
Study on Mystique Artifacts used in Buddhist Rituals and Ceremonies and its Spiritual and Religious Significance

Kesang Ongmu Bhutia, Dr. Sudha Kumari Jha, Dr. Savita Chettri, VMSU, Gangtok Dr. Hissey Wangchok Bhutia SU, Gangtok.

Abstract: *The paper tries to highlight the historical evidence of how the ritual started, its significance the performance, the relevance of the rituals and its scientific name, its meaning and the functional role it have and to quantify the significance of the rituals, mystique artifacts and religious performance in the Buddhist society of Sikkim. To obtain the historical evidence, interview was done with Buddhist Lamas, elderly people, Bon and Assistant Professor of Buddhism. In the analysis it was mention that the Bon, and the Village religion, was evolved through the ages not only due to the impact of Buddhism but also factors like the changed society, environment and economic prosperity and disparity in course of so called Modern city and rural areas too. To track back the past, it was taken note of Bon , the village religion and the Artifacts used in spiritualizing the habits and views of the rural life as well as city life to counter the uncertainties on some supernatural powers which has positive effect for curing illness, maintaining social norms and to perform Buddhist religious ceremony.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Sikkim, prior to becoming an Indian State in the year 1975, was a tiny Kingdom ruled by the Buddhist Chogyals, or Kings by the name of Namgyal Dynasty till it merged in India and become its youngest state now standing 22nd in row of Indian States. Source of my inspiration goes to my external guide Dr. Hissey Wangchok Bhutia, refer his Abstract and Research article named 'The social relevance of spiritual heritage in a Secular State, Tashiding Monastery, West Sikkim.' (brag dkar bkra shis sdings kyi dgon pa; i spyi tshogs dang 'brel ba'i lo gyus skor)

The rituals in Sikkimes Bhutia Buddhist are called as Syap-tey and the instruments or Artifacts used in perfuming this rituals is my topic of study. All Buddhist rituals has some connectivity with the Bon, the village religion and it is from its impact, many rituals has been put once again in a new get up in order to please the deities responsible for enhancing the wellbeing of all people falling under Buddhist beliefs and practices. As all rituals needs skilled hands and well versed minds to perform it, so is the usages of Artifacts comes into being. No rituals can be performed without any Artifacts. These Artifacts can come in two partical forms viz natural form or artificial form .

The natural form included the animal sacrifices as in the past and the artificial form contributes the hand made materials out of organic and natural materials which are easy available in the house or in the vicinity.

The animals sacrifices and also that of human souls in the past when religion wasnt strong enough to analyse the entire concept of visualiazation and catering to the need of the hour, the system or the whole practice was barbaric in nature.

Today in modern times, these Artifacts faciliates the exchange or replacement of those real and rustic offerings in substitutes and is called Artifacts. Hence, the study of Artifacts which is must in order to understand the performance of a ritual . I have enacted four rituals in my own resident and have also come up with explanation and understandings of such Artifacts.

The four household rituals along with the figures and explanation of it merged in the units for a clear understandings of Artifacts and its utility which seems quite complicated in the beginning yet can be made easy with the research work and its conclusions.

Some of the household Artifacts are-

1. Rice dumplings / Tume are called Lallay representing the deities and their counterparts.
2. Ser Kum, the offerings made out of local alcohol and plain water which is offered to the dieties at intervals when the learned Lama or the monk chant the secret mantras of each rituals.
3. Cha- Sur- it is made out of mixture of tea leaves and butter.

4. Thuoe- sprinkling the holy water which is made out of plain water mixed with Kesar flowers or saffrons and which is kept inside a Vase till the rituals is performed to the end. The monks distribute it each of the family members as a token of gift for good health and wellbeing of the entire family members.
5. The Duna- this is a multiple collection of grains found in the house and put together to make a scattering gift to the deities in the end of rituals which needs it. Such collection of grains are also sent to the main monastery of each locality during all the holy rituals and exactly on the new year. These in turn is burnt in huge quantity in the premises of the monastery in order to please all the deities in all four directions viz East, West, North and South of a place.
6. Thip Sang- this is again a dry juniper which is uttered magical words by the learned monks known as Ram-ney and is burnt as a guard against evil eye, bad intentions and skeptical outlook.
7. Phe-Sur - this is a mixture of rice powder called Phe and butter.
8. Dhuge - is made out of rice powder in exact structure which is made such to represent the dieties .
9. Kya-laam-it is a ready made way or directions made out of wheat power. This is later on swept away after the Artifact of Representing dieties are given a farewell
10. Khe-len- conversation between the monk and the dieties at the time of welcoming and also at the time of farewell. It is written in the script found in the book or manuscript which is uttered by a leaned monk. (the oral chanting)

2. OBJECTIVE

1. To make and analysis of Buddhist Rituals and its Significance.
2. To highlight the role of Bon for creation of Village Religion.
3. To highlight the performance of Buddhist Rituals and usage of artifacts for spiritual worship.

3. METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Both primary and secondary information was used. To obtain the historical evidence, interview was done with Buddhist Lamas, elderly people, Bon and Assistant Professor of Buddhism. Other than that, a Reference book for Bon on Buddhism or the creation of village religion 'The Lama, Shamans and Ancestors' - A Village Religion in Sikkim by Dr. Anna Balikci was refer to obtain additional information.

4. STUDY AREA

The refer study was conducted at Tinchim village, North Sikkim and also at Tashiding Monastery of West Sikkim. The study area is located at the western and northern part of Sikkim around 60 kilometre and 112 Kilometre away from the capital of Sikkim, Gangtok. The study area is located in the mountains of Sikkim and it is belief to be the oldest monastery of Sikkim and where Yearly Bhumchu festival is held.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In Tinchim village, the time when a Pawo-shaman in trance asked for a Buddhist rituals to be performed, the villagers did not know what he meant, is still remembered. It is difficult to say when it could have been, but the Kagud monastery of Phodong, the first to be built in the North District, was established as late in 1740, a whole century after the foundation of Sikkim as a Buddhist kingdom. Until the 1930s, no men from Tinchim were Lamas-monks in Phodong, and the monastery located some fifteen kilometre South of the village was visited only once a year by Tinchim villagers on the occasion of the exorcistic rituals and annual cham dance held before Lossong, the Sikkimese Lhopos New Year Day. In those days, Buddhism was primarily confined to the monasteries, their surroundings and villages, the capital, and the palace. Although, villagers considered themselves Buddhist, there were no lamas in Tinchim village at the end of nineteenth century. For all rituals performed for the benefit of the individual, the household, the lineage and the village, people were dependent on the different types of shamans who were numerous and powerful.

Buddhism then took over as the main ritual practice of the village in three distinctive phases. At the beginning of the 20th century, Tinchim villagers received the major Buddhist influence that present villagers can remember from the Lachen Gomchen, later to be known throughout Sikkim's boarder as a teacher of ALEXANDRA DAVID -NEEL. The Lachen

Gomchen was born in neighboring Namok and mediated for some 20 years in the forest above Tingchem, Namok and Phodong. From his retreat above Tingchim, he is said to have prevented Pawa and Nejum from being born in all the surrounding villages. He told villagers that with their drums and bells.

Pawo and Nejum kept waking up the Nopa, the ambiguous supernatural beings of the locality who could otherwise sleep for many decades if left undisturbed. Not a single pawo or nejum was born in Tingchim while the Lachen Gomchen present and the necessary rituals for the Pholha and Molha and supernatural beings of the land were performed by the Ajo Nakshong without the medium of trance or the beating of the drums. Once the Lachen Gomchen left for Tibet and eventually resettled a few days walk higher up the valley in Lachen, Tingchim got a new pawa and the practice was rekindled, but to a lesser degree.

Until the 1930s, the practice of Buddhism in Tingchim was limited to the undertaking of meditation retreats in the forest by a few aspiring Lamas in admiration of the Lachen Gomchen. The knowledge they acquired seems to have been for their own benefit and accumulation of merit although the tantric powers they gained in the course of their practices were also used for the benefit of the villagers when asked to perform household rituals for the sick during the winter. Their knowledge of Buddhism was limited to the practice of mediation, the use of mantras, the recitation of ritual texts of which they usually did not understand the meaning, and the procedure to be followed during funereal, which in those days were still a simple affair. In the 1990s there were only two or three such Lamas in Tingchim, and by the 2030s, there were seven of them who were, for the most part, affiliated to the Phodong monastery, with the exception of one family of hereditary Lamas affiliated to the Nyingma monastery of Labrang, also located in Phodong. Although belonging to different sects and monasteries, all the Lamas of Tingchim performed their duties together within the village. Until the late 1920s Lamas never performed community rituals at the village's prayer hall, which had until then been the meeting place for the older women of village to pray ever since the construction of Tingchim's first hall at the end of 19th century. There were no Buddhist community rituals nor did the Lamas celebrate the important days of the Buddhist calendar, lineage, household and to a larger extent, individual religious matters, were still in the hands of the **Shamans**-Early religious men.

The second phase was marked by the passage of Saky Lama Tsoda Gystso from the great Sakya monastery in Tibet, who stopped in Tingchim at the end of 1920s on his way to a pilgrimage in India when he was asked by Lachen Gomchen to help take control of an epidemic in the village. As part of the remedy, the Sakya Lama instructed the village Lamas to perform the annual Buddhist rituals on a regular basis within the village's prayer hall. Lamas received training from the Phodong Lamas on how to perform these rituals and, from then on, Buddhism stopped being individualistic and became an occupation of the community where the villager's participation both in presence and in contribution was required.

During Tingchim's third Buddhist phase, which was initiated by the arrival of Tibetan Rinpoches in Sikkim following the Chinese takeover of their country in 1959, ritual that practice following the influence of the 16th Karmapa who eliminated the practice of animal sacrifices in the village. Buddhism effectively took over as the community ritual practice when in the early 1960s, the annual mancho (mangmchod) community ritual, that required the sacrificial offering of an ox for all the supernatural beings of the land, was abandoned and replaced by the Buddhist Bumkor (bum bskor) whereby the Buddhist scriptures were taken out to bless the village houses, as the village's most important ritual of the year.

Gradually, Buddhism timidly imposed itself and emerged as the most prestigious form of ritual while still accommodating Bon and without even openly trying or succeeding to eliminate that practice in its totality. The Lachen Gomchen, the Sakya Lama's and the 16th Galwa Karmapa's effort were all directed at specific aspects of Bon such as animal sacrifices or spirit possession without trying to eliminate the ritual practice as a whole. The 16th Karmapa is even said to have encouraged the Tingchim Lhopos to remain honor of their ritual to their Pho lha and Molha. Today, the village Lamas, the and the Pawa, the Nejum and the Bonghings are thought to generally get on and work together for the welfare of the people. And this is seen being tolerated co-existence finds its best expression in the annual (Chirim-common ritual) where the Lamas and the Bongthing momentarily officiate together within the precinct of the village's prayer hall and palace chapel.

6. THE SHAMANS

The sikkimese shamans are the ritual specialists in charge of keeping good relations with the households and the lineage's ancestral gods. Until the end of 19th century, each partilineage had its personal pawa or nejum responsible for his or her lineages and its households ritual needs. In addition to each household's biannual harvest offerings which are still

performed today, all members of the lineage used to gather once a year in their respective shaman's house for a four day retr which was a celebration of their common ancestors and lineage protectors. In the case of illness, the troubling spirits were invited to express their grievances while possessing pawo, after which apologies and offerings were made in order to please them.

The Buddhist dieties Pho- lha and Mo-lhaa the Nopa in theory, are respectively the domain of the Lamas, the Pawo, and the Bongthing although in reality these distinction are far from being clear. Although, the Pawo, the Bongthings and the Lama will each have their own altar and responsibilities when performing regular rituals. Rituals is a contested term in anthropology and there are many view on how it should be understood or defined. Rituals are generally held either on a regular basis for the purpose of augmenting fertility and prosperity, the merit of the sponsor or the powers of the practitioner. Or in the moment of crisis with the hope of propitiating the supernatural beings of the territory, the ancestral gods or the Buddhist deities. Villagers do have a general term similar to rituals.

7. RITUALS IN ILLNESS

The villagers consult the ritual specialists in the hope of curing sick relatives. They use a system that will normally involve the Bongthing, the pawo and the nejum and the lamas within the village but that will also be expanded to include ritual specialist from other ethnic –including Hindu communities and the consultation of Tibeatan and Sikkimese Rimpoches and medical doctors in Gangtok. The Bongthing is the first person who consults Bhaunjakris, Lamas.

The rituals of Bon performed in order to appropriate and obtain the blessings and protection of the Pho- lha and Mo-lha and that are not offensive to the village Lamas. These include the baits natsi harvest offerings, the pawo annual retreat ortsache, and all the other rituals for the ancestral gods. They are invoked by the villagers to obtain abundant harvests and male descends, good health, and protection against enemies and other evils of this world. All bon rituals where white toma-made out of rice batter)an are offered on a wooden plateau come under this category.

The drecho(dre-mchod) ritual of bon are theoretically unacceptable to all Lamas although most of villagers the will simply look the other way when they are performed by the bon specialists, while a few lamas may even take part in rituals.

The offering of animal life is considered to be the most effective healing method and sometimes dangerously and seriously ill person is healed. The body, the gods and society are interrelated in the cycle of illness, its diagnosis and the relief generated by the identification of a wrongdoings and how in the landscape could be additional key element to this cycle. When illness is serious, the level of anxiety, collaboration and discussion among kin and neighbors keeps on rising and only finds relief the moment the correct cause is put forward, diagnosis is that would co-incide with the patients improvement or recovery. when a Lama is consulted, his diagnosis deprives them of this process and eventual sense of relief.

The research being the relation between Lamas and Shamans and the survival of the shamanic worldview through the performance of household rituals, it is necessary to identify the different platforms on which Lamas and Shamans operate and ritually meet. The main instruments or Artifacts used by these religious men like the Lamas, Shaman, Bongthing is very important along with the chants, mantras and utterances. Since being born and brought up in a rural place since from the childhood, understanding such ritual was equally difficult too. But it cannot be denied that one become familiar to such rituals of being in constant touch of such rituals at home or in the villages every day or week or year.

It is now understood that in village such rituals rules the heart and mind of every individual no matter what caste and class he or she belongs. It is a predicament or the way of life in verse with nature and its vivacious ways.

Yet on second thought, today in the wake of modernization and global affinity, such rituals seems to be vague and is likely to lose its affirmation unto the life of villager and others as well.

8. THE SACRED HIDDEN LAND

At the village level, people are dependent on natural resources that are owned, guarded or inhibited by a horde of supernatural beings that must be taken into consideration in all their hunting, gathering, fishing, agricultural and building activities. Only the higher deities of the land such as Dzonga are considered protectors, supernatural beings while many lower supernatural beings are potentially dangerous and cannot be ignored. The best example illustrating this relation with the sacred environment relate to the Lake, which is the village's main source of irrigation for paddy fields and drinking water for the houses located in lower part of village.

The lake's sanctity and the villager's sentiment towards it were well illustrated in many incidents written and told verbally too

9. THE CHERIM

Common or popular ritual at the village prayer hall by the lamas and the Bongthing in order to prevent and cure illness for the whole village when need arises during the monsoon. Cherim was performed annually on regular basis at Phang Lhabsol as a preventive ritual but is now only performed when need arises as a curing for the whole village, Participation – Lamas and Bongthings.

The Cherim ritual previously called Mangcho, has known three different forms, each reflecting a period of the village's recent religious history. The Mangcho was the most important annual ritual in the community and its performance was stopped due to death of Ajo Pawo in 1961, which coincided with 16th Galwa Karmapa's intervention in the matter of animal sacrifice in 1962. As the animal sacrifice was rejected, the Mangcho was given the name Chirim Common ritual and was brought to village prayer hall, a change that marked the end of what villager called Bon as the community ritual, which was then attended by the entire village, become the Bumkar. It is held on the 15th of the 3rd lunar month, which roughly corresponds to the time of the old Mangcho. In those days, the Buddhist scriptures held in the village prayer hall used to be taken from house to house still done in certain villages.

The second form of Chirim was held in Phang Lhabsol and was responsible for bringing Bon and Buddhist rituals together. Chirim became the only ritual where the Bongthing and Lamas participated in the recurring ritual within the village prayer hall, momentarily addressing the same supernatural beings for the same ritual purpose during the performance of Nesol. First the Bongthing would build a long frame of bamboo on which a series of at least six Labyong offerings would be laid out on banana leaves, each for a particular group or individual Ajo-Grandfather, Anyo-Grandmother, and laden with the offerings of grain, flowers and eggs, inside the prayer hall, the Lamas performed the Nesol and the appropriate moment, would call the Bongthing inside so that he would personally chant the oral Khelen* section of the Nesol for Kangchendzonga and all higher deities of the land. The Lamas then resumed the reading of the Nesol text while the Bongthing returned outside to perform his own Lbyong, in the same way as the Lepcha do, the Bongthing would break the eggs, putting the yolks in the bowl in which he would read predictions for the village. While the Lamas and the Bongthing together invoked and made offerings to the supernatural beings of the land, it was considered the Bongthing's duty to send them back home, and especially send home trouble someone's after making them promise not to come back to create trouble in the village until they are called again the following year to receive their new offerings. The bamboo frame covered with Labyong was then taken to lake and a village feast followed at the prayer hall with one person per household participation.

10. THE STORY OF GYE BUMSA AND THE CHIEF CLANS OF SIKKIM

It is said that Gye Bumsa first came to Sikkim with his wife in search of the Lepcha patriarch and Bongthing Thekongtek. The couple were childless and requested the Lepcha Bongthing to perform a ritual where Kangchendzonga and all the territorial deities of Sikkim were invoked so there they might be blessed with male descendant. Upon their return to Chumbi, the couple had three sons who later became the ancestors of a number of Lhopo patrilineal descent groups, including that of the Sikkimese royal family. For this reason, it is said that Kangchendzonga came to be regarded by the Lhopos as Pho lha, or male ancestral god who may bless the lineage with male descendants. Later, when Gye Bumsa and his wife returned to Sikkim to express their gratitude and perform a thanksgiving ritual for their sons, a blood brotherhood was sworn between the Tibetan King Gye Bumsa and the Lepcha tribe head, The kongtek where the territorial deities of Sikkim were invoked to witness god during the national ritual of Pang-Lhabsol held at the Palace chapel at Gangtok, when dignitaries and representative swore a solemn oath in the presence of the protective deities of Sikkim to serve the country.

The rituals of the land are also an expression of their well-rooted and long term relation with the soil. Now that intra-village social rites of economic exchange have been largely replaced by those to Nepalese tenant and Indian merchants, rituals of land provide them with an important avenue for social exchange in the village, which binds them together in the face of an increasing number of powerful outsiders in turn, rituals of the land inevitably contribute to maintain the villager's shamanic worldwide to which Buddhism keeps adapting itself as it did in the past when the first monastery Lamas entered the valley. This relation with the land, its harvest, deities and sacred locations, is probably the most important

aspects of culture left to the Lhopo community ,along with their language and rites of passage, to define themselves as a community.

11. CONCLUSION

The query of mind is to track back the earliest religion of the State and therefore, my discussion will be to throw light on the religious practices in Sikkim before the impact of Buddhism .In doing, so, I mention the Bon, the Village religion and how it evolved through the ages not only due to the impact of Buddhism but also factors like the changed society, environment and economic prosperity and disparity in course of so called Modern city and rural areas too. To track back the past, I had to take note of Bon , the village religion and the Artifacts used in spiritualizing the habits and views of the rural life as well as city life to counter the uncertainties on some supernatural powers. However, the rituals have come a long way slowly coping up with the changed environment, social-economic status, winds of change and many other factors which were responsible for many forms of practices which came along. The rituals which were performed in the past had some rustic approach whereas rituals that are performed today have a religious impact and simple in form compared to that of past. The rituals I had performed in my resident comprises of households remedial practices and does not indulge in any of the rustic methods.

So in order to conclude my article, I am of the opinion that rituals are performed in all religion only except in few cases.And every ritual has some meaning and attachment related to our age old concepts of human life and perceptions which has been coming along mainly because civilization didn't happen at once or suddenly. The people couldn't throw away the old and embrace the new overnight. As such, some customs, rituals, and traditions clings to each of us perhaps to reminds us of our roots and native identity.

The rituals in all religions had some meaning and methods which are primitive in nature and closely linked with human endeavors as advanced citizens and civilized personnel's today. The performance of such rituals takes us back to our primitiveness within us yet it is a necessary to live with it.

Human beings have three important characteristic within themselves which goes to make them up as to they are. These three main characteristics are -

1. Language.
2. Traditions,
3. Rituals and habits.

With these three characteristic, it will be very easy to know and to analyse the background of individuals with regards to their native mannerisms, way of talkings, instincts and inclinations.This is mainly due to the cause of sudden modernisation of thoughts, concepts and utilisation of every day life style.

The religion is the first and the last characteristics which allows humans to develop as an individual as a whole.They are further categorised as people falling into such category according to their literary status, employment position, property differences, status owing to religious position in the society and the last of all , is differences owing to possession of wealth and monetary possessions in the society.

In the present day, positions and status is confirmed on regards to an individual's properties, materialistic wealth,and commanding positions in the society.This is a reality and rituals are also sometimes imparted according to the social status of a person,the higher the performances, better the positions.

My study on Artifacts used in Buddhist rituals and ceremonies and an attempt to understand its usages and importance is based on both ancient way of performing it and recent trends in which it is performed.It tries to throw light on the differences in the mind and method of performing the rituals as in the past and in the present which is highly reformed and is totally based on religious books, texts and chants which are inscribed in books.

The Artifacts too are reformed duly replacing it with handmade offerings and Artifacts which are eco-friendly, organic and in harmony with nature yet unique in its own way.

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