping animals to be sacrificed is called *zung(gzung)* in Lhopo community. *Azung* is an animal which is usually a pig or a chicken. *Zung* is kept in order to dedicate usually to the *nopa* or *ajo*. The *zung* animal is usually nominated or assigned by the *bongthing*. After the *zung* is sacrificed for common welfare, immediately a younger animal as the new *zung* is nourished.

Different regions have different zung traditions:

In most Lhopo households the *zung* is usually a pig kept for *AjoDongbong*- 'the legendary and troublesome Lepcha ancestor (Anna Ballikci). In Western Bhutan a cow or a bull is 'dedicated to the guardian deity of the territory. Sherpas dedicate yaks to the ancestral deities and mountain deities of the locality. The practice of letting free a yak is also seen in few Sikkimese regions. The different classes of beings who are mostly given the red sacrifices are- *Degye (sdebrgyad-* 'eight classes of spirits') and the *ajoanyo* (the Lepcha and Limbu supernatural spirits which were adopted by the Lhopo community). The *anyo* are usually known as the protectors of the house, the attics, the animals and food stores. They require animal sacrifice as an appeasement. *AjoGoka (Ajo mgodkar)* which is also known as *TsongGoka (gTosngmgodkar)* or *Kame Ajo(Khasmad a jo)* is an ambivalent spirit from Nepal or a Limbu ancestor. It is recognised and adopted by the Lhopos all over Sikkim. *AjoGoka* and *AjoDongbong* are actually the pseudo pho lhamo lha, who are offered pigs before they turn three years old. *Dzonga*, the mountain God and chief pho lhamo lha of Sikkimese Lhopos, is respected and honoured as the highest and purest of all deities. He is placed on the top of all deities. But after the Buddhist taming, *Dzonga* God is considered as the 'Buddhist

protector' of Sikkim. But before 1960, as observed by Tibetan scholar Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1996) Dzonga god also needed the 'white yak' or ox.

For social events and consumption:

Lhapos in Sikkim consider meat as one of their regular and occasional element of food. Along with chang- the traditional drink for social, religious and familial festivals, raw meats of pig or ox are served. There are other family rituals and celebrations where animals are dedicated to be sacrificed or set free.

The occasion of birth is called *piake*. Piake or in Lhapos terminology- *bya skes* means 'to bring chicken'. Birth of a child is celebrated at home and as per custom each household in the neighbourhood is supposed to send one woman or a man to offer a live chicken to the family of the new born baby. Birth of a son is considered in Sikkimese Lhopo community as a succession of the lineage of a particular household. So this is an important event and is celebrated. After the birth of a son the pho lha mo lha are offered the head and a hind leg of an ox. In the case of birth of a boy child who is the first child of a couple, pawo and bongthing perform a special ritual of piake. They perform the ritual *Masang shode* (*Ma sangs sha'u 'das*) to thank *Masang Khyungdu* and other pho lha of the patrilineage as they are blessed with the first son to perpetuate the lineage. Previously this offering to Masang Khyundu was called *bon yak* (*bon g'yang*) where a whole yak or a mountain sheep used to be sacrificed. The blood was offered to the nopa and the head and hind leg to Masang and pho lha. Even after the 16th Karmapa's intervention in Sikkim, an ox's head and a hind leg, which were collected from the butcher, were given as offering. Sikkimese terminology of a wedding is- *nyenshaza shed* (*gnyenshaza shed*), which consists of 'gnyen' (meaning 'wedding') and 'shaza shed' (meaning 'will eat meat'). From this it can be estimated that a wedding mandatorily consists of animal sacrifice and consumption.

An ox is killed to pieces to serve guests at lunch during house-warming ceremonies. Apart from the rituals where animal sacrifice is involved, in Lhopo villages of Sikkim there is an

important ritual called *mgo shanga* (*mgo* means 'head'; *shanga* means 'five meats'); it originated from *bon yak*.

Red offering as the ultimate ritual of curing illness:

There are various points of view among the Lhopo people about the aspect of animal sacrifice and the objection posed by the purer form of Buddhism against it. On one hand it is believed that in the period when animal sacrifice was banned by Tibetan pure Buddhist ideologies and influencers, life was more peaceful. On the other hand, it is also said that some of the villagers died because of the ban of red offerings to the *nopa* or ambiguous deities. Animal sacrifice has been believed to be a means of a recovery from a severe illness. People also believe that the *nopa* or local supernatural deities are not benevolent to the religious activists from the outside world, like Tibet, and they cannot be tamed in Buddhist dominations. Anna Ballikci (61) has pointed out:

The reason given for 'slipping back' into performing red offerings was that some of the *nopa* currently causing problems had been omitted from the original list submitted to the 16th Karmapa in 1962. Thus the Karmapa, who commands enormous influence and respect in the region, was in no way blamed for this failure. Nor were the ritual powers of Lama head-teacher or the superiority of Buddhism to be questioned. In the eyes of the helpless villagers, the omission simply gave them the license to deal with the illness in their own way and resort to animal sacrifice when a relative was dangerously ill.

Advent of Buddhism and its confrontation with shamanism

A study of Sikkimese culture and religion tells us that Buddhism was introduced in Sikkim in the eighth century A.D when the land was blessed by Padmasambhava (Guru Rimpoche) who named it as *Beyul Demojong* or 'the hidden fruitful valley'. Guru Rimpoche tamed the malevolent spirits infesting the land and turned them into their guardian deities among whom *dZongu* residing on the *Kanchenjunga* was appointed as the supreme deity. He selected some sites for Sikkim's future monasteries and erected a few stupas. Later, from 14th to 16th century A.D, many Terton lamas visited Sikkim and blessed the land. But it is believed that during 1641-1642 A.D, there appeared three holy lamas namely *Lhatsun Namkha Jigme*, *Ngadag Sempa Chenpo* and *Kathok Kuntu Zangpo* from Tibet only to fulfil the prophecy made by Guru Rimpoche in the 8th century A.D. They, as it was prophesised, then consecrated *Phuntshog* and made him the patron King or *Chhogyal* of *Demojong* in 1642 A.D. Thereafter, under the patronage of *Chhogyal*, the three lamas

started founding Buddhist teaching centres and later their lineage carried further their legacies in different parts of Demojong. Despite the introduction of Buddhism in Sikkim during the 8th century A.D, the Sikkimese people hardly felt the impact of the newly brought religion before 13th century A.D. Prior to that, the influence of Buddhist teachings and their philosophy of life on the major tribes of the land were very little (Subba 2008:146). During such a time, the early migrant Bhutias in Sikkim believed in nature worship, which was referred to as Bon or shamanism (Gupta 2009). It was a sort of witchcraft and sorcery wherein the spirits and the ghosts were invoked and pleased for various purposes. The Lepchas also had almost the same kind of a belief and the Limboos had Yumanism. Such existing religious beliefs were so deeply rooted among the tribes that they did not seem to have felt the new religion very strongly. During those days, Buddhism in Sikkim could not travel beyond the very few monasteries that were built and there were very few lamas in those monasteries. To perform any ritual for the wellbeing of an individual, a family or a household, people believed in the shamans who were both magical and powerful, and always available.

It is with the arrival of the Lachen Gomchen, famous for his powers and peculiarities in the wake of the 20th century that people in Sikkim received the major Buddhist influence. Once thereafter a span of twenty years' meditation, he started preventing the pawo and the nejum to be born in the villages. He formulated the views that the pawos and the nejums keep waking up the nopa with their drums and bells. Had the supernatural beings not been disturbed, they would have kept sleeping forever. From then on, no pawo and nejum were born there and the rituals were being performed without the use of the drums and bells and entering into trance was very rare. But, once Lachen Gomchen disappeared from there to Tibet, pawos started appearing again and the same practices were restored, though the impact was not as before.

Later, at the end of the 19th century, the great Sakya Lama from Tibet who came to Sikkim, instructed the village lamas to perform some Buddhist rituals especially on the 8th, 15th and 30th of each lunar month in the village prayer halls with the village women over the age of child-bearing. Thus, Buddhism started turning into a communal response and mutual experience. After

the Chinese takeover of Tibet, many Tibetan Rinpoches came to Sikkim and transformed various ritual practices by infusing the same with Buddhist ideals (Bhiba 2021). The practice of animal sacrifice faced a major blow after the arrival of the 16th Karmapa in Sikkim. Anna Balikci notes in her remarkable book on the Lhopos community in the village of Tinchim that during 1950's, Buddhism controlled the communities' major ritual practices and in the early 1960's, the annual ritual like *mangcho* (*mang mchod*) that needed the sacrifice of an ox to please the supernatural beings of the land was eliminated and instead of that, a new Buddhist ritual called *Bumkor* was initiated to bless the village houses by reading out the Buddhist scriptures and in turn, it became one of the most important rituals for the villagers. (59)

Although emerging as the most impactful form of rituals among the Lhopos and hence, the other tribes in Sikkim, Buddhism never tried to eradicate the primitive Bon practices totally. The major Buddhist teachers like Lachen Gomchen or the 16th Karmapa focused on some specific aspects of Bon rituals like animal sacrifice and the satiation of the spirits to abet their influence on people to some extent. These Buddhist teachers even encouraged the people to perform the rituals and sacrifices in the honour of their ancestor god *pho lha mo lha*. "Today, the village lamas, the *pawo*, the *nejum* and the *bongthing* are thought to generally get on a work together for the welfare of the people" (Balikci 59-60). A 'tolerated co-existence' of the village lamas and the shamans prevails now in the performance of the communities' important rituals and ceremonies in the village prayer halls with the participation of common folk.

Confrontation of shamanism and Buddhism about red offering:

Although Dzonga god has been known as the protector deity of Sikkimese beyul land, he has other identities like-

- I. chief *pho lha* or father god
- II. chief protector of Sikkim
- III. guardian of the ambivalent supernatural entities.

IV. a secular Dzonga god (not a follower of Buddhist pantheon)

Apart from the mentioned roles and identities, Dzonga God has another place in the histories of Sikkimese religion, culture, ethnicity and geopolitics- as a 'witness deity'. Gye Bumsa, who is the Tibetan ancestor of Sikkimese kings or Chogyals, was a ruler in the neighbouring valley of Chumbi. He did not have any child. So Bumsa with his wife came to Sikkim in search for a Lepcha bongthing called Thekong Tek. Thekong Tek could invoke Dzonga god to bless them with a male descendant. Upon their return to Chumbi they were blessed with three sons, who became later the ancestors of Lhopo villages. For this reason Dzonga God is also worshipped in expectancy to give male descendant to Lhopo parents. A blood alliance as well as a sweet bonding was established between Bumsa and Thekong. This blood brotherhood was celebrated by invoking Dzonga God and Animal sacrifices. A lot of animals were sacrificed in the feast which was hosted by Gye Bumsa to celebrate the birth of male ancestors and the friendship built between Lepchas (Sikkim) and Lhopos (from Tibet). This feast was led by a celebration, where Mount Kanchendzonga was placed as the deity to witness the bond of friendship between Lhopos and Lepchas. This was the first *Pang Lhabsol* (offering to witness deity) in the history as mentioned by Anna Balikci:

This ritual of blood brotherhood between the Lhopos and Lepchas is considered to have been the first Pang Lhabsol. Lamas, who dislike animal sacrifice, usually prefer mentioning that the first Pang Lhabsol had been performed by Latsun Jigme when he performed a thanksgiving ritual for his safe journey across the Himalayas as related by Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993: 402). The annual worship of Kanchendzonga was of course celebrated by the Lepchas long before the arrival of the Lhopos". (70)

Pang Lhabsol celebration has three main aspects:

- I. Revering Dzonga God as the witness deity witnessing the bond between Sikkim and Tibet.
- II. It is the national festival of Sikkim where Dzonga God is the main God.
- III. Dzonga God can bless predecessors.

Lamas who have been historically opposing animal sacrifices following Buddhist principles disagree with the first Pang Lhabsol's existence. They claim that Pang Lhabsol was first performed

in the 17th century by Lhatsun Namka Jigme (1597-1650) who is actually the chief propagator of Buddhism in Sikkim. This change of history following the conflict regarding historical presence of Pang Lhabsol is mentioned by Anna Balikci. It appears that the first Pang Lhabsol's existence is not acceptable in the history book of Buddhist Lamas due to its affiliation with animal sacrifice in the festival where a Tibetan King (Gye Bumsa) was the host.

The 16th Karmapa intervened in the matter of epidemic in Sikkim in the 1960s. He was requested to substitute the red offering, by the village Lamas. He initiated the practice of burning of bones and perpetuated the submission of the local nopas to Lord Buddha. Although Dzonga god has been known as the protector deity of Sikkimese *beyul* land, he has other identities like:

- V. chief pho lha or father god
- VI. chief protector of Sikkim
- VII. guardian of the ambivalent supernatural entities.
- VIII. a secular Dzonga god (not a follower of Buddhist pantheon.

Relationalism versus Individualism:

In Tingchim, as in Sikkim generally, the lamas are not consulted nor do they play a role on the identification, initiation, training and performances of the pawo and the nejum. Indeed, Sikkim appears to be a rare case where the lamas' and monasteries' influence on the pawo's ritual practice has been minimal

-Anna Balikci (72).

As Anna Balikci has pointed out that Sikkimese shamanism has been confronting and contradicting Tibetan Buddhism, a lot of contradicting notions can be found expressed and countered by both lamas and shamans. Buddhism as an invading religious sentiment entered Sikkim from the neighbouring main land Tibet several times. On the one hand Sikkimese Shamanism has changed its principles and worldview many times because of the influence of Buddhism and on the other hand, lamas and Buddhist heads blended various Shamanistic principles into Buddhism. Talking about 'relationalism', it is a term coined by Anna Balikci (72):

As I mentioned earlier, Ortner thought it was "wrong to align the shamanism/Buddhism opposition permanently and completely with the relationalism/individualism opposition" (1995: 370) as she

did in her first manuscript and later demonstrated how shamanism and Buddhism could be shown to be both individualistic and relational...

Relationalism is the term she has used to show how Shamanistic people of Lhopo community consider every element in the surrounding world to have a connection may be not in the physical dimension but surely in the spiritual dimension. This is of course a matter of analytical study on the abstract worldview of shamanistic people. Relationalism can be observed in various principles of their life. On the other side, Buddhism has its principles of individualism, which contradicts relationalism.

Regardless of how long we spend living together,
Good friends and relations must someday depart.
Our wealth and possessions collected from effort
Are left behind at the end of our life.
Our mind, but a guest in our body's great house,
Must vacate one day and travel beyond—
Cast away thoughts that concern but this lifetime—
The sons of Buddhas all practice this way.

- Martin A. Mills; “*Vajra Brother, Vajra Sister: Renunciation, Individualism and the household in Tibetan Buddhist Monasticism*”.

One of the aspects where relationalism is found in the Sikkimese tribal belief is the existence of supernatural spirits in Lhopo and Lepcha worldview. Indigenous people of Sikkim consider that

every concrete and inanimate object has a soul. They are supernatural entities which dwell alongside human beings. When any person in the community falls ill or any catastrophe or famine occurs in the society, it is believed that supernatural powers are the reasons behind it. But these extra-terrestrial beings are also believed to be invoked in the times when people need blessings (blessing for protection from accident, disasters, foreign invasion and war; blessing for offspring). Anna Balikci has noted that Sikkimese people of shamanic belief see these spirits not as demons who could harm or injure but who are similar to human beings:

... all the supernatural beings in Tingchim, like the human beings and aspects of society that they may have come to symbolise, have both beneficial and malevolent tendencies and are rarely, if ever, entirely positive or negative, like supra-worldly gods and under-worldly demons are usually meant to be.” (114)

Even it is believed that these spirits are part of the *samsara* and they have their own lives-

These *nöpa* also have a life of their own, since they are caught in *samsāra* and, like human beings, keep turning on the wheel of life. They each have a history, a past, a future, sometimes a consort, a retinue, possessions and responsibilities. They have their own character, needs, cravings and dislikes.” (121)

Not only these ambivalent spirits are observed as similar to human characters, they are also seen as a matter of nationalist sentiment. And this nationalism tied to the supernatural deities counters Buddhist sentiments:

one side of the Lhopos seems to want to boldly retain their ambivalent Sikkimese tendencies by resisting complete submission to foreign conventional Buddhist ideals of discipline, celibacy and scholarship.

This expression of nationalism is not the only example illustrating the role of the supernatural in matters of Sikkimese identity.” (115)

Relationalism in Lhopo shamanic community can be established through the concept of ‘cohesion of collective consciousness’. Lhopo communities of Sikkim prevalently believe in the ‘faith healing’ method more than the Ayurvedic system of healing or the Tibetan method of healing by Lama and medicinal-scientific method of doctor in hospitals. By the ‘faith healing’ method Lhopo people practice the shamanic procedure of recalling supernatural entities,

identifying the *nopa* or the culprit spirit through trance and by appeasing the enraged spirits through offerings. Shamanism in broader view is seen as a healing system where psychotherapy is a dominant part of the healing process. In the severe case of illness not only the family members of the patient but “the extended family will be on alert to provide assistance as events unfold.” (Balikci 124). After initiating rituals of trance and offering and questioning about the *drib* or wrongdoing done by the victim, “whatever the case, a cause will be accepted by everyone as the correct one when the corresponding ritual for the responsible *nöpa* significantly improves the condition of the patient. A marked sense of relief will replace the general state of anxiety and confusion in the assembly of relatives” (125). This identification of *nopa* (the spirit behind the illness) maintaining the *bon* ritual emits the effect which is derived as a therapeutic pleasure. This ‘cohesion of collective consciousness’ counters Buddhist Lamas’ individualism:

Dissatisfaction with the lamas' diagnoses seems to be rooted in the fact that these fail to exploit the accepted relation between the body, the social and physical environments and the supernatural while the bon curing rituals emphasise the link in a way that seems therapeutic not only for the patient but for his anxious group of relatives. (118)

Paradox of Ecological Consciousness

Shamanism caters to numerous ecological conservational principles. However, there is one element in Shamanism that constitutes a curious paradoxical character in it with respect to ecological consciousness: red offering.

Sikkim as the 'Beyul' land comes within the matrix of shamanistic thinking. Hence, the indigenous approach to nature and natural components clashes with the primary requirement of Red Offering, which is animal sacrifice. Animal sacrifice in Red offering is therefore detrimental to the holistic ecological consciousness that shamanism otherwise promotes. As opposed to Buddhist individualism, shamanism consists of Relationalism. Relationalism again offers altruistic sentiments for everything: water to greenery to stones to mountains. It puts forth the impression of harmonious co-existence of human beings with nature; it is a celebration of this unique relationship as a collective mnemonic experience on a physical as well as spiritual level. However, this altruistic sentiment is not extended towards the animals that are sacrificed in shamanism.

There is a questionable hierarchical practice regarding selective offering of animal sacrifice related to supernatural entities. Previously God Dzonga was also worshipped with red offerings, however, after the advent of Buddhism God Dzonga was established as the supreme deity and the protector of Sikkim. Since Dzonga came under the sweep of Buddhism animal sacrifices for the God stopped. It was placed at the highest rung of the supernatural and divine hierarchy. However, the animal sacrifices continued, especially in the extreme cases to save and rescue human life, by pleasing the local supernatural entities or 'nopas'. Even the Pho Lha and Mo Lha are offered animal sacrifice during the initiation of 'pawos'.

The aspect of animal sacrifice goes against the symbiotic 'reservation of life' ethics in Sikkim. This can be illustrated drawing the example of Lake Ox or 'mtsho glang'; it is regarded as

a sacred lake housing the life force 'tso long'. People protect this lake against pollution and sabotage as it also helps the villagers in the vicinity with irrigation and drinking water. Some moth collectors from Darjeeling had come to this place in the dead of night but they were driven away by the local people because the former's intended action could harm the lake (Balicki Anna 92.) But these very people "offer the head and hind leg of an ox following the birth of a first son" (95.) The Lake Ox as a whole is considered to be a supernatural entity but paradoxically, ox is one of the animals butchered in animal sacrifices.

According to Siliguri based sociologist, Mr. Amit Khawas, shamans believe in the purity of blood and that is why they emphasize on sacrificing animals even after the overwhelming Hindu and Buddhist influence that provides options for other benign alternatives, such as fruits and sweet offerings. For the animal sacrifices that occur only once or twice annually, not many are ready to compromise with the sanctity of this ritual. The sacrifice of large animals have been given up in parts and smaller animals as hen, duck, etc. have found favour with shamans because of the ever increasing awareness and pressure of overwhelming ecological repercussions. However, whether animal sacrifice, as a whole, would be wiped out is still a question.

Conclusion

"Look down into the nature and then you will understand everything better"

-Albert Einstein

This line seems to have an intricate connection with shamanism as shamanic rituals and practices are closely associated with natural elements and entities. The red offerings prevalent in the old shamanic practice had its own ecological perspective that was to appease the supernatural deities and entities. Buddhist intervention led to the abolition of slaughtering or red offerings. This project that focuses mainly on the all-round ritualistic aspects of shamanism with an emphasis on red offerings does concord with the fact of abolition of red offerings and we are able to find many references which establish this phenomenon. Shamanism, the way it survives in the present date, could manage to come out of this tendency by the natural harmonious acceptance of Buddhism that projects every life is equally important and killing a life is a heinous sin. Shamanism or the practice of shamanism in Sikkim covers many areas such as shamanic healings, altered states of

consciousness, supernatural entities, red offerings etc. But the advent of Buddhism appears to thwart shamanism and as an indigenous cultural practice its rituals have already come under the debilitating homogenization wrap of Buddhism on the one hand and modernity on the other. Many of its rituals are already on the verge of oblivion owing to negligence and scarcity of authentic practitioners. The aspect of animal sacrifice might be problematic but it is already undergoing evolution with shamans refraining from sacrificing large animals as ox or cow. This evolution is bound to happen so as to keep up with the course of time. Khawas cites two reasons for the change and acceptance of such change: first, the pressure of ecological and conservational ethics, and secondly, the economic blow of procuring large animals for sacrifice.

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