

# Mythology

of the  
People of



# Sikkim

Jash Raj Subba

# MYTHOLOGY OF THE PEOPLE OF SIKKIM

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## PREFACE

Sikkim is a multi-racial, multilingual, multicultural, secular and democratic state of India. While studying religion and mythology of different races of Sikkim, we find different belief systems in different stages of development. Some of them are on the verge of assimilation with other developed religions, others are at the stages of extinction; and thus it is very difficult to segregate their original belief systems. No human society has yet been found in which some mythological motifs have not been rehearsed in liturgies, interpreted by seers, poets, theologians, or philosophers; presented in art; magnified in song; and ecstatically experienced in life-empowering visions.

Mythology is a miscellaneous collection of old tales and legends which embraces all of what we now call religion, science and philosophy (natural, moral and metaphysical). It asks fundamental questions – how the world began, how it will end, where humans fit in and how they can influence it, and how individuals and communities should interact. Since the questions are the same, we see common threads running through the mythologies described in this book: heavens above and nether worlds below; the critical importance of the sun, the moon and the stars; gods, heroes and monsters creating, transforming and destroying successions of nascent worlds; the sacred significance of the landscape itself, and of particular elements within it. An honest comparison of religion and mythology of the people of the world immediately reveals that all have been built from one fund of mythological motifs, variously selected, organized, interpreted, and ritualized, according to local needs, but revered by every people on earth. A fascinating psychological, as well as historical problem is thus presented.

Man, apparently, cannot remain him-self in the universe without belief in some arrangement of the general inheritance of myth. In fact, the fullness of his life would even seem to stand in a direct ratio to the depth and range not of his rational thought but of his local mythology.

The present 14 (fourteen) Himalayan tribes/races of Sikkim have been influenced by the two major oriental mythologies of Buddhism and Hinduism, and one occidental mythology of Christianity. After the first visit of *Guru Rimpoche* from *Banares* to *Dakar Tashiding*, West Sikkim on the way to Tibet during the 8<sup>th</sup> century; after migration of Tibetans with *Rigzin Godemchen* (1337-1408) at *Tashiding* area of Sikkim; after migration of more and more *Tibetans* from the north after the blood brotherhood treaty of *Khe-Bumsa* and *Thekong-Tek* during 1275 A.D.; and especially after the establishment of the Himalayan Kingdom—"The Greater Sikkim" in 1642 A.D.; and declaring Buddhism as a kingdom's official religion through the tripartite treaty of "*Lho-Mon-Tsong-Sum*" in 1666 A.D. (corrected date); Buddhism has tremendously influenced the belief systems of the *Lepchas* and the *Tsongs* (*Limboos*) the indigenous people of Sikkim. The early adoptees of Hinduism—the *Khasas* from the West on the other hand, have strongly influenced the other races/tribes of the entire Himalayan region after "the Greater Nepal Unification Process" started in 1760 A.D. (Stiller, Ludwig F. 1968). They eventually migrated to Sikkim after 1774 A.D. onwards mainly in the Western, Southern and Eastern Districts of Sikkim (Subba, J.R. 2008a). After the treaty of *Titalyia* in 1817 A.D., Sikkim came under British protectorate. Church of Scotland missionaries from *Kalimpong*, West Bengal started sending the *Lepcha* Christian adoptees, trained for conversion of their fellow *Lepchas* of Sikkim after 1880s (Subba, J.R. 2008a). Thus most of the indigenous people especially the *Lepchas* were converted to Christianity.

Amongst the most affected tribes or races are the *Khasas*, *Newars*, *Sunuwars*, *Bhujels*, *Thami*, *Majhis*, *Mangars*, and some

*Gurungs*. The tribes who adopted Buddhism leaving aside their *Bonism* long back are the *Bhutias*, *Tamangs*, *Sherpas*, and some sections of *Gurungs* and *Newars*. Partly affected by Christianity are the *Lepchas*, *Khambu-Rais* and *Yakhas* (Subba, J.R. 2008a; 143-157).

There are many lesser-known religions, belief systems popularly known as animist mainly by the westerners and the elite people in Sikkim. These are the ancient belief systems of different 14 (fourteen) hill tribes or races of Sikkim, namely: *Lhopo (Bhutia)*, *Lepcha (Rong)*, *Limboo (Tsong)*, *Khambu-Rai*, *Yakha*, *Magar*, *Gurung*, *Sunuwar*, *Tamang*, *Sherpa*, *Thami*, *Majhi*, *Newar* and *Khasa* (Higher *Khasas* – *Bahun* and *Chettri*; Lower *Khasas* - *Kami*, *Damai* and *Sarki*) inhabiting Sikkim today. Many of these hill tribes or races have adopted many well developed religions of the world with insignificant traces of their own belief systems infused in these adopted religions now. The main aim of this work is an attempt to collect the valuable information of these lesser known “Belief Systems” or “Religions” and “Mythologies” of the different ethnic people of Sikkim for the first time for further research and development.

The first part of the book deals with the overview of the mythology of the people of Sikkim. It deals with the basic elements of mythology of the ancient myths, initiation of boys and girls, roles of shamans, reincarnation, myths and mythological functions, difference in myths and fairy tales, religion and mythology, love and marriage, transcendence, journey inward, mythology of sacrifice and bliss, mythology of eternity, mythology of death and afterlife, living beyond boundaries, the sky/*Akashik* field or *Lokas* or *Dens*, creative leaps etc. In brief, it elucidates the basics of mythological interpretations pertaining to the people of Sikkim.

The second part illustrates the overview of well developed religions and mythologies adopted by the people of Sikkim in brief namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism in oriental mythologies, and Christianity and Islam in

occidental mythologies. Plenty of literature is available on these mythologies and thus I have not dealt in detail on these mythologies. I have provided the salient features of these well developed religions and mythologies for better understanding of the subject.

The third part describes the lesser known oriental religions and mythologies of the people of the hill tribes or races of Sikkim in brief. Most of these lesser known belief systems or developing religions are in oral traditions. Systematic recording, documentation, understanding of these oral traditions, belief systems, religions and mythologies are lacking. Hence, the literature on these subjects are scanty except in the case of *Yumaism* of the Limboo tribes. I have tried my level best to collect, compile and edite the available information and have presented this work for further development in future. These lesser known oriental religions and mythologies of the people of Sikkim are:

1. *Yumaism* or *Yuma Samyo* (*Samyo* = religion) of *Tsongs/Limboos* and *Yakhas*,
2. *Animism* or *Ninnammism* of the *Kirant Khambu-Rais* and *Yakhas*,
3. *Animism* or *Munism* and *Bongthism* of the *Lepchas*,
4. *Animism* of the *Mangars*,
5. *Animism* of the *Sunuwars*, and
6. *Animism* of the *Thamis*.

It is the first attempt made to study systematically both the oriental and occidental belief systems, religions and mythologies of the people of Sikkim. It is interesting to know the basic concepts underlying the belief systems, religions, gods and goddesses, origin of the universe, origin of life and destiny, afterlife and the mythologies of the people. Myths are the spiritual instructions of our ancestors. It unearths how our ancestors perceived the mysteries of God, origin of the universe, origin of life and destiny, afterlife; and tried to pass on what they experienced to the future generations in their own archaic ways.



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I acknowledge my profound sense of gratitude to all the learned scholars, whose work I have consulted and referred to in this book. This study could not have been possible without the works of numerous scholars from whose works (as recorded in the reference), I have derived heavily, which enabled me to produce this comprehensive review on various religions and mythologies.

I acknowledge my thanks to my wife and daughters for their constant interest and cooperation.

**Jash Raj Subba**

# 1

## MYTHOLOGY OF THE PEOPLE OF SIKKIM—AN OVERVIEW

Sikkim, the 8th North-Eastern and the 22nd State of India is a state of diversity in the climate ranging from nearly tropical, sub-tropical, temperate, and alpine to snow-clad mountainous landscape; rich in both biodiversity and culture. The unexplored native peoples' lesser-known mythologies, as diverse as these landscapes; indigenous as well as influenced by the advanced mythology of the people who made inroad to this mountainous areas from outside; are briefly described in this work. The native peoples' legends reflect ways of life based variously on hunting and gathering, agriculture and fishing. Humans entered in this part of mountainous Sikkim Himalayas in antiquity as nomads (band socio-anthropological stage) during the Archaic Period of human migration (c. 38,000 – 2,500 B.C.) as hunters and gatherers in seasonal rounds. About 10,000 years ago, some woman folk of these people had discovered how to domesticate some of the wild plants they gathered and rear some of the wild animals around them. Tending these involved settling in one place also. The mountainous environment being harsh, remote, impenetrable and infertile to support the increasing populations, the inhabitants continued hunting and gathering, fishing, along with agriculture in small plots near their camps or villages or tend animals for a long, long time. With the increase of population societies were evolved, cultures evolved steadily from nomad groups, natural spirituality focused on earth and sky evolved belief systems as well as religions evolved in due course of time (Diamond, J. 1997; Subba, J.R. 2008a).

Yet each of these diverse cultures and social groups had one thing in common: the need for a mythology to explain not only the vastness and power of the cosmos and the wonders of nature, but also the mysteries of the human mind, with its desires, its fears and its capacities for good and evil, creation and destruction, and selfishness and altruism. The need of mythology was felt necessary probably not at the socio-anthropological category stage of "*Band*" but when the bands developed into a "*Tribal*" stages of human evolution due to increase of population and settlement of the people for agriculture. The need of mythology might have further intensified with more and more dependence on agriculture and limited availability of hunting animals and wild plants for food. This has led to offering the newly harvested crops to the gods and goddesses for bumper harvest in the next season. Thus, the rituals evolved, myths evolved, belief system evolved, religions evolved and developed the mythology of the people of Sikkim in the process of evolution of modern society in its own primitive ways.

No human society has yet been found in which some mythological motifs have not been rehearsed in liturgies, interpreted by seers, poets, theologians, or philosophers; presented in art; magnified in song; and ecstatically experienced in life-empowering visions. Every people have received its own seal and sign of supernatural designation, communicated to its heroes and daily proved in the lives and experience of its folk. And though many who bow with closed eyes in the sanctuaries of their own tradition rationally scrutinize and disqualify the sacraments of others. However, an honest comparison immediately reveals that all have been built from one fund of mythological motifs, variously selected organized, interpreted, and ritualized, according to local needs, but revered by every people on earth. A fascinating psychological, as well as historical problem is thus presented. Man, apparently, cannot remain him-self in the universe without belief in some arrangement of the general inheritance of myth. In fact, the fullness of his life would even seem to stand in a direct ratio to the depth and range not of his rational thought but of his local mythology.

Mythology is not just a miscellaneous collection of old tales and legends. It embraces all of what we now call religion, science

and philosophy (natural, moral and metaphysical). It asks fundamental questions – how the world began, how it will end, where humans fit in and how they can influence it, and how individuals and communities should interact. Since the questions are the same, we see common threads running through the mythologies described here: heavens above and nether worlds below; the critical importance of the sun, the moon and the stars; gods, heroes and monsters creating, transforming and destroying successions of nascent worlds; the sacred significance of the landscape itself, and of particular elements within it.

Even so, answers to these questions vary with the societies in general and in Sikkim particular that ask them, depending on their habitat landscapes, ways of livelihood and thinking, influence from their neighborhood etc. People of all cultures define the world as they experience it, so their mythologies must account for what they see. Every part of a landscape of the Himalayas has the potential for spiritual identity. This is often literal: high mountain peaks or places are close to the sky and the remote gods; big stone or huge rocks or a big tree or dense forest, big lakes or snowy glacier lakes or caves provide entry into the earth and hidden spiritual forces. All material things have spiritual potential – from egg-yoke to blood bubble sacrificed during their religious rituals. This mythological age is not lost in the deep past defined by science, for aboriginal concepts of time are both linear and cylindrical: linear as the steps and stages of a human life, and cylindrical as the generations that renew all life and the earth itself. This endless spiral means that the past never recedes into the distance; even the time of creation is only just beyond the reach of the myth-chanter. The mythological narratives of a culture are thus an eternal present, renewing social identity with every telling. These mythologies are in practice in every society in Sikkim, participated through religious rituals even today whether it is a *Lepcha*, *Limboo*, *Khambu-Rai*, *Sunuwar*, *Lhopo*, *Gurung*, *Tamang*, *Mangar*, or *Khasa* society.

A human life is so brief that the face of the earth seems absolute and unchanging. No living being has seen the billions of years of tectonic shifts, overwhelming seas and ice ages that have scarred the land, so the idea of a decaying world is almost unimaginable. Someone with superhuman power must have made the rivers, as

we might trace a line in the sand. And someone must have given us the gifts of nature that we use to sustain our lives. In aboriginal thought, the time when powerful beings transformed creation's dark, empty lands into the familiar, sheltering earth is only just out of reach of memory. Life at that time was fluid. Those first ancestors shifted and changed form at will between humans, animals and objects as they carried out their formative tasks – bringing daylight and fire, hewing out the shape of the land and creating the stuff of cultural life.

✓ The *Akasha*, the sky, *Tangsang Den* or the atmospheric layer around the Mother Earth must be the realm of gods and goddesses. The horizons may be the meeting place to the gods and goddesses by the mortal human beings – as it is believed in *Ninnammism* of *Khambu-Rais* and in *Limboos*. Beyond the horizons in the west, the evil powers such as *Sogha* or *Sugut* may reside; beyond the horizons in the East, the gods and goddesses may reside; beyond the horizons in the south, the terrifying demons may reside; while beyond the horizons in the north, boon bestowing powerful gods and goddesses may reside as in the believe system of *Yuma* religion. Well beyond the reach of even the highest mountains, the greatest powers reside there – light and darkness, the changing seasons, furious storms and life-giving rains; and it is the source of many creations. Some remote creators used the dark cosmos as a staging ground for their work, but in most narratives the sky (*Akasha/Lokas/Tangsang Den*) was a world with its own physical and social dimensions, not an airless void. Many mythologies divide this into several layers and their supernatural gods and goddesses rule these layers as seen in *Yumtaism* (nine layers above the earth inclusive and nine layers inside the earth = 18 layers or *Dens*); as in the case of *Maya* mythology (13 layers above the earth and 7 layers inside the earth = 20 layers) etc. In many mythologies the earth has to be created for the living beings or especially for the human beings as in the case of *Yumtaism*, for instance. The heavens may also be a final resting place for supernatural beings, Gods, Goddesses, departed souls – forefathers etc. The sky is crucial to cultural identity, because it defines the land and sets the rhythm of the world. The cycles of the sun, the moon and the stars evoke a sense of time, marking the passage of human lives. As a measure of space and

time, the sky therefore unites the mythical and the actual in an eternal flow of darkness and light.

The heroic events of creation and transformation do not depend only on the recollection of ancient myths or traditions. They live on in the shape of the land itself: every towering mountain or twist in a river records the acts of the culture heroes who changed the earth as they lived on it, as in the *Lepcha* myths for instance. In some places, the marks of creation are still fresh. Since aboriginal people like *Lepchas* and *Limboos* and many others of this part of the Himalaya intertwine oral tradition and geography in their way, they still have a spiritual hold on their lost lands, a bond that they can verify and renew as long as those lands exist. The *Lepchas* believe that their progenitors were created by the God (*Rum*) out of the untrodden snow of Mount *Pundim* (Mt. Pandim) one of the five important peaks of Kanchenjunga. Similarly, the *Limboos* believe that their progenitors were created by the creator God (*Sigera Yabhundin Mang Porokmi Wambhami Mang*) out of the biomass of bamboo ash, fowl's excreta and rainwater at Mount Jannu (Mt. *Phoktanglungma Pembenglungma/Kumbhakarna*) one of the five important peaks of Mt. Kanchanjunga. The aboriginal tribes *Lepchas* and *Limboos* believe that the earth is infused with spiritual energy. When supernatural beings shaped the lands during the age of transformation, all material things had the potential to live as humans and animals do. Because of this legacy, aboriginal thinkers see the earth as a living spiritual realm where supernatural beings still reside. Every territory of the land, the mountain peaks, rivers, streams, springs, trees, rocks and stones, forests, lakes, glaciers, has its special places of spirit dwellings of deities, divinities and retinue of divinities. High mountains and prominent rock formations, caves and crevices, waterfalls and springs are all spirit dwellings. Whether the earthly spirits live, ever watchful, above the land or are hidden away to be suddenly encountered on a path or waterway, they always remain powerful, even dangerous, in their abodes.

Monsters exist in every mythology to give shape and meaning to the unknown, the dangerous and the unwanted. Many mythologies like the *Lepcha* and *Limboo* myths describe how, when the earth was a still young, terrible creature raged across the land, threatening the fragile harmony of human and animal beings in

the world. By the act of destroying these monsters, supernatural beings created the heroic, defined the limits of good and evil, and established supernatural power as an overwhelming force. But, while cosmic beasts disappeared, other dangerous creatures retreated only to the margins of the world, lurking just beyond familiar horizons, in the darkness or deep under water. Some of these are fearsome apparitions and the stuff of nightmare: bodiless heads or hideously deformed animals. These positive or negative acts are acknowledgement of life's dark side resolves the fundamental contradiction of nature – that it is at one time both a nurturing and a destructive force. Yet humans must always face the tension between appropriate and inappropriate thoughts and actions, reflecting the vagaries of a natural world that both sustains life and takes it. Mirroring this reality, transformers and cultural heroes were quixotically human, with the same lusts, desires and foibles as the people they would create. The *Lepchas* believe that their lord *Tamsangthing* arrived at *Tarkaol Tam-E-Tam* from *Pundim Chu* (i.e. river originating from mount Pandim) to deliver the *Lepchas* from the clutches of the demon king - *Laso Mun Panu*. He rejuvenated their moral strength and gave them supernatural powers to protect thyself through *Munism* and *Bongthingism* (*Pademism*). Similarly, the *Limboos* believe that their Demi-God *Sodhung Lepmumang* (*progenitor/father*) sent various types of *Phedangmas* (nine types) to protect the *Limboo* forefathers from the evil spirits and conduct offering of newly harvested crops to gods and goddesses for bumper harvest in the next season.

Death is not absolute in a world where nothing is inanimate, and time does not retreat endlessly into extinction; people withdrew from bodily existence, just as the culture-heroes did after the age of transformation. Those supernatural beings were responsible for the fact of death, usually because of some heroic failing. The path of the dead may lead into an underworld, into a remote land beyond the horizon, or into the sky. Most cultures hope that it will be a place of physical and spiritual ease. The indigenous belief systems or religions of the people of Sikkim believe that the soul never dies after one's physical death. The soul invariably originated from the center of origin some where in the *Akashic* field and entered in the physical body on earth. The soul is the property of ancestor deity or God or Goddess residing in

the *Akashic* field. Thus, the soul of the deceased individual has to go or reached or accompany soul journey by the religious shaman priests to the *Akashic* field and handover it to the ancestor deity or indirectly to the Almighty God or Goddess, as in the case of *Yumaism* or *Munism*, for instance.

With migration of people in Sikkim from all the directions with the adopted developed mythologies of Buddhism (8th or 13th century onwards), Hinduism (1774 A.D. onwards), Christianity (1880 A.D. onwards), Jainism (1900 A.D. onwards), Islam and Sikhism (1975 A.D. onwards) etc., the hill tribes/races no longer intertwined only with their own earth and sky. The natives of the land listened and learned – sometimes avidly, but more often helplessly – about a single god or trinity gods and a morality fashioned on a distant continent. In some places they were also prey to conflicting ideas, as missionaries of different faiths competed for converts. Some groups resisted by creating new narratives to counter the new mythological teachings. Some adopted, embraced within their mythologies. Others attempted to avoid the total loss of their mythologies by appropriating (Subba, J.R. 2008a:143-157).

For example: during my study period, I met an old *Lepcha* gentleman at *Mangan*, North Sikkim. While discussing about the origin and destination of souls of the deceased, the *Lepcha* gentleman expressed his feelings about it. "I am supposed to leave this world shortly now, but frankly speaking I am totally confused about my destination. In the beginning I was a believer in *Munism* and my destination was *Rumlyang* (ancestor's world). Now, most of the people in the society have adopted Buddhism, and they talk about six worlds. I am confused which world I am supposed to leave. I do not know my destination as yet. Further, a good chunk of my society, are Christians now, and they talk about the spiritual body and soul leaving for heaven only after second coming of Jesus. I am confused what will happen if Jesus fails to come again. Thus, I am totally confused about my destination in my old age now." Similarly, I met an old gentleman who retired from Sikkim Government long back. While discussing about the origin and destination of soul he also found himself in utter confusion. He said "During my early ages I was a believer of so many faiths. I never bothered about my own belief system. I was Hindu during October at the time of *Dushehra-Diwali* festival and Christian during December for



Christmas celebration. I never thought about the origin and destination of soul after my demise. But now after my retirement, I started thinking about my destination. I am confused about my destination. I do not know where I am leaving after my death. This has been a very painful period for me now. I do not know about my destination as per my society's belief system. We never bothered for its study which was so essential".

In the mountains of Sikkim the voices of the gods spoke from the wind and thunder, and the spirit of God flowed in every mountain streams, tributaries of Teesta and Rangit, *Hee Khola, Keng Khola*, other streams and the whole state bloomed from the main five peaks of Kanchendzonga to the point where the Teesta and Rangit meet and joins the Brahmaputra River (*Tusroti Umroti* in *Limboo*) as a sacred place, the realm of mythic imagination. The modern men have yet to strip off the state of its mystery, a housecleaning of belief and still continue to nourish our imaginations. We are all seeking a meaning of life, an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonance within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture/ecstasy of being alive. We are so engaged in doing things to achieve purposes of outer value that we forget that the inner value, the rapture that associated with being alive.

In the modern world, we dropped the literature of the magnificent human heritage we have in our great tradition of Plato, Confucius, the Buddha, Goethe, Guru Rimpoche, *Phedangmas, Muns* and *Bongthings, Mangpas, Dhami/Jhankri* and others who speak of the eternal values that have to do with the centering of our lives from the modern education curriculum. Now, a whole tradition of oriental and occidental mythological information has been lost in part or whole in the modern societies of the world. It used to be that these mythical stories were in the minds of people. These bits of information from ancient times, which have to do with the themes that have supported human life, built civilizations, and informed religions over the millennia, have to do with deep inner problems, inner mysteries, inner thresholds of passage, and if you don't know what the guide-signs are along the way, you have to work it out yourself. But once their subject catches you, there is such a feeling, from one or another of these

traditions, of information of a deep, rich, life-vivifying sort that you don't want to give it up (Campbell. Joseph 1959; 1962; 1964; 1968; 1988; Jones, D. M. and Molyneaux, B.L. 2001: 10-249; Subba, J.R. 2005a; Chopra, Deepak. 2006).

### **Ancient Myths**

The ancient myths were designed to harmonize the mind and the body. The mind can ramble off (move without any aim) in strange ways and want things that the body does not want. The myths and rites were means of putting the mind in accord with the body and the way of life in accord with the way that nature dictates. The ancient myths live in us as Archetype Memories – as certified by the famous psychologist Jung, C. G. (1875-1961). The stages of human development are the same today as they were in the ancient times. As a child, you are brought up in a world of discipline, of obedience, and you are dependent on others. All this has to be transcended when you come to maturity, so that you can live not in dependency but with self-responsible authority. If you cannot cross that threshold, you have the basis for neuroses. Then, comes the one after you have gained your world, the crisis of dismissal, disengagement, and ultimately death. That is the ultimate disengagement. So myth has to serve both aims, that of inducting the young person into the life of his world – that is the function of the folk idea, then disengaging him. The folk idea unsells the elementary idea, which guides you to your own inward life.

The tradition in Sikkim as in any one place of India, for instance, of actually changing your whole way of dress, even changing your name, as you pass from one stage to another. When one retires from a job, as I am today, he knows that he had to create a new way of life, and he changes his manner of thinking about his life, just in terms of that notion, moving out of the sphere of achievement into the sphere of enjoyment and appreciation and relaxing to the wonder of it all. The Buddhist incarnate Rimpuchies of Sikkim have a very good tradition of writing their life experiences before they descend from this physical world. This serves the Buddhist societies to remain ever updated the spiritual experiences of this physical consciousness. Similarly, many retiree of the Sikkim Governments have also started writing their

memoirs, Sri K. B. Limboo, Ex-Minister SPWD in 2000; Sri K. C. Pradhan in 2008, for instance.

In *Yuma* religion of Sikkim, 18 (eighteen) stages of life are recognized. Each stage is well defined right from the day of conception in the mother's womb to the death of the individual and each stage of life has to pass on a series of life-styles; observe a series of live rituals. Death is no problem at all. The problem is in middle life, when the body has reached its climax of power and begins to decline as I am today, is to identify yourself not with the body, which is falling away, but with the consciousness of which it is a vehicle. This is something one has to learn from myths. What am I? Am I just a body that carries the consciousness (soul), or am I the consciousness (soul) of which the body is a vehicle? One of the psychological problems in growing old is the fear of death. But this body is a vehicle of consciousness, and if you can identify with the consciousness, you can watch the body go like an old car. There goes the fender, there goes the tire, one thing after another, but its' predictable. And then, gradually, the whole thing drops off, and consciousness rejoins consciousness. It is no longer in this particular environment. So these myths have to say about growing old.

In *Yuma* religion, while conducting the rituals of "*Sam Samma*", "*Samchamma*" and "*Sitongsing khema*", the *Phedangma* repeatedly addresses to the soul of the dead in the myth that "You have done nothing wrong, this is the way of life and death. One who comes to this physical consciousness with the body in the temporal world has to go like this only. Now you are shading your physical consciousness or the body here in this temporal world and leaving with the spiritual consciousness and joining your origin or your forefathers at *Sangram Pedang Den* in the village of your ancestors. This is for the last time you are being fed by your family members and close relatives in this physical word. Now onwards, they will not be able to feed you. You will not be dinning together now onwards. They will not be with you; you have to travel with us in the soul journey in the *Akashic* field to *Sam Yukna Den*. Please take the food, drinks etc. offered by your family members, relatives etc. now. After this you will be leaving etc. etc...."

The earliest evidence of anything like mythological thinking is associated with graves. They suggest that men and women saw life, and then they didn't see it, so they wondered about it. The grave burials with their weapons and sacrifices to ensure, a continued life, these certainly suggest that there was a person who was alive and warm before you who is now lying there, cold, and beginning to rot. Something was there, that is not here. Where is it now? The modern man evolved about 50,000 years ago. The humans discovered death when they were first humans, because they died. Now, animals have the experience of watching their companions dying. But, as far as we know, they have no further thoughts about it. And there is no evidence that humans thought about death in a significant way until the Neanderthal period (between 130,000 and 40,000 years ago), when weapons and animal sacrifices occur with burials (Subba, J.R. 2008b: 23-26). In the absence of any physical anthropological study in Sikkim so far, we have no evidence of ancient thought about death by humans in Sikkim as yet. However, every society has their own system of burial in the specific places preserved in many places even today. For instance, burial places like *Yeebung* of the *Limboos*, is very prominent, burial place of the *Lepchas*, *Khambu-Rais* around their households etc. except crematory systems of *Khasas* and Buddhists. These burial places of Sikkim could be explored through physical anthropological study in the days to come for more and more information.

Burials always involve the idea of the continued life beyond the visible one, of a plane of being that is behind the visible plane, and that is somehow supportive of the visible one to which we have to relate. That is the basic theme of all mythology - that there is an invisible plane supporting the visible one. This idea of invisible support is connected with one's society, too. Society was there before you, it will be there after you are gone, and you are a member of it. The myths that link you to your social group, the tribal/racial myths, affirm that you are an organ of the larger organism. Society itself is an organ of a larger organism, which is the landscape, the world in which the tribe moves. The main theme in ritual is the linking of the individual to a longer morphological structure than that of his/her own physical body. The mystery of death balances the theme of the mystery of life. It is the same

mystery in its two aspects. The next theme is the relationship of this to the animal world, which dies and lives again.

Man lives by killing, and there is a sense of guilt connected with that. Burial, suggest that my friend has died, and he survives. The animals that I have killed must also survive. Early hunters usually had a kind of animal divinity – the technical name would be the animal master (*Pung Sam* in *Yuma* religion, *Pong-rum* in *Lepcha* and so on), the animal who is the master animal. The *Limboo* hunter offers the hunted viscera, ear tips, toe tips etc. to the master spirit of the animals after the prey is killed, and prays for good future hunting. If it is not done, he will not be successful for hunting in future. Others believe that if the preyed is left overnight as such, the animal master comes at night and make it alive and take away. If the animal master is pleased, it sends the flocks to be killed, *Lepcha's Pong-rum* worship, for instance. Thus, the basic hunting myth is of a kind of covenant between the animal world and the human world. The animal gives its life willingly, with the understanding that its life transcends its physical entity and will be returned to the soil or to the mother through some ritual of restoration. So in the early hunting societies there grew up between human beings and animals a bonding that required one to be consumed by the other. *Yuma* religion believes that every living being (plants and animals) was created for the survival of the human beings by the creator god *Sigera Yabhundin Mang Porokmi Wambhami Mang*. That is the way of life is. Man is a hunter, and the hunter is a beast of prey. In the myths, the beast of prey and the animal that is preyed upon play two significant roles. They represent two aspects of life – the aggressive killing, conquering, creating aspects of life, and the one that is the matter or you might say the subject matter. Hunting and killing is not simply slaughter, it is a ritual act, as eating is when you say grace between meals. A ritual act is recognition of your dependency on the voluntary giving of this food to you by the animal that has given its life. The hunt is a ritual and a ritual expresses a spiritual reality. The early myths help the psyche to participate without a sense of guilt or fright in the necessary act of life. The myths constantly refer to the dynamic in one way or the other – the hunt, the hunter, the hunted, and the animal as friend, as a messenger from God. Guilt

is wiped out by the myth. killing the animal is not a personal act. You are performing the work of nature.

The animal has powers that the human doesn't have. For example, the *Phedangma* shaman priests in *Yuma* religion invariably have some animal spirits known as *Sam Sire* as their master spirits to perform the various shamanic functions of divination, control and healing of sickness, etc.

The Eastern relationship to animals is in contrast to the Western relationship to animals, where the Westerns see animals as a lower form of life. In the Bible the Westerns are told that we are the matters. The aboriginal *Lepchas* and *Limboos* of Sikkim believe that, "In the beginning of all things, wisdom and knowledge were with the animals. God did not speak directly to man. He sent certain animals to tell mankind that he showed himself through the beast. And that from them, and from the star and the Sun and the Mon, man should learn." The *Lepchas* believe that the God sent the birds to tell the humans when to sow the crop seeds brought from the God's land for cultivation.

Any worship place say a "*Mangkchim*" in *Yum* religion, a *Gompa* of Buddhists, a *Mandhir* of Hindus, a *Samkhalung* of Khambu-Rais is a landscape of the soul. When you walk into it, you move into a world of spiritual images. It is the mother womb of your spiritual life. All the forms around are significant of spiritual value. The imagery is in anthropomorphic form. The spiritual message is of a relationship of time to eternal powers that is somehow to be expressed in that place.

### Initiation of Boys and Girls

The ancient caves speculate that they had to do with the initiation of boys into the hunt. Boys had to learn not only to hunt but how to respect the animals, and what rituals to perform, and how in their own lives no longer to be little boys but to be men. Those hunts you see were very, very dangerous. These caves are the original men's rite sanctuaries where the boys became no longer their mother's sons but their father's sons. Most of the figures in the ancient caves are male. We don't know exactly what happened to the female in this period because there is very little evidence to tell us.

we might call a possession. It is described as a flash, a kind of thunderbolt or lightning bolt, which passes from the pelvic area right up the spine into the head. And the one whose psychological experience, this traumatic experience, this ecstasy, would become the interpreter for others of things not seen. He or she would become the interpreter of the heritage of mythological life, for example, Black Elk, *Phedangma* in Yuma religion, *Mun* and *Bongthing* in animist *Lepchas*, *Mangpa* or *Bijuwa* of *Ninnammism* etc. The deities, who have been encountered powers, call them "*Sam Sire*" or "departed soul or consciousness of the dead" or "nature divinities" are retained throughout their lifetime. The connection is maintained, not broken. And these men or women then become the spiritual advisors and gift-givers to their people. So far as Sikkim is concerned, the religious shaman priests of different communities are the reservoirs of ancient myths, rituals and guides of the society. They are also the mediums for transfer of these oral traditions from generation to generations.

### Myth and Mythology

The dictionary definition of a myth would be stories about gods. So then you have to ask the next question: What is God? A god is a personification of a motivating power or a value system that functions in human life and in the universe; the powers of your own body and of nature. *Myth* is an idea, and *Mythology* is the vehicle of that idea. The myths are metaphorical of spiritual potentiality in the human beings, and the same powers that animate our life animate the life of the world. But also there are myths and gods that have to do with specific societies or the patron deities of the society. In other words, there are two totally different orders of mythology. There is a mythology that relates you to your nature and to the natural world, of which you are a part, and it is called *Natural Mythology*. And there is the mythology that is strictly sociological, linking you to a particular society, and it is called *Social Mythology*. You are not simply a natural man; you are a member of a particular group or society. The nature-oriented mythology would be of an earth-cultivating people. The social-oriented system is of a nomadic people who are moving around, so you learn that is where your center is, in that group or society.

Myths are stories of our search through the ages for truth, for meaning, for significance. We all need to tell our story and to understand our own story. We all need to understand death and to cope with death and we all need help in our passages from birth to life and then to death. We need for life to signify, to touch the eternal to understand the mysteries, to find out who we are. If you read your own religion, you tend to interpret your own religion in terms of facts, but if you read the other ones, you begin to get the message of the symbols. Myth helps you to put your mind in touch with this experience of being alive. It tells you what the experience is.

The mythological stories are the stories about the *wisdom of life*. What we are learning in our schools is not the wisdom of life. We are learning technologies and we are getting information. Mythology teaches you what is behind literature and the arts, it teaches you about your own life. It is a great, exciting, life-nourishing subject. Mythology has a great deal to do with the stages of life, the initiation ceremonies (womb worship, child naming etc.), as you move from childhood to adult responsibilities, from the unmarried state into the married state (marriage). All of these rituals are mythological rites. They have to do with your recognition of the new role that you are in, the process of throwing off the old one and carrying out in the new, and entering into a responsible profession.

Myth is essentially a cultural construct, a common religious or secular understanding of the world that binds individuals and communities together. Ideas such as rebirth, heaven and hell, angels and demons, fate and freewill, sin, Satan and salvation are religious myths. Ideas such as sovereignty, nation state, human rights, women's rights and animal rights are secular myths. Religious or secular, all myths make profound sense to one group of people. Mythology constitutes stories, symbols and rituals that make a myth tangible. The myth stories, symbols and rituals are essentially languages that are heard, seen and performed. Together they constitute the truths of a culture. From myth *come beliefs*, from *mythology customs*. Myth conditions thoughts and feelings. Mythology influences behaviours and communications. Myth and mythology thus have a profound influence on culture.



Many experts have defined myth and mythology in various ways. Myth is the foundation of life, the timeless scheme, the pious formula into which life flows when it reproduces its traits out of the unconscious. Many ethnologist, archaeologist, or historian would observe, the myths of the differing civilizations have sensibly varied throughout the centuries and broad reaches of mankind's residence in the world, indeed to search a degree that the "virtue" of one mythology has often been the "vice" of another, and the heaven of one the other's hell. The secret cause of all suffering is mortality itself, which is the prime condition of life. It cannot be denied if life is to be affirmed. Human suffering is a principal theme of classic mythology. The only true wisdom lives far from mankind, out in the great loneliness, and can be reached only through suffering. Privation and suffering alone open the mind that is hidden to others (Campbell, J. 1988:3-36).

Mythology is the song, as the *Phedangmas* or *Mangpas* sing the oral traditions of myth during religious rituals. It is the song of the imagination, inspired by the energies of the body. The main motifs of the myths are the same, and they have always been the same. If you find your own mythology, the key is with what society has grown up in a certain society you associate or belong to. Every mythology has grown up in a certain society in a bounded field. Then they come into collision and relationship, and they amalgamate, and you get a more complex mythology as we experience in Sikkim today.

Mythology in the modern opinion may be irrelevant to the human condition today. The mythological stuff is that the remnants of all that "gods and stuff" line the walls of our interior system of belief, like shards of broken pottery in an archaeological site, often found on the soils at *Daramdin*, West Sikkim. But as we are organic beings, there is energy in all that stuff. Rituals evoke it. It is not to identify oneself with any of the figures or powers experienced. The Indian *Yogi*, striving for release, identifies himself with the Light and never returns. But no one with a will to the service of others would permit himself such an escape. The ultimate aim of the quest must be neither release nor ecstasy for oneself, but the wisdom and the power to serve others as it is understood from the lives of the religious shaman priests of *Limboos*, *Lepchas*, *Khambu-Rais* etc. of Sikkim.

While talking to people about belief, they reveal the radiance of their own discovery. They reveal a joy for learning and living, to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and by in its turn making this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas. Mythology is an interior road map of experience, drawn by people who have traveled it. It is the song of the universe, the music of the spheres, music we dance to even when we cannot name the tune. We are hearing its refrains whether we listen to the myths (*Mundhums*) of *Yumaism* or of *Khambu-Rai*, *Mukudum* of *Sunuwar* or *Munthem* of *Lepchas*. This grand and cacophonous chorus began when our primal ancestors told stories to themselves about the animals that they killed for food and about the supernatural world to which the animals seemed to go when they died. Out there somewhere, beyond the visible plain of existence, was the animal master (*Pong-sam* or *Pong-rum* etc.), who held over human beings the power of life and death; if he failed to send the beasts back to be sacrificed again, the hunter and their kin would starve. Thus early societies learned “*the essence of life is that it lives by killing and eating;*” that is the great mystery that the myths have to deal with. The hunt became a ritual of sacrifice, and the hunter in turn performed acts of atonement to the departed spirits of the animals, hopping to coax them into returning to be sacrificed again. The beasts were seen as envoys from that other world, a magical, wonderful accord growing between the hunter and the hunted since 2.5 million with invention of stone tools by our ancestors (*Homo habilis*), as if they were locked in a mystical, timeless cycle of death, burial, and resurrection (Subba, J.R. 2008b). Their art, the painting on cave walls, *Mundhums* of *Yumaism* or *Ninnammism* or *Munthem* of *Munism* and fairy tales gave form to the impulse we now call religion.

As these primal folk turned from hunting-gathering to domestication and planting, about 10,000 years ago by the modern thinking man evolved about 50,000 years ago, the stories they told to interpret the mysteries of life changed, too. Now the seed became the magic symbol of the endless cycle. The plant died, and was buried, and its seed was born again. This symbol was seized upon by the world’s great religions as the revelation of eternal truth, that from death comes life, or as “From sacrifice, to bliss” (Subba, J.R. 2008b).

As Jesus said, "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if dies, it bears much fruit." In the *Quoran* "Do you think that you shall enter the Garden of Bliss without such trials as came to those who passed away before you?" Once a troubled woman who came to the Indian saint saying, "O Master, I do not find that I love God." And the saint asked, "Is there nothing, then, that you are?" To this she answered, "My little nephew." And he said to her, "There are your love and service to God, in your love and service to that child."

The images of God are many, calling them, "the masks of eternity" that both come and reveal "the face of Glory." God assumes such different masks in different cultures, yet comparable stories can be found in these divergent traditions, stories of creation, of virgin births, incarnations, death and resurrection, second coming, and judgment days. Truth is one; the sages call it by many names." All our names and images for God are masks signifying the ultimate reality there by definition transcend languages and art. A myth is a mask of God, too – a metaphor for what lies behind the mystic traditions differ; they are in accord in calling us to a deeper awareness of the very act of living itself. Freud and Jung both the famous psychologists felt that myth is grounded in the unconscious (Campbell, Joseph 1959; 1962; 1964; 1968; 1988: 3-36).

### Rituals are Enactments of Myths

Ritual is group participation in the most hideous act, which is the act of life-namely killing and eating another living thing. We do it together, and this is the way life is. Myth relates directly to ceremony and tribal ritual and *the absence of myth can mean the end of ritual. A ritual is the enactment of a myth.* By participating in a ritual, you are participating in a myth. The early elementary culture comes out of an elite experience, the shamans (*Phedangmas* in Yuma religion, *Mun* and *Bongthing* in Lepchas, and *Dhami* or *Jhankri* of Khasas, *Mangba* or *Bijuwa* shamans of Ninnammism), the experience of people particularly gifted, whose ears are open to the song of the universe. The shaman is a person male or female, who in his late childhood or early youth has an overwhelming psychological experience or enlightens soul of the dead (spiritual conscious), visits and stays throughout his or her lifetime that

turns him totally inward. It is a kind of schizophrenic crackup. The whole unconscious opens up, and the shaman falls into it. This shaman experience has been described many, many times. It occurs all the way from Siberia right through the Americas to Tierra del Fuego. And the trance dance ecstasy is part of it. In every society, these shaman priests (Buddhist *lamas*, *Bahun* priests, *Phedangma* or *Bijuwa* or *Mun* etc.) conduct the ritual enactments of myths of their societies in their own way.

### Fairy Tales

Fairy tales are told for entertainment, and have got to be distinguished between the myths that have to do with the serious matter of living life in terms of the order of society and of nature, and stories with some of those same motifs that are told for entertainment. Fairy tales are for children. A fairy tale is child's myth. These are proper myths for proper times of life. As you grow older, you need a sturdier mythology. There are truths for older age and truths for children. For instance, the Indian philosophy of *Maya*, the idea of life as a dream or bubble is difficult to understand by the young boys and girls. When the young boys and girls grow older, and everyone they have known and originally lived for has passed away, and the world itself is passing, the *Maya* myth comes in. But, for young people, the world is something yet to be met and dealt with and loved and learned from and fought with, and so, another mythology.

### Mythical Stories

The Myths are the spiritual instructions of our forefathers. The mythical stories are not entertainment stories or folk-tales; because they can be told only at certain times of the year and under certain conditions. There are two orders of myths. The great myths, of the Bible or of *Mundhum* of *Yuma* religion or *Ninnanmism*, or *Munthem* of *Lepchas*, or *Mukudum* of *Sunuwars*, for example, are the myths of the Churches, or of the sacred *Mundhum* (oral traditions) rituals. They explain the rites by which the people are living in harmony with themselves and each other and with the universe. Each time they tell the stories of universe creation. The understanding of these stories as allegorical (symbolic representation) is normal. The first humans who told the story of the creation had some intuitive awareness of the allegorical nature of these stories.