

**Death and Funeral Rites among the Dukpas of District  
Darjeeling, West Bengal**

A Dissertation Submitted

To

**Sikkim University**



In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the  
**Degree of Master of Philosophy**

**By**

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## DECLARATION

I Passang Wangdi Dukpa, hereby declare that the dissertation entitled "Death and Funeral Rites among the Dukpas of District Darjeeling, West Bengal" is an original work carried out by me under the guidance of Dr. Charisma K. Lepcha. The contents of this dissertation did not form the basis of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge, and that the dissertation has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other university/institute. This is submitted to the Sikkim University, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in Anthropology.

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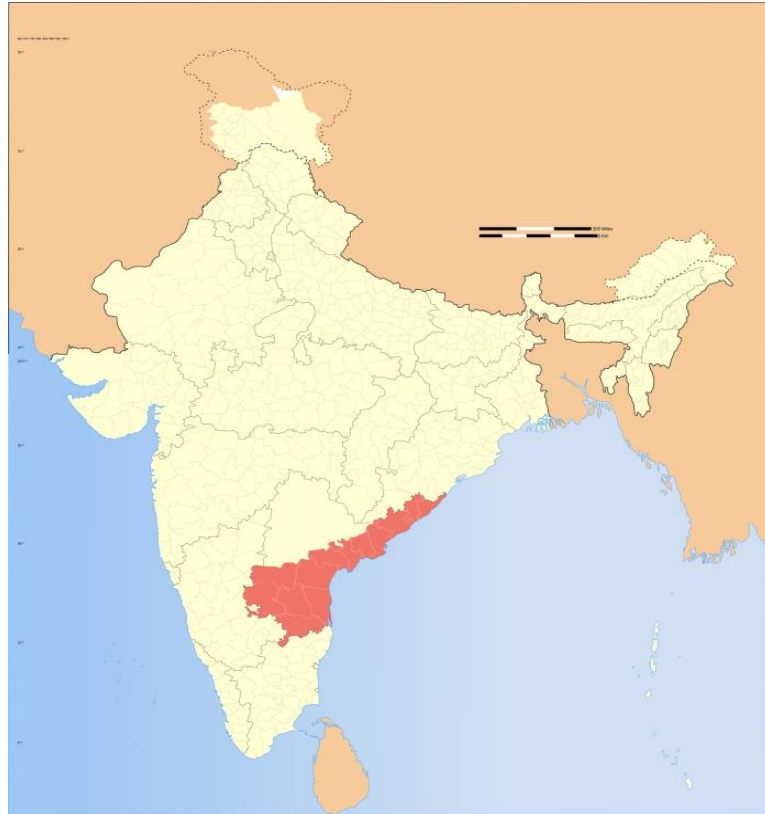
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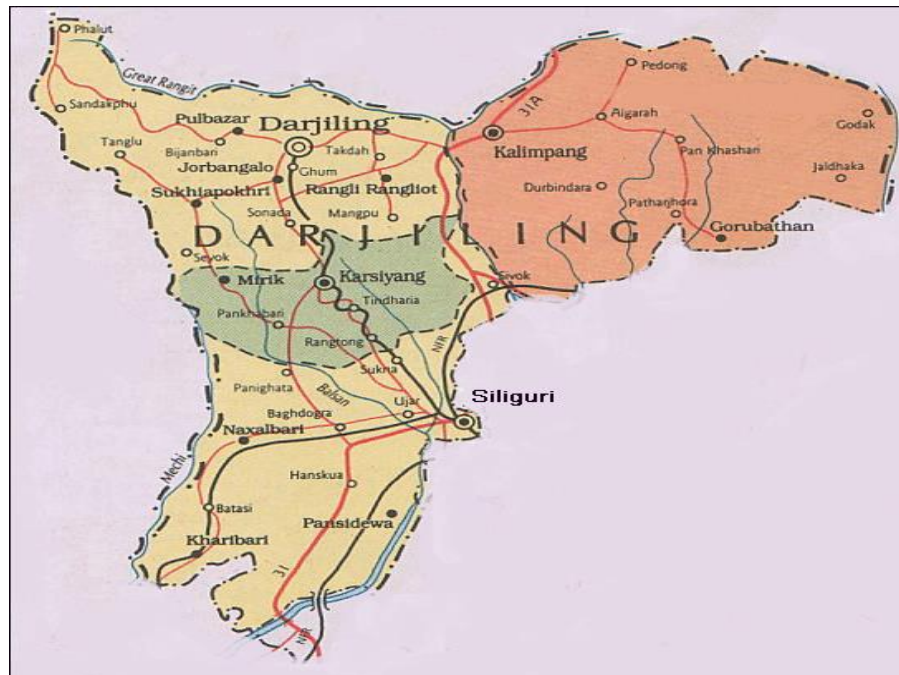


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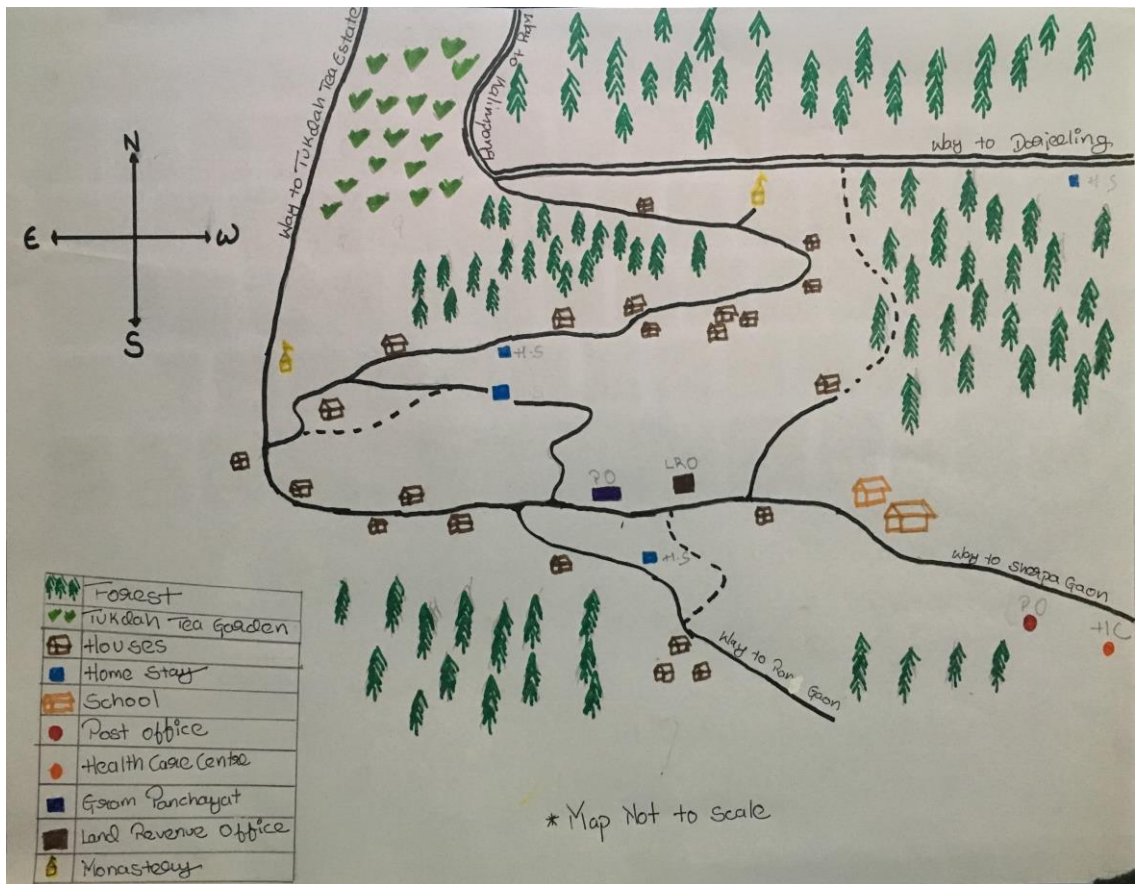
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Map of Darjeeling

[www.ecoholiday.co.in](http://www.ecoholiday.co.in)

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Religion is an eminently social thing. Anthropological inquiry into religion extends as far as 19<sup>th</sup> century when anthropology started as an academic discipline. Hence, the study of religion has been central to anthropology since its inception. Tylor (1958) argued that the minimum definition of religion was “the belief in spiritual beings” (Bowie 2006). In one form or another definition, with various embellishments, it has proved remarkably durable, despite the fact that it begs the question, “what are spiritual beings?” For Tylor, religion is an attempt by human beings to make sense of their experiences and of the world in which they live (Bowie 2006).

Anthropology of religion looks into the diverse phenomenon of the study of globalized religions to sectarian movements, indigenous traditions, irreligious and anti-religious group. As an inclusive, comparative study of human societies, from their prehistoric origins to the present, anthropology has sought to describe, classify, and explain religious beliefs and practices (Bowie 2006). Anthropologists have considered religion is the product of evolutionary development of human brain. Anthropological inquiry in religion extends as far as 19<sup>th</sup> century when anthropology started as the academic discipline. Geertz (1973) talks about religion as a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. Durkheim (1965 [1915]: 62) defined religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things

set aside and forbidden- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them.

Religious phenomena falls into two basic categories: beliefs and rites. The first is states of opinion and consists of representations; the second is particular modes of action. Between these two categories of phenomena lies all that separate thinking from doing (Durkheim 1912). Needham (1972) has suggested that the very notion of belief itself is culturally relative and that not all cultures use it with the same meaning or uses it at all. Therefore the concept of belief is not expressed in all languages when they do not possess themselves. As we know, all societies possess beliefs that can be grouped under the term religion. These beliefs vary from culture to culture and from time to time. Yet despite their variety, we shall define religion as any set of attitudes, beliefs, and practices pertaining to supernatural powers, weather that power be forces, gods, sprits, ghosts, or demons. Religious representations are collective representations that expresses collective realities; rites are way of acting that are born only in the midst of assembled groups and whose purpose is to evoke, maintain, or recreate certain mental states of those groups (*Ibid*). In an individual's experience, the acquisition of rites and beliefs are part of the culture the individual is born into. The rites can be distinguished from other human practices- for example, moral practices only by the special nature of their object. Like a rite, a moral rule prescribes ways of behaving to us, but those ways of behaving address objects of a different kind. It is object of the rite that must be characterized, in order to characterize the rite itself. The special nature of that object is expressed in the belief. Therefore, only after having defined the belief can we define the rite (Durkheim 1912). Religious beliefs and practices can be found all over the world and contemporary societies; and archeologists have found signs of religious belief associated with homo sapiens who

lived at least 60000 years ago. People buried their dead, and many graves are found with remains of food, tools, and other objects that were thought to be needed in an afterlife.

Death rites are very important in every culture. Different cultures have different ways of performing funeral rites. Every culture has their own experts who perform the funeral rites. Birth is the beginning of life in the same way death is the end of life, and so both are very important in every culture. Death is considered a great loss in every society, but when one is born, one has to die. Of all sources of religion, the supreme and final crisis of life is death, and it is of greatest importance. Death is the gateway to the other world in more than the literal sense. Man has to live his life in the shadow of death, and he who clings to life and enjoys its fullness must dread the menace of its end (Malinowski 1948).

When a person dies, family, friends, and neighbors respond in structured, patterned ways to death. Cultural guidelines determine the treatment and disposal of the body and prescribe a period of mourning for close relatives. Death ritual, like much of human behavior, is an expression of a cultural blueprint, of attitudes, values and ideals passed down by parents, and their parents, which an individual learns as a member of society. Death of someone means the period of mourning when people may alter their lifestyles; refraining from celebration and jollification perhaps, and making regular visits to the grave of the loved one. In Japan, a notice is pasted on the door, which not only identifies the house as one in mourning but also makes explicit the idea of pollution associated with the period in question. During this time, no meat is to be eaten, and there is a special diet for the bereaved. Various rites are held to mark the stage in the progress of the soul, and these coincide with gathering to thank

those who helped at the funeral, and generally to redefine the social relation of the members of the family left behind. In some countries in southern Europe, a widow continues to wear black for the rest of her life, but in most cases there is a means of incorporating the living back into normal life (Hendry 2008). In Nepali Hindu tradition, the dead body is given over to the purifying flames of the sacred fire. Immediately after death the body is washed clean, wrapped in a new white cloth and laid on a mat on the ground. After a few hours it is carried on a wooden stretcher to the funeral site (Painadath 1999). The funeral procession is headed by the chief mourner, usually the eldest son of the dead. He carries in a jar the flame kindled at the domestic fire. The Lord of Fire that was a companion from the day of the marriage now accompanies the dead to the last rites. The mourners repeat the name of the redeeming Lord Hari and verses which urge the dead to join the ancestral spirits and *Yama*, the deity of death (Painadath 1999).

Death as an event occurs in a place often treated as a sacred place. Death is understood as a transitional form directed towards ancestors. An important thing at that time is to perform the funeral rites of the dead. From every household a person should join the funeral procession regardless of caste. All participants in the funeral procession purify themselves by taking a ritual bath after the cremation. Cremation is looked upon as cosmogony, and an individual death is assimilated into the process of cosmic regeneration (Parry 1982). Cremation as a way of disposing of the dead has similar meanings as a burial. All sons of the deceased observe mourning for certain number of days depending on their caste. The ritual also involves cleaning, hair shaving, bathing and fasting. All members of the family and lineage family should avoid certain food items, such as black gram and salt (Khattri 2010). Death is therefore the transitional period for those alive, and they enter it through rites of

separation and emerge from it through rites and reintegration into society (Gennep 1960). So death rituals may be divisible in three parts. Firstly, rites performed at the time of death and after till the dead body is taken to the cremation grounds for final disposal. Secondly, rites are performed at the time of disposal of death. And lastly, rites and rituals performed after the dead, till the pollution period is over. All these may also be categorized in term of pre-disposal, disposal and post- disposal rite respectively (Sharma 2000).

Rites of separation is highly developed at a funeral, but there is again a period of transition, both for the deceased on his or her way to the afterlife, and for those who remains behind to come to terms with their loss. At Christian funerals, the custom of throwing a little earth into the grave is a way of saying farewell and saying ‘from earth you came, to earth you return’, as in the practice in Japan of adding a pinch of incense to the burning pile. In Roman Catholic and Afro-Caribbean communities, the custom of holding a wake allows a more elaborate venue for the final farewells, and elsewhere there is open house for the bereaved to receive the condolences of their friends and relatives. In past and present day societies, from most technologically simple to the most complex, the majority of the world’s peoples appears to have devised some type of ritualized response to the physical cessation of life. Archeological findings have revealed that even early men possessed various traditions for disposal of the dead. The archeological record, for example, includes evidence of Neanderthal burial, which incorporated the interment of animal bones and flint tools alongside corpses (Chambell 1992). Human remains from rural contexts tend to be deposited in a variety of positions bodies may have been placed in an extended position in the ground. They may also have been placed on their side in a flexed or even in a very tightly crouched position. Many burials are found with grave

goods, some of the grave goods may contain articulated animal bones, possibly representing the remnants of food offerings given to the dead.

Among the Dukpas too whenever a person dies, the spirit of the deceased goes through various stages for the rebirth depending upon the karma of past. Since most Dukpas are Buddhists, they believe in reincarnation. So when they die they will be reborn again. The goal is to escape the cycle of death and rebirth and attain nirvana or a state of perfect peace. After death, a *lama* (Buddhist religious leader) is called in to extract the *sem* (spirit) from the body and speed its way to rebirth. The body is placed in a sitting position before an altar, on which various ritual objects—including *torma* (figurines made of dough and butter)—are placed. The lama leads the service for the dead, reciting passages from various Buddhist texts. Cremation is the usual form of disposal of the corpse, although bodies may be buried or thrown in a river. Rituals are performed for forty-nine days after death. During this period an effigy (symbolic model) of the dead person is kept in the house. Both the end of the mourning period and the one-year anniversary of the death are celebrated with a feast.

Dukpas or Drukpas are from Bhutan. "Druk" in Tibetan means "Dragon" and it also refers to the sound of thunder as Bhutan is also known as the land of thunder dragon. In 1206, Tsangpa Gyare Yeshe Dorje saw nine dragons fly up into the sky from the ground of Namdruk, and he named his lineage "Dukpa" or "lineage of the Dragons" after this auspicious event. The Dukpa lineage is the branch of Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism. However, there are differing views regarding the wave of migration of people into Bhutan. Tephoo Bhutias from Cooch Behar in India (Sharma 1969) are believed to be the first settlers in Bhutan. There was another migration from Kham in Eastern Tibet. The Ngalops are people of Tibetan descent who immigrated



to Bhutan as early as the 5th century and today form the ruling group who control the monarchy, the government and the economy. They tend to live in the north-western region, speak the Dzongkha language, and wear robe-like dresses. They can be referred to as Dukpas as they follow the Dukpa Kargyupa school of Mahayana Buddhism (Leigh 2012). The Sharchops largely live in eastern Bhutan and practice the Nyingmapa sect of Mahayana Buddhism and belong to Tibeto-Burman ancestry. They speak Tsangla, Kurteop, Kheng and Brokpa dialects. They are supposed to have migrated from north-east India (Leigh 2012). The Lhotsampas live in southern foothill districts and speak the Nepali language. They have migrated from Nepal, Darjeeling and Sikkim in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This accounts for the ethnic composition of the present inhabitants of Bhutan today.

### **Review of Literature**

In *The Anthropology of Religion* (2006) Muller argues that belief in a divine being was universal, and that however childish or primitive a religion might appear it still served to place the human soul in the presence of God (2006:19). With various embellishments, has proved remarkably durable, despite the fact that it begs the question, "what are Spiritual Beings?" For Tylor, religion is an attempt by human beings to make sense of their experiences and of the world in which they live *Religion in Primitive Culture* Tylor (1885: 8). In *The Anthropology of Death: A Preliminary Overview* (1993), it mentions how all societies, regardless of whether their customs call for festive or restrained behaviour, death becomes the "quintessential expression of sociability" (1993: 6). Malinowski (1948) in his book *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* mentioned about the myth of death and of the recurrent cycle of life. He said that "Death is the gate-way to the other world in more than the literal

sense. According to most theories of early religion, a great deal, if not all, of religious inspiration has been derived from it—and in these orthodox views are on the whole correct. Man has to live his life in the shadow of death, and he who clings to life and enjoys its fullness must dread the menace of its end” (1948: 29).

The various stages of human life from birth till death have been discussed by van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage* (1960). “We have seen that an individual is placed in various sections of society, synchronically and in succession; in order to pass from one category to another and to join individuals in other sections, he must submit, from the day of his birth to that of his death, to ceremonies whose forms often vary but whose function is similar” (Gennep 1960: 188) Hendry (2008) in his book *an Introduction to Social Anthropology: Sharing our world* mentioned about the rites to passage and the various stages as he talked about the funeral practices in various religion across the culture from Christian to Japanese and Afro-Caribbean. Pecorino (2002: 55) *Perspectives on Death and Dying* this book is the compilation of work by various authors who explains death from various perspectives and talks about various form of death rituals practiced by humans.

However, there are different ways of disposing the dead. David-Neel (1971:31) points out that disposal in water is charitable because fish and otters eat the flesh and fat. However, many other writers assert that disposal in water is reserved for executed criminals, persons who have died of contagious diseases, victims of accidents or murder, and pregnant or barren women. There is also cremation, which is believed to be reserved for high lamas or wealthy people who can afford the required the fuel. David-Neel (1971: 31) says that burial on earth is considered a charitable giving of the body because it provides food for worms; but Bass’

informants disparaged it for essential the same reason- the worm that came to eat the body would die of starvation when it is consumed, so the next result would be harm not benefit.

*An Overview of Bhutanese death rituals and related practice* (2001: 36)

Yongten Dargye has given a brief idea how death rituals are performed in Bhutan. How these rituals differentiate from region to region in Bhutan. By reading this book we can compare the difference between the death rituals practiced in Bhutan and Darjeeling. We can also observe that a lot of the things related to death rituals practice has changed. Like some of the rituals that are practiced in Bhutan are now alien to the Dukpas in Darjeeling. Still in Bhutan, the body is taken in sitting position but it's not done so in Darjeeling. In Bhutan it is tradition that from every household offer condolence with tea, *ara* local wine but this is not practiced in Darjeeling instead using any form alcohol is considered bad.

In *The Anthropology of Death: A Preliminary Overview* (1993: 10) all societies, regardless of whether their customs call for festive or restrained behaviour, the issue of death throws into relief the most important cultural values by which people live their lives and evaluate their experiences. Death indeed bears upon the living "Death is the quintessential expression of sociability". Death rituals must therefore be viewed as culturally heightened activities; they conflate, refract, and highlight a people's most important values" (Kiong and Schiller: 1993: 1). Hopkins (1972) *Death Intermediate State and Rebirth: In Tibetan Buddhism* discusses in great detail the process and stages of dying, entry into the intermediate state between this life and the next, and taking rebirth. (Hopkins, 1972:54)

*The Tibetan book of living and dying* by Sogyal Rinpoche has given the concept of living and dying and how one should live so it can help them in their afterlife. He says “the sense consciousness arise from one’s mind. The flesh, bones, organ of smelling and odors are formed the earth element. The blood, organ of taste, tastes and liquid in the body arise form water element. The warmth, clear coloration, the organ of sight is from the fire element. Breath, organ of touch and physical sensation is from air element. (1992: 252)

*Preparing for the death and help the dying* by Sangye Khadro said how people take death as a negative way but according to one must accept death and will come for everybody. It is the nature’s way of removing the old and adds new. One of the principal things the Buddha discovered and pointed out to us is the truth of impermanence that things change and pass away. There are two aspects of impermanence: gross and subtle. Gross impermanence refers to the fact that all produced things that includes humans and other living beings, all the phenomena in nature, and all human- made things will not last forever, but will go out of existence at some point. (1999: 1)

In *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism* (1995), it mentions how “Tibetan Buddhism places a strong emphasis on instructions concerning death, and Tibetan literature is full of admonitions to be aware of the inevitability of death” (Powers, 1995: 325). The book further explains the various stages of *Bardo* process which is further explained by Samdup (2013) in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Whenever a person dies, the spirit of deceased enters into Bardo which means “intermediate state” or “in between stage” of death and after life. “The intermediate state comprises three Bardos: The Chikhai Bardo or ‘Bardo of the moment of death’, the Chonyid Bardo or

‘Bardo of the experiencing of reality’, and the Sidpa Bardo or ‘Bardo of rebirth’ (Samdup 2013: 13) Likewise, Hopkins (1972) discusses the process and stages of dying, entry into the intermediate state between this life and the next, and taking rebirth in *Death Intermediate State and Rebirth: In Tibetan Buddhism*.

Gouin (2010: 1013) in her book *Tibetan Rituals of Death Buddhist Funerary Practices* mentions the process involved in funeral rites for the death of person till the cremation and how it is done. She even talks about before death, whether lama is present or not, and the considerable importance attached to keeping the dying person in a calm frame of mind because it can influence subsequent rebirth. Dying with a calm mind full of virtuous thought will lead to a good birth, but dying with unpleasant thoughts can lead to rebirth in the lower realms. “Immediately after it has been determined that a person is dead, a whole constellation of activities is initiated, which occur during the period from the moment of death up to the disposal of the body. Some of the preparation are directly related to the disposal of the body, but a significant number are directly related to ensuring the spiritual well-being of the deceased, and specially to exerting a positive influence on the deceased’s rebirth”. ‘Death, Memory and Building: The Non-Cremation of a Cambodian Monk’ (2006) examines one case of the ceremonial preservation of a Buddhist monk's body in rural Cambodia. While consistent with Buddhist relic veneration traditions and regional death ritual patterns, the case shows local actors and conditions influencing practice. The study discusses whether there is a recent efflorescence of such practices in Cambodia and whether the 'post-socialist' moment has tended to foster their revival (Marston: 2006: 491).

“Darjeeling is an Imagined Community” Das (2014) writes in *Darjeeling Society Economic Polity* as he mentions it to be an imagined location and space by multiple angles of imagination with different degree of ownership over the imagined terrain. Malley (1907) also talked about various topics about Darjeeling like boundaries, flora and fauna and the people. The book also talks about the history of Darjeeling and the Bhutan war fought between Bhutan and British and the treaty which was signed between two nations. In November 1865 the treaty extorted from Sir Ashley Eden was given up, and a fresh treaty was executed under which the Bhutan Duars, with the passages leading into the hills, were ceded to the British in return for an annual subsidy. The whole of the Bhotia possessions in the plains this became British, and a slip of the Tista was interposed between Bhutan and Sikkim. In 1866 this tract, which now forms the Kalimpong police circle, was added to the district of Darjeeling. This was the last addition to the district, which thus acquire its present dimensions. The book also gives information about the migration of people into Darjeeling hill area. According to the book the great bulk of immigrants come from Nepal, chiefly as laborers in the tea gardens. It also talks about various ethnic group living in Darjeeling such as Nepalese, Bhutias and Lepchas.

Subba in his article ‘Migration and Ethnic Relation in Darjeeling and Sikkim’ talked about the migration history of the various communities in these regions. “The topography of the northern frontiers of Sikkim being what it is, the low landers that the Lepchas were they perhaps never inhabit beyond Lachen and Lachung in the north Sikkim. The farther north was inhabited, if it was at all inhabited, by the high landers Tibetans. Again, the present Kalimpong sub-division being close to Bhutan it is plausible that the Bhutanese had settled there even before 1706 when Bhutan annexed it from Sikkim. The fertile land and moderate climate of Kalimpong must always

have attracted the attention of the weather beaten Bhutanese” (2010: 307). In *The History of Bhutan* (2013) Phuntsho sheds light on the Duar war which is the important event in the history of Bhutan because at the end of this Bhutan lost its territories to the British Empire (Phuntsho, 2013: 441). Sharma (1969) in his book *Glimpses of Bhutan* is about the history, geographical location, education system, people, language and various other traditions and cultures followed by the Bhutanese people. It also provides information about the establishment of Indo- Bhutan relation. (1969: 11).

In *Bhutan: Tradition, Transition and Transformation* (2004), the religious, political and social assimilation was achieved to the extent that now the Bhutanese social structure presents almost the same features from length to breadth of its expanse. Only small, isolated, and less assimilated tribal stocks are identified as different from mainstream of the Bhutanese society. In this context, ethnologically the Bhutanese society may be identified at various levels: the pre-Brugpa Mons, predominantly found in eastern Bhutan, Ngaloan of western Bhutan and Koch, Mech and descendants of the other communities from Duars in the high hills. The book further explains the mutually exclusive ethnic categories in Bhutan: “the first is composed of several groups of people of Tibetan. Secondly, there are number of distinct but related Indo-Mongoloid groups in the Assam Himalayas and which presumably migrated to Bhutan. The third element in Bhutan’s population consists of a number of small tribal groups such as the Drokpas, Lepchas, and Doyas. This book really gives a good idea about the ethnic group which can be found in current day Bhutan. Though this is not an in-depth description about the Bhutanese ethnic group but it helps gain few knowledge about the ethnicity in Bhutan (Sinha 2004).

*Bhutan Society and Polity* (Mishra 1996) describes Bhutan as the multi-lingual state which comprises of various languages. There are four major indigenous languages prevalent in Bhutan Dzongkha (western Bhutan), Sharchop (eastern Bhutan), Bumthang (central Bhutan) and Dzalakha (north-eastern Bhutan). Leigh (2012: 10) gives information about the culture and customs of Bhutan including an account on the funeral practice of Bhutan. In Bhutan, funerals are elaborate religious process. After death, a lama is called to extract the spirit from the body. The body is placed in a sitting position before an altar, in which various ritual objects are placed. A lama leads the service of death. Cremation is the usual form of disposal of corpse.

From the above literature, we can see that study on Tibetan and Buddhist death rites are at plenty but none has looked into Dukpa specific death rites. Dukpa rites and customs have largely been ignored especially in terms of Dukpas living outside Bhutan, specifically Darjeeling. Most of the work is among Dukpas based in Bhutan. Hence this study proposes to do a proper study of death rites among the Dukpas of Darjeeling.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Dukpas have been living in Darjeeling for a long period of time. The population of Dukpas in Darjeeling is very less compared to other communities residing there. Since Dukpas fall into the minority community, they have either adopted or assimilated to various cultures, rituals of other dominant cultures. In this context, the cultural practices of Dukpas have been dwindling or assimilated to other practices. Likewise, the cosmopolitan nature of Darjeeling, allows lot of syncretism visible among the Dukpas and neighboring communities of Darjeeling.



The stagnant population has also somehow affected the culture of Dukpas. Most Dukpas do not know Dzonkha language and this has resulted in maximum Dukpa population communicating in Nepali- the *lingua franca* of Darjeeling. One can also see Dukpa people observing festivals other than their own. They are scattered all over Darjeeling and have not been very successful in organizing themselves to come together as a community. So this resulted in small grouping of people especially family members. So the religious ceremonies are also concentrated into small groups and because of that they are attracted to other festivals rather than their own. There are very few places where we can see the higher concentration of Dukpa population and only one village where they live as a homogeneity. Likewise, the stagnant population number of Dukpa lamas has directly affected the performing of the rituals and other religious ceremonies by the Dukpa families. Another reason for the decreasing Dukpa lamas can be youths more involved in getting into government jobs. This as a whole has resulted in the loss of the Dukpa culture. Also, the inclusion of Dukpas under the Bhutia banner has complicated the identity formation process. The Government of West Bengal recognized Dukpas as a Scheduled Tribe category under the Bhutia community along with seven other communities namely Denzongpas, Tibetans, Yolmos, Kagates, Walongs, Totos, Sherpas. They have also been given the Bhutia development board. This resulted into movement of people into the Bhutia flag. The Dukpa monasteries present in Darjeeling are usually headed by a Bhutia lama. Because of this the rest of the lamas most of which are Dukpa lamas follow their head Bhutia lama, and as a result the Bhutia tradition are more prevalent over the Dukpa tradition.

The focus of this research is therefore on the dwindling tradition of death rites and its practitioners among Dukpas. This study aims to look into the funeral rites of

Dukpas because slowly the authentic death rites of Dukpas are fading and it is already started. If we look into the funeral rites the scenario is the same. One of the major problems faced by the family of the deceased is finding Dukpa lamas. Today funeral rites have become really expensive among Dukpas. In order to conduct an “authentic” Dukpa funeral, they have to bring lamas either from Bhutan or Sikkim. One of the major problems over the period of time is that Dukpas have accepted their fate and have incorporated rituals from other cultures and religious ceremonies. Likewise, they go for Bhutia, Tibetan, Tamang lamas to officiate their religious occasions. So we see history of Dukpa in Darjeeling to be a syncretic kind as it is mixed, undocumented and underrepresented. This research therefore hopes to look into the existence of Dukpas in Darjeeling, their culture, their rites of passage more specifically dwindling death rites.

### **Objectives**

- To provide a descriptive account of death rituals among Dukpas.
- To examine the influence of other cultures on Dukpa death ritual.
- To study the changes on death rites of Buddhist and non-Buddhist Dukpas.

### **Methodology**

This research study was conducted in Lamahatta, Darjeeling because Lamahatta has the highest number of Dukpa population in Darjeeling. The study was based on intensive fieldwork. The interview was focused on the political leaders of the association, experts, *lamas*, elderly member of the community and also the youths. Data is empirical and qualitative in nature. It is an ethnographic attempt in recording and understanding the process of death rites of Dukpas in Lamahatta

Empirical data was gathered through participant observation. Participation in the rituals was the major source of collecting data with photography and video recording during death rituals. Interviews with lamas, interviews (both formal and informal) with a structured schedule. Additional data was also collected from ritual specialists, elders and community leaders.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The research took longer due to the strike in the proposed field area. The people in Darjeeling observed it for 104 days. Due to the strike many rituals remained unattended and therefore only interviews with recently families who has conducted death rituals were taken. There was a stop in the transportation as well therefore the researcher was unable to go to the field. Telecommunications and Internet services were also affected by the strike hence delaying the whole process.

The Dukpa population in Darjeeling is very low. Furthermore, the population is widespread across the town. There are very few areas in Darjeeling where Dukpa population is concentrated. Due to the low population, the number of Dukpa ritual specialists are also very low. If people want to perform the authentic death rituals they have to bring *lamas* from either Bhutan or Sikkim. There is very less interaction between the Dukpas in Darjeeling; apart from festivals like *dodko selo* which is observed before *lossung*, it is one of the important festival for Dukpas. Which fall during the month of December. There is not much contact between them, instead they are more assimilated to the cosmopolitan nature in Darjeeling.

While most of the interviews could be done in Nepali, the rituals officiated by the ritual specialists were conducted in Tibetan language which were later translated hence much could've been lost in translation.

## **Organization of Thesis**

The first chapter deals with the introduction of the topic. It also gives a brief overview of the community. This chapter also brings out the statement of problem, which relates to the importance of doing this research. It also highlights the objectives of the research.

The second chapter deals with the area where research was conducted and gives brief overview of the land and the people.

The third chapter consists of descriptive account on death rituals and its performed in Lamahatta. It makes an attempt to describe how the rituals are conducted.

The fourth chapter four focuses on the change and continuity of the rituals and how the changes occurred. It also shows the ritual practices between Buddhist and non-Buddhist dukpas what cause those changes.

The final chapter deals with summary and the suggestions on this topic

## Chapter 2

### Land and People

#### The Dukpas

Dukpas have been in Darjeeling for a very long period of time. The coming of Dukpas in Darjeeling can be traced to their original homeland of Bhutan. Though Dukpas came to Darjeeling way back; there are no official written documents which proves the migration of Dukpas from Bhutan to Darjeeling. But when elderly Dukpas recall their migration to Darjeeling, they usually answer that they first moved to Sikkim -west Sikkim and later to Darjeeling in search of better lands and opportunity. But if we want to learn about the origin and history of Dukpas or Drukpas, we have to look into the history of Bhutan. It is the land, which gave birth to Drukpa or Dukpa culture, tradition, etc. So to understand Dukpas, we must first understand Bhutan since everything is related to Bhutan.

Bhutan was also known as “Druk-Yul” in early days. It was only after the coming of British in India it was called Bhutan. Even today majority of Bhutanese population call Bhutan as “Druk-Yul”. It is a land locked country located between China and India. In local term, the name of the country means the land of thunder dragon. In Bhutan, thunder is considered as the voices of roaring dragon. In around 1200AD a monastery was built called the *Druk* with a sect called Drukpa or Dukpa. The name and the emblem of dragon has been associated with Bhutan ever since. The dragon represents Druk, the Tibetan name for the kingdom of Bhutan (Kathuria, 2007). Drukpa or Dukpa Kagyu was formed in 12<sup>th</sup> century by Go-tsangpo Gonpo Dorje (1189-1258) one of the main disciples of Dragon Tsangpa Gyare. The sect

Drukpa or Dukpa refers to thunder dragon. It is believed that a dragon appeared on the site of Ralung monastery when Tsangpa Gyare has visited the spot. Since then the monastery was named Druk Ralung and the sect came to be known as Drukpa or Dukpa Kargyu throughout the world. (Sikkim, 2016)

If we look into the history of Bhutan, it is shrouded in mystery. Before it was united as a one nation, it was divided into regions ruled by various clans and every single clan ruled different valleys of Bhutan. It was Zhabdrung Nawang Namgyal who unified the country under his central leadership and this period was considered as the one of the most important era in the history of Bhutan. He ruled Bhutan for 35 years until he retired in 1651 AD. During his reign, he built *Dzongs* (fortress), monasteries, and religious institutions. He also established the Drukpa Kargypa school of Tantric Mahayana Buddhism in Bhutan. His rule marked the dual system of governance called the *Chhoesid* where the power and authority was shared between Deb Raja head of secular affairs and Dharma Raja spiritual head called as *Je Khempo*. Bhutan is a Buddhist state where the power is shared between the king and monastery. This dual system of governance continued until the beginning of the Wangchuk dynasty and the establishment of hereditary monarchy. (Kathuria, 2007)

There are four main languages in Bhutan namely; Dzongkha, Bumthangka, Sarchapkkha and Nepali. However, Dzongkha is the official language of the country (Sharma 1969). There is another language which is used for private communication, religious material, and official documents are written in *Chhokey*. Bhutanese culture derives from ancient Tibetan culture Dzongkha and Sharchop the principal Bhutanese languages, are closely related to Tibetan and monks read and write the ancient variant of the Tibetan language known as Chhokey.

Hidden in the fold of the Himalayas, Bhutan is the home to several aboriginal people living in diverse regions. From the humid jungles to the southern foothills to the desolate and frigid high Himalayan valleys (Chand, 2004). There are three main ethnic, religious and linguistic groups and a dozen smaller groups in Bhutan. Ngalunhs/ Ngalungs or Ngalops ethnic group live in the north western region. They are called Drukpas or Dukpas as they follow the Drukpa Kargyupa school of Tibetan Buddhism. The king and royal family belong to this group. Sharchops inhabit the eastern and central region and practice Nyingmapa sect of Mahayana Buddhism and belong to Tibeto-Burman ancestry. Lhotshampas are the third ethnic group that live in six southern foothills district. They speak Nepali and practice Hinduism and migrated from Nepal, Darjeeling and Sikkim. All three ethnic group migrated to Bhutan at different points of time.

In 7<sup>th</sup> May 1864 British attacked Bhutan which lasted for five months. This resulted in Bhutan's defeat and loss of part of its sovereign territory. In 11<sup>th</sup> November 1865 a treaty was signed between Bhutan and the British and this treaty is called "Sinchula" treaty. With this treaty Bhutan was forced to leave the land on the left of Teesta river and territories in Assam Duars and Bengal Duars area. This led to the loss of Kalimpong area to British, which was taken from Sikkim by Bhutan. Kalimpong being close to Bhutan, it can be assumed that the Bhutanese had settled there even before 1706 when Bhutan annexed it from Sikkim (Subba 2010). With the coming of Bhutanese people in Kalimpong, we can say that people started migrating to other lands and since Darjeeling and Sikkim was in closer proximity, we can assume that they migrated to this area in search of better lands for agriculture and abundance of foods for their cattle. According to Subba (2010) Kalimpong subdivision being close to Bhutan it is plausible that the Bhutanese had settled there even

before 1706 when Bhutan annexed it from Sikkim. The Dukpa in Darjeeling hill comprises of various groups whose ancestors migrated at different period of time, commencing as early as 6<sup>th</sup> century. The migration was most prominent during 15<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century (West Bengal Government, 2015). The migration of Dukpas in Darjeeling is still in obscure, since there are no recorded data or written document about the migration, which took place. But there is some evidence which proves that Dukpas in Darjeeling is been living before the independence. Example can be taken of Gaga Tshering Dukpa, a Dukpa freedom fighter involved in the freedom struggle for India along with other freedom fighters from Darjeeling.

### **Darjeeling**

The origin of the word Darjeeling has very many related interpretations; one theory suggests that it is named after *Dorje-ling*, the Buddhist monastery that once stood on the Observatory Hill overlooking Mall, the nerve centre of the town. The name Darjeeling thus appears to be a corruption of Dorjeling, '*Dorje*' standing for the ecclesiastical scepter or the double-headed thunderbolt (in Tibet the word *vajrah* became *dorje* the common of all emblems associated with priestly power), which the Lama holds in his hand during service, and '*ling*' meaning place. Another story goes that the monastery at the observatory hill was constructed from 1757 and completed in 1763, the chief monk of this monastery was Rinzing Dorji Legden La; hence the name 'Dorji-Ling' or the 'the place where Dorji lives' came into prominence (Malley, 1999). Many interpretations, it is popularly known today as Darjeeling.

Darjeeling was part of the dominion of the Rajah of Sikkim. The British government received the deed of grant of Darjeeling from the Rajah of Sikkim out of friendship in 1835. During those times, the population of Darjeeling was sparse with



only about one hundred inhabitants. The place had many viabilities besides being a hill station socially. The place could be developed as a replica of European hometown for the foreigners. It was also a strategic location to watch over neighbouring kingdoms (Malley, 1999) of Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan. With the coming of British, Darjeeling became a bustling hub for many activities as a hill station for the British where new roads were constructed, educational institutions were established and tea plantations were introduced. So when Campbell who took charge of the hill station at the end of 1839, he promised free land to new settlers. Another main contribution by the British has been the education system which attracted people from various regions and countries like Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, etc. (Dash, 1979). One could see the growing heterogeneity of the population of Darjeeling and the cosmopolitan nature of Darjeeling. Ethnically, the majority of the people in the hills are of Mongolian origin and Dukpas are one among the many.

### **Dukpas in Darjeeling**

Dukpas came to Darjeeling because of the free lands for agriculture. People coming from the other states if India occupied the occupation like managerial and clerical workers in tea gardens, government jobs, lawyers, doctor, etc. (Malley, 1999). However Dukpas of Darjeeling do not occupy a separate identity. Instead, Dukpas of the Darjeeling fall under the Bhutia community.

The Bhutias of Darjeeling Hills numbered a total of 9300 in 1872. In 1950, the Bhutia tribe of West Bengal was accorded Scheduled Tribe status vide Constitution (Scheduled Tribe) Order. The composition of Bhutia population of West Bengal however includes Bhutia, Dukpa (Drukpa), Kagatey, Sharpa (Sherpa), Tibetan,

Yolmo, and Toto. Though a minority community in Darjeeling, the Bhutias got the Bhutia Development Board from the West Bengal government in 2016,

Having a shared political identity with seven other communities, the Dukpas on their own are very less in number. They are scattered all over Darjeeling and have either adopted or assimilated to various cultures, rituals of other dominant cultures. In this context, the cultural practices of the Dukpas have been dwindling or assimilated to other practices. Likewise, the cosmopolitan nature of Darjeeling, allows lot of syncretism visible among the Dukpas and neighboring communities of Darjeeling.

### **Field Area: Lamahatta Village**



Fig 2.1: Entrance gate to Lamahatta Village

The research was conducted in Lamahatta village. Lamahatta is located 23km away from Darjeeling town. Lamahatta is connected by Darjeeling- Kalimpong highway. The population of Lamahatta comprises of Sherpas, Yolmos, Tamangs, Bhutias and Dukpas. According to the 2011 census of Lamahatta, the total population of the village was 9955 out of which 268 are Dukpas. We can see that the Dukpa population

is very much in minority even in the only village where the Dukpa concentration is more. The population of Lamahatta is heterogeneous in nature but the village is divided into various small sections according to the community-dominated area. For cremation of the body people go to the nearby Lamahatta *gumba* currently there is only one in the village. The village has one governmental health centre that provides basic health care during the time of need and is open from Monday to Saturday. In case of severe emergencies people have to go to Darjeeling for the treatment. There are no markets in the village. Only a handful of shops, which can provide basic necessities. Ration and other house hold items are bought from Darjeeling town. The village is governed by Panchayat system. Today we can see eco-tourism making inroads in Lamahatta area. There is also a Lamahatta Park because of which homestays has started becoming major source of income for the people of Lamahatta.

The main reason for choosing Lamahatta as field area is because majority of Dukpa population is concentrated in this area compared to other places in Darjeeling. There are various stories and histories associated with Lamahatta which can give us idea about how Dukpa people came to Darjeeling. Majority of Dukpas not only from Lamahatta believe that historically the area of Lamahatta was once under the Bhutan. From there people started moving to other places of Darjeeling. There are 40 Dukpa households and a total of 210 Dukpas in Lamahatta.

Male	Female	Total Population
106	104	210

Fig 2.2: Male and Female Dukpa Population of Lamahatta

## **Food**

Food has always been the source of identification for different ethnic groups. But with the movement or migration of people it is continuously changing or adapting depending upon the area or situation. Food is something which is not constant but it keeps adapting along the way depending upon the geographical area. But certain food defines the culture and tradition by the way they are prepared.

In the context of Dukpas living in Darjeeling, they prefer rice as their staple food. It is used for daily consumption and meat is the major source of protein for the people because of cold weather people prefer meat along with vegetables. With the coming of Dukpas in Darjeeling, people of the hill started cooking some dishes that did not belong to their culture like *sel roti* and *aloo dum* which is a traditional dish for Nepalese and usually these food are cooked during the Nepali festival *Dashain*. These changes in culture are also caused by the exogamous marriages practices. In Dukpa dish, chilly is an important ingredient in most of the dishes and whether it is traditional or non-traditional, they add chillies. The most popular dish is *ema datse* made with large, green hot chillies in a cheese sauce. Several Tibetan- style dishes are common like momos (dumplings), thukpas (noodles). During festival like *lossung* which is celebrated mostly during the month of December, they make *khapsyo* and *jhurumur* which like a biscuit. It is made of flour is also used during marriages.

*Chaang* is a homemade alcoholic drink also considered as homemade beer. It is used during festivals and marriages but also used in the religious ceremonies.



Fig 2.3: Khapsyo and Jhurumuru

### **Attire**

The traditional dress of Dukpa men is called the *gho* and the traditional dress for Dukpa women is called *kira*. The *gho* is a long knee length robe that is tied around the waist by a belt. Long socks and boots complete the attire. The hand-woven *ghos* and *kiras* are usually worn during formal occasions. The *kira* is a large piece of woven cloth that is wrapped around the body in a series of folds it is worn over a blouse, or *wonju*, and a cotton petticoat. Body-length petticoats are known as *gutsum*, and petticoats from the waist down to the ankle are called *meyo* (Leigh 2012). If we look into the current Dukpa population living in Lamahatta, we can see the change in dressing pattern as people usually don't wear *gho* and *kira* rather they prefer western wear for their daily purpose. Only in weddings or other religious function like *lossung* or any cultural festival they wear traditional dress.



Fig 2.4: Tradirional Dress for men *Gho*



Fig 2.5: *Kira* Traditional Dress for women

### **Clans**

Dukpa are organized by various clans. Some of the popular clans in Lamahatta were Ishap, Benda, Yatob, Phechep, Gowlingtam, Machop, Phechempo, Shyap, Oda, and Phenda. Among them, the Yatob and Phechep belong to higher strata in Dukpa society. Most of the people in Lamahatta also fall under these groups.

### **Marriage**

Among Dukpas marrying from the same clan is strictly not allowed. But all the clans are further divided into two groups. For example *Yatob* is a single clan but it is also divided into two groups and marriage can take place between these two. Usually during the traditional marriage *lamas* are called to officiate the marriage. Then the family can give feast for their friends and relatives.

## **Family Pattern**

Dukpa family is patrilineal in nature. Most of the families are extended family and few of them were nuclear families. The head of the family is the Father. In case the father died, the mother becomes the Head of the Family. Traditionally, the inheritance of the property was only given to the son. But today, there is an equal share given to the daughter of the family as well.

## **Religion**

Buddhism plays a fundamental role in the culture and religion of Dukpa people. The dominant sect is the Dukpa *Kargyu* sect of Mahayana Buddhism. The ritual specialists are lamas who are very important in every ritual from birth, marriage and death. They are the ritual experts. The lamas are usually male even though there are few female lamas known as *laminis*. With the coming of Dukpas in Darjeeling, we can see the change in the religious practices. Since the majority of Buddhist population in Darjeeling is dominated by the Bhutias, the Dukpa people also started to follow Bhutia religious practices. Since finding Dukpa lama who can perform authentic rites are very less, people started adapting to the new ways. We can even see people, families started converting into Christianity over the period of time. There is one important Dukpa monastery in Darjeeling it is located in Dali it is known as *Druk Sangag Choling* Monastery.



Fig 2.6: Druk Sangag Choling Monastery

## **Festivals**

*Lossung* is one of the most important festivals for Dukpas in Darjeeling. Other common festivals are *sakadawa* and Buddha purnima celebrated in the month of May and June. People also follow other Hindu festivals such as Diwali though it is not celebrated as grand as others. Usually *lossung* falls in the month of December. It lasts for three days in Darjeeling. During this time, all family members come together to enjoy the festival. They prepare traditional foods like *khapsyo* and *jurumuru* or *ruk ruk* according to some people. They also invite their friends during this time and can see the cultural persuasion taking place. During this time people drink homemade beer *chyaang* and *momos* are the staple food during this time. Dukpas in Darjeeling only celebrate *lossung* as the major festival. If we look into the current situation we can see the transition which is taking place among Dukpas. Today Dukpas in Darjeeling have opened up to other cultures, which is mainly caused by the exogamous marriage system which is taking place. With this Dukpas have started



participating in other festivals. Until recently they never celebrated *bhai tika* since the marriage of our elder cousin sister into a chettri household we are participating in the festival.



Fig 2.7: Celebrating *Losung* Festival

### **Economy**

Traditionally the economy of Dukpa people was agriculture and animal husbandry because majority of the population live in the outskirts of the town. Even today in places like Lamahatta, majority of population are involved in agriculture and animal husbandry. Only few of them work in government offices and some have followed the path of *lamaism* with their own will or by the economic problem of the house. But with the coming of modernization we can witness the change in village area in the context of economy it provided lots of opportunity to the youths like opening of internet cafe and Xerox shops. Roads helped to connect the village with towns which opened the opportunity for drivers. With the boon of the tourism industry in Darjeeling hills, it has opened various opportunities for the people like they started opening tours and travels, restaurant, hotels and home stays. We can see the change in economy pattern earlier which was solely dependent upon the agricultural. Now more

and more people are involved in getting government jobs which can improve their social status.



Fig 2.8: Construction of a New Home Stay at Lamahatta

## Education



Fig 2.9: Students Going Home after School is over

There are two government schools in Lamahatta. Lamahatta Senior Secondary high school and basic primary school. Students from Lamahatta or around the village attend these schools for their schooling. Parents with good income send their children to private schools in Darjeeling town for their education. These students either stay in hostel, rent or with their relatives. We can even see families migrating to towns for the education of their children and only during vacation they come to the village, and also to pursue higher education one has to move to Darjeeling or Siliguri.

Education	Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Graduation and Above
	13	35	2	18

Fig 2.10: Education table of Lamahatta village

### **Political System**

In terms of political organisation Dukpa Buddhist Welfare Association is one of the major functioning body. Its branches are in various places in Darjeeling. The main office is located in Jorebunglow. The main objective of this body is to preserve the cultures and traditions of Dukpas and also to help people who are suffering from financial crisis. The body has its own election system where president, vice president, general secretary, treasurer are chosen. It also has a youth body and its members are chosen by the president of the association. The other branches also have their own president, vice president, etc. chosen by their own local people. This association tries to maintain and preserve Dukpa culture by hosting various cultural programs and sports. Every year before the beginning of *lossung* the association organises a sports

program which lasts for two days and is known as *Dhoko shelo*. The association also maintains a language classes for those who interested in learning *Dzonghka* language.

## Chapter 3

### Death Rituals among Dukupas

Dukupas or Drukupas mainly practice Buddhism, and share many similarities in terms of religious practices with other Buddhist followers. Tibetan Buddhism is divided into various sects like *Nyingma*, *Kagyü*, *Sakya*, *Gelug* and Drukupas or Dukupas fall under the *Kargyu* sect. Since all the sects fall under the same umbrella of Tibetan Buddhism, there are various similarities among them but the differences can be seen in their rituals practices and how they are performed depending on their sect.

Death is considered a very important ritual because it is believed that death is the process of rebirth of one's life. Whenever a person dies in the family, the body of the person is not touched or moved because it is believed that any contact with the body will eject the soul from the body. It will then wander and could be taken away by the demons.

#### *Pho*

Within the first hour of death, a ritual called *Pho* is done to direct the soul in the right path. Usually *Pho* is done by a *lama* (monk) who is an expert of has done *Cham* meditation to control thoughts. After the *lama* completes his meditation, he has to perform *Pho* upon himself by putting a thin broomstick into the crown of the head, and if the stick passes the skin then the *lama* has achieved *Pho*. To learn the practice of *Pho*, one must have a teacher who can teach him and the mantras for the rituals are written in *Pho pecha* or book. So, when a person dies, it is believed that the soul of the deceased wanders in the house and it is also said that after death, the soul of the deceased gets the kind of power which allows him/ her to go wherever they can and

they know all languages. The only thing they cannot do is attain Buddhahood or cannot come back to the living world. It is only achieved by going through various stages of *Bhardo* liberation of the soul. There is a specific “Pho” lama who specializes in bringing the soul back to the body and guiding the soul of the deceased for rebirth. When a “Pho” lama comes to the house, all the family members and relative should leave the body and lama alone in the room or where the body is lying. To extract the soul from the body, few hair is plucked from the head making way for the soul. It is believed that the soul comes out of the head. The *lama* who practices *pho* should have stayed in meditation for three or four years for the knowledge and practicing it. It is believed that the soul of the deceased wanders. In case, there is no body then the name of the person is required which is given to the lama and he calls out the name of the deceased called *Ngoten* name of the person and some amount of money is given. Then the *lama* calls the soul by name. After the soul has arrived, *Sur* is done and cleansing of sins is required then only the “*Pho*” is done. The essential function of the *Pho lama* is to guide soul through *bhardo*.

### ***Sur***

*Sur* is the other step conducted after the death of a person. It is the process of giving food to the spirit of the deceased. The *Sur* consists of butter, powder of roasted barley *Tsamba*, tea leaves and few drops of sprinkling of water called *Chap* meat and alcohol are not allowed to be put into the fire. *Sur* is done during the breakfast, lunch and dinner time and continues till 49 days because it is said that till 49 days the soul of the deceased remains at home and only after 49 days he or she is reborn. It is believed that the smoke coming out of the *Sur* act as food and water for the soul of the deceased.



Fig 3.1: Sur Burning of Food

### *Chi*

Then the third part is looking into horoscope of the dead known as *chi*. It is looked by a lama who is known as *Chipa lama* who is an expert in looking into the death horoscope. Just like the “*Pho*” lama, he has to finish “*Cham*” to be able to see the horoscope. It requires time of death, age and birth year and by looking into this, the lama decides the date, time and direction to take the body for the cremation and who are allowed and not allowed to see the body of the deceased. So the body is kept till the date given by the *lama*. For getting the horoscope, the family members usually go to the monastery with some money and *khada* for the *lama*.

After the *Pho* is done, the body of the deceased is moved into the prayer room *Chesam*. The body is covered with white cloth and a *thanka* is placed above head of the deceased. This time family members, friends, villagers can come to pay respect by offering the *khada*. The *khada* that is offered during the death should be white plain *khada* without any print on it. One butter lamp is lit, one glass of water and fruits are kept near the body. Before the beginning of all this, the *lamas* who are called for the

rituals prepare *torma* which is made for the ritual. Tormas are usually made up of flour and butter. They paint the *torma* red mixed with vegetable oil *thor* means giving without attachment *ma* means completely present. It is red in colour because Dukpas or Drukpas follow tantric Buddhism and they used to offer blood sacrifice before the ritual but with changing time they gave up with sacrifice and they started using red colour to signify the blood.



Fig 3.2: Torma Prepared for the Ritual





Fig 3.3: Lamas Chanting During the Rituals

*Lamas* start the ceremony with their prayers. The ritual always involves 4 to 5 *lamas*. It is however dependent upon the family of the deceased how many *lamas* they want to use. It also depends upon the family's economic condition. The richer you are, the more *lamas* are used. Usually in this ritual, there is always one head *lama* and other are either apprentice or junior *lamas*. The head *lama* usually presides over the rituals and he holds one *dorjee* and *bell* in his hand and other *lamas* play *gyaling* a wind instrument and *dhangro* drum and *jyampsta* two plate like instrument are played. This time the *bhardo thodol* text is used which is also known as Tibetan book of death. It is actually a guide which the *lama* tells the deceased. The *Bhardo* is divided in three categories; *Chikhai bhardo*, *Chonyid bhardo* and *Sipda bhardo*. Thereafter, *Mani* is also done and the family member are supposed to join the *lamas*.



Fig 3.4: Chemi Lit During Rituals

With the beginning of the rituals *chemi* is lit continuously and there should be 108 *chemi* butter lamps. It is believed that the light from the *chemi* shows the correct path to the deceased. Next morning begins with *lamas* blowing *gyaling* then the *lamas* start with their chanting then when they are finished, foods are offered to the death. They call out the name of the deceased and say foods are offered to you so eat the food. During this whole process, *sur* is burned out side without fail. This process continues till the body is taken out for the cremation. This ritual goes on till the date when body is taken for the cremation. Till the date of cremation *lamas* stay in the house.



Fig 3.5: Gyaling and Dhangro Musical Instruments Used During the Rituals

On the day of cremation, the body is taken outside according to the date and time given by the *lama*. Before taking for cremation, the body is cleaned. Then the body is covered with a white cloth with *khadas* on top of it. Usually the body is taken out lying flat in the coffin. But before the body is taken out there is one more ritual called the *yanku* which needs to be conducted before taking the body outside the house. It is said that whenever a person dies, he or she takes some amount of wealth of fortune with them. To retain those wealth or fortune this ritual of *yanku* is done. Then a *lama* blows a conch shell outside the house for three times. After that, the body is taken out and put in the coffin made of wood and it's kept outside. Then the *lama* chants and the family members go around the body. Then the villagers and friends offer *Khadas*. Then the body is put in a *gari* or rickshaw, which is covered with white *Khada*. Then the body is taken for the cremation to the nearby monastery. Villagers, friends and family members follow the procession and some of them hold incense with them. The procession is led by *lamas* with three to four *lamas*. One

chanting with holding *khada* tied to the coffin and other two blows *gyaling*. In the front of the procession a guy holding *si-bow thanka* is always there. It is believed that the *si-bow thanka* chases away all the evil along the way.

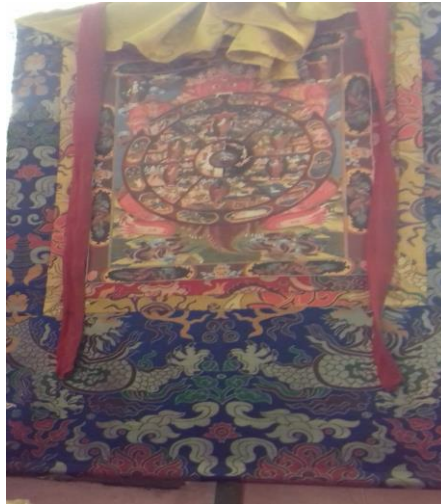


Fig 3.6: Si-Bow Thangka

### **Cremation**

Cremation takes place in the monastery. Family members, friends and villagers assemble in the cremation area to pay their respects. After reaching the monastery, they circle clockwise around the monastery for three times. Then the *lama* from the monastery offers *khada* to the deceased. The body is then taken to the cremation area. The body is taken out of the rickshaw and kept then the *lamas* chants and the family member joins the *lamas* in chanting and *mani* is done. Again foods are offered to the deceased and there is a room where *lamas* sit and chant during cremation. After that, the body is put on the pyre. Then the *lama* gives fire to the pyre and then *lama* puts *tsamba* and butter into the fire. All the people attending the cremation offer wood or small pieces incense into the fire.



Fig 3.7: Cremation of the Body

### **Post Cremation**

Then the *lamas* who are present go back to the monastery, and after three days family members and *lama* return to the cremation ground to collect the bones and ashes. Then they return home. But the bones and ashes are not taken inside the home. On next day *lamas* and family members go to the nearby river to feed those remains to the fishes, before feeding *lamas* mix those remains with *tsamba* and make a small ball known as *cho*. After thirteen days there a ritual known as *Sunday*. During this ritual, *lamas* along with some family members chase away the soul who has come to retrieve the soul of the deceased. It is done because it is believed that the soul can kill other family members. On the 14<sup>th</sup> day, all the rituals are over and after that weekly *lamas* are called for the prayers till the 49<sup>th</sup> day.



Fig 3.8: Lungdars are erected

On the 14<sup>th</sup> day *lungdar* or prayer flag are erected in the name of the dead. It is also done for the purification of the soul. These prayer flags should be white in colour. The number of *lungdar* to be erected totally depends upon those who can afford can go for 108 *lungdars* but one is minimum for the family members. On the same day, *gewa* is done where all the family members and villagers are called for the feast. After the 14<sup>th</sup> day, those who can afford call *lamas* in the house till the 49<sup>th</sup> day and those who cannot afford the expense can go to the monastery to light the *chemi*. After the 49<sup>th</sup> day, yearly death anniversary is observed and *lamas* are called to light *chemi* or people go to the monasteries. The mourning period last for 3 years for the family members.

## **Different Forms of Death**

Death rituals and funeral rites among the Dukpas are similar to all people around the world. Most of the death is treated the same like any other *lamas* playing the major part in the rituals. There are very few differences in rituals and funerary practice depending upon the cause of death. The rituals can also vary on the status of the people.

### ***Death caused by accident or untimely death***

Whenever a person dies, death is caused either by car accident or by any form of accident. If the body of the deceased cannot be retrieved, the *pho* is done by giving name and some amount of money to the *lama* in the monastery. Other rituals have to be conducted in house like any other funeral rites.

In case of suicide, the same kind of *pho* as for the accident is done in the monastery. Though the rituals which are performed, are more extended than the normal funeral rites. It is also said that guiding the soul of a person who has committed suicide is very difficult. It is believed those people commit suicide cannot achieve nirvana. They have to suffer because according to Buddhism taking someone's life is one of the biggest crime and if you have taken your own life it is a bigger crime. If the soul is successfully guided for the rebirth he or she will die again on same age when he or she committed suicide in previous life. The ritual have to extend because it is believed that if this kind of soul is not properly dealt with it can cause harm to the family.

### ***Old age death***

This is the most natural form of death that does not have any bad results. In this situation the rituals are performed as mentioned earlier. This people consist of senior members of the family so to pay the respect. The family members mourn for 3 years in their name.

### ***Death of children***

Whenever a child dies in a family, the death rituals that are conducted are the same as others. The body is also cremated like the other but if we look into more traditional way, the rituals are same but the body is not cremated. Instead it is kept in a cave covered with white cloth. Today no one in Darjeeling performs these rituals and it has lost its importance.

### ***Death of highly attained lama***

These *lamas* are the *Rinpoche* who are considered reincarnate of their former life, also as the living Buddha. These people when they die there is no need for the rituals like *pho*, *sur* and *chi* because they have already attained the knowledge of death and how to tackle it. It is said that their soul dos not require any guidance as they can do this on their own. It requires 108 *lamas* in the chanting and playing the instruments but this is done for the peace and well being of the world and people.

### **Role of Family Members**

The role of family members is very important in death and funeral rituals. Everyone has to be present during the ritual process. It is up to them to conduct all the rituals during ritual process. The eldest member of the family is required to conduct the



rituals. If the eldest member is not present the other from family can perform those rituals. Just after the death it is them who goes to the monastery to fetch the *lamas* for the rituals and all the important things are done by the family members. Even when the *chemi* butter lamps are lit, the entire family member has to light the lamps. Even doing *mani* prayer everybody has to be present. *Sur* is also prepared and burned by the family members according to the instructions given by the *lamas*.

### **Role of the Dukpa Association**

The Dukpa Buddhist Welfare Association is the present body in Darjeeling. Its branches are spread throughout Darjeeling. The main function of this body is to help Dukpa people in Darjeeling. Dukpa Buddhist Welfare Association tries to attend most of the death and funeral rites. They provide the family of the deceased with butter, oil and other items, which are needed during the rituals. They also provide monetary support if the family member cannot afford the expense of rituals. In some of the cases the association has also provided *lamas* to the families because they cannot afford to get themselves. During the *gewa* association manage hall for the people who cannot do themselves.

### **Role of the Villagers**

Whenever someone dies in the family, villagers are the first to respond. They stay in the deceased's house whole night until the body is taken for cremation the next day. They come to the house and help the family members for the functioning of the process. During a death ritual there is always hustle and bustle people come to pay respect to the deceased. In these situation villagers help to maintain order by distributing work among themselves. For example some look in distribution of the tea and some guide the visitors to the sitting area. Some of them also prepare the box and

woods for the cremation. Even during the *gewa* people come to help prepare food and attending the people coming to *gewa*.

### **Role of Village Association**

In Darjeeling each village has an association and these association helps each other within the village during the time of need. In death and funeral rites, the villagers belonging to the association bring sugar, butter, oil, bread and biscuit to the family of the deceased. It is done to help just a little bit to the family of deceased. They also help the family members during the process. Men are usually involved in heavy work were as women works in the kitchen.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Change and Continuity**

Change is a continuous process and cannot be stopped. It is inevitable. Change is the process of growing and evolving which makes us learn new things and teaches us to adapt to our environment. There are various factors such as the geographical location, availability of the resource, socio- economic condition, demographics of the population etc. that causes change. People accept and adapt to these changes as members of society. But like every other thing change, can be either bad or good. Some changes are visible and some are not. Cultural changes are often most visible when it comes to traditional culture and the contact with either modernization or other cultures.

#### **Changes in Dukpa Culture**

If we look into the historical background Dukpas they have come from Bhutan and migrated to Darjeeling. Since the population of Darjeeling is heterogeneous, there is only a fraction of population that belong to the Dukpa community. In due time, they have adapted to the religion of practiced by majority Buddhist population and started following rituals according to their system. The first change, however, according to the president of Dukpa Buddhist welfare association, was changing their title name from 'Dukpa' to 'Bhutia'. Since they changed their title from Dukpas and started using Bhutia, it marked a shift in their identity. It could be seen as a major shift removing them from their Dukpa-selves to create a new Bhutia identity. The second major change was the language shift from Dzongkha to Nepali. Due to the majority Nepali population in Darjeeling, the *lingua franca* of is Nepali. So, the Dukpas have

also made a linguistic shift to the Nepali language. Adapting to the Nepali language gave access to Nepali culture and Dukpas started observing and practicing certain Nepali festivals like *Dasai*, Tihar. Likewise they picked up the food habits and started preparing *sel roti* and other Nepali cuisines of Darjeeling hills. Today majority of the Dukpas in Darjeeling and Lamahatta don't speak Dzonkha, instead they are fluent in Nepali which does not always express the deeper meanings of Dukpa rituals. Likewise, the traditional Dukpa attire is worn only during festivals, religious ceremonies and marriages.

### **Changes in Death Rites**

In terms of the changes in the Dukpa death rituals, the first and foremost problem is the difficulty in finding Dukpa *lamas* to conduct the rituals. Whenever someone dies in the family, it is necessary to find the *lama* to take care of the rites but since Dukpa *lamas* are not easily available, people don't give priority to Dukpa *lamas*; so they involve *lamas* belonging to other communities like Bhutia, Sherpa, Tamang etc. to perform their rituals. They will perform the rituals as performed in their own respective communities and not necessarily conduct as done by the Dukpas traditionally. Likewise, the language also plays an important role during rituals, because every religious text of Buddhism is written in Tibetan and the common Dukpa people don't understand whether the rituals are being performed according to the Dukpa tradition or others.

Since the Dukpa funeral process is very elaborate in nature and takes a long time, people today don't have time to conduct these long rituals. Thus they have adapted and made it shorter. Traditionally after death, the effigy of the deceased was kept in the prayer room dressed in the clothes of the deceased and kept in the house

for 49 days. Till 49 days foods were offered to the effigy and a *lama* used to stay in the house for praying and chanting. It was *lama* who addresses the soul of the dead that food has arrived and now it's time to eat. Traditionally, all rituals lasted 49 days but people do not have that kind of time today. They try to shorten the rituals according to their convenience.

Traditionally when cremation is done, the *lama* used to go back to monastery for the cleansing process. After that they used to come back to the house for the other ritual or to pray for the good of the family and also for the soul of the deceased and stayed for 49 days, Nowadays *lamas* return on the 13<sup>th</sup> day and on the next day, which is the 14<sup>th</sup> day, they will end with the rituals.

*Sunday* is the process of chasing away the evil spirits that killed the person or in layman's term we can call it a reaper was done on the same day of the cremation. When the cremation used to be over *lamas* use to come home after disposing of the ashes of the deceased to the chase the *Sunday*. Today this ritual is also done on the same day.

Even the traditional instruments like *nangra* a drum used to be played during rituals by *lamas*. Today this instrument is not found. Even the *kharkunda* a brass utensil where the body was kept while taking for the cremation is not there and today people prefer taking the body to the cremation ground in sleeping position because it has become more convenient and easy for everyone.

Death anniversaries used to be a big deal back then. Today, people don't even observe the death anniversary because they believe that after 49 days, a dead person take rebirth into new life so they think that it is useless to observe the anniversary.

If we look into the traditional death rituals, we can see meat and home brewed alcohol was very important. These items were used throughout the rituals including even those who come to visit are given meat and alcohol as food. Today we can see that majority of the Dukpas don't use meat and alcohol. They rather go for vegetarian food during death rituals. It is because other communities in Darjeeling thinks using meat and alcohol is for festive occasions and not for solemn events taking it in a negative way. So Dukpas in Darjeeling have adapted the same system and stopped using meat and alcohol during Dukpa funeral rites.

Another reason for the banning of meat during rituals is also because of Buddhist views as people have become more conscious regarding their religion. Since Buddhism talks about non violence or considers it wrong to take other lives, even if it is an animal or an insect. People now believe that if they use meat during rituals it will affect the soul of the deceased and he or she can be reborn as the most insignificant creature so they refrain from it. There are very few Dukpas who go for traditional rituals and use meat during the rituals. Since I am from Darjeeling I have only heard about one Dukpa family conducting authentic Dukpa rituals while using meat and alcohol. Even the food which is offered to the lama have changed. Traditionally meat and alcohol was served to the *lamas* during the rituals. But today we can see even that *lamas* have become vegetarian and prefer vegetarian dishes. Even during the *gewa* -the last ritual which is traditional performed on 49<sup>th</sup> day meat and alcohol is absent. Today some of them do this ritual in 13 days. It is the last ritual has to be done on 49<sup>th</sup> according to the Dukpa belief.

## Reasons for Change

The death rituals are very expensive because it is a very lengthy process. The ritual last for 14 days and after that it continuous by calling *lamas* once a week for prayers till the 49 days. At the end of the final ritual which is on the 49<sup>th</sup> day family members give feast which is usually given to all the villagers and family members. During the process of rituals, *chemi* are lit continuously which is brought from the monastery by paying money and has to be returned after finishing the rituals. During the death *lamas* are called for to perform the rituals and the *lamas* stays in the house till cremation. During this period, household has to take care of the *lamas* by providing them with food, tea, and other necessities plus cash. The numbers of *lamas* brought for the ritual are usually 6 to 5 but the minimum is 4. This itself is an expensive affair and is difficult to manage especially financially for many Dukpa families. However, the community, the villagers and association members come to help Dukpa families during death rituals. Because of their support and hard work they are given food and tea.

The firewood which is used in the pyre and for making the coffin are usually bought from the mill. After the cremation, food is given to the people who have attend the funeral procession. At the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> day final day of ritual the *lamas* are to be paid some amount of money. The head *lama* is given little more then the other *lamas*. The rituals continue even after the 14 days after that once a week *lamas* are called for the prayer in the house and they return same day. It goes on till the 49<sup>th</sup> day when the *gewa* is a done. By doing all these the household usually pays around Rs.40- 50,000 in cash excluding the other expenses they have to bear.

Today people have made the ritual more short and fast tracked because of the time constraints people are facing today. Today people don't have enough time to stay at home and conduct the long and elaborative rituals, rather they prefer short cut. Traditionally the rituals go on for the 49 days. Slowly it was shortened to 21 days and finally it came down to the 14 days. Most Dukpa youths work in armed forces which also makes it difficult for them to come home and sometimes they are unable to attend the death rites of family members. Likewise, those working in government sectors also don't get leave to sit at home and conduct long rituals. So this has led to the shortening of rituals.

Today, there are very few Dukpa elder people left who have witnessed the original Dukpa death rituals. Most of the youths and adults are less informed about Dukpa death rituals. This is also caused due to the fact that elderly members of the Dukpa community have failed to pass down the knowledge that they have acquired. In terms of the language, same thing happened and majority of Dukpas don't know their Dzongkha language.

One of the other reasons why it has been shortened from 49 days is because of the other Buddhists in Darjeeling who only go for the 14 day rituals. It is caused by the scarcity of Dukpa *lamas* and the usage of *lamas* which Dukpas use nowadays that belong to different community and they perform the ritual according to their community instead of Dukpa ritual..

The absence of traditional Dukpa ritual is also a result of mixed marriages have taken place among Dukpas. The number of people marrying outside the community is effecting the population of Dukpas. Whenever a Dukpa girl marries a guy from another community, the girl has to go and live with the husband's family.



She has to give up on her religion, tradition and rituals to accept the one that her husband follows. In case of males marrying outside the community, it is considered okay and its not seen as the bad effect on the community. There are instances where husband changed their religion according to the wife. But sometimes the coming together of two traditions has also effected the population of Dukpas. Most of the people in Lamahatta village also holds this idea very strongly.

Lastly, finding Dukpa *lamas* in Darjeeling has become a very difficult task. The stagnant population of Dukpas has also affected the number of *lamas*. Even the monasteries like *Druk Sangag Choling Monastery* which is the headquarter of *Drukpa kargyu* sect of Buddhism does not have any Dukpa *lamas*. Even these monasteries bring *lamas* from Bhutan during important rituals so Dukpa households are bound to bring non-Dukpa *lamas* in their ritual practices. Only rich families get *lamas* from Bhutan and Sikkim to conduct the rituals.

The Dukpas association present in Darjeeling is trying to counter all the problems faced by the Dukpas in Darjeeling. They are making efforts to revive the other cultural practices. Even in death rituals association always help the people who are in need and cannot conduct the death and funeral rituals. They usually collect money from the members to help these people.

However, we can find that the changes in actual rituals practices are not huge since it shares similarity with other Buddhist religion. But if we look closely we can observe various small changes which are equally important in understanding the traditional Dukpa death rituals.

## **Buddhist and Non Buddhist Dukpas**

In Darjeeling, Dukpas are mainly divided into two categories; Buddhist and non-Buddhist Dukpas. The non-Buddhist Dukpas are usually Christian. However, the number of Christian Dukpas is very less compared to Buddhist Dukpas. In terms of death rituals the Christian Dukpas do not follow the Buddhist tradition. They mostly bury the body according to the Christian tradition. The Christian tradition is not elaborative in nature and neither is expensive as compared to their counter parts. So we can also see a lot of Buddhist Dukpas converting to Christianity. Since the Christians do not believe in rebirth, there is no concept of *pho* which is process of guiding the soul for rebirth and the giving food to the deceased known as *sur* is not there; neither do they look into the horoscope for taking the body for cremation. So the expenses incurred during this time is saved if you conduct your death ritual in the Christian tradition. Likewise, the *lamas* are also not used because of which the rituals are simple and direct in terms of Buddhist Dukpas are very elaborating and sometimes bit confusing to the outsiders.

The death ritual of Christian Dukpas are also short as compared to the Buddhist Dukpas. They usually take the body to the church and to the graveyard for the burial of the body. There is no lengthy process like *lamas* chanting before the body is cremated, nor the payment that needs to be given to the *lamas*. The death ritual ends with the burial of the body. There is no concept of weekly prayers done till 49 days like in Buddhist rituals. They don't give *gewa* which is observed in 49<sup>th</sup> of the ritual. There is no concept of lighting *chemi* and erecting of *lungadrs* in the name of the deceased. Every year they don't have to call *lamas* to conduct the anniversary of

the deceased. In that, the Christian death rites is quick, cheap and does not require so much time and energy.

The Buddhist death rituals on the other hand are expensive and elaborative in nature and since finding the *lamas* has become more difficult it has become more expensive. So people who cannot afford the expense of the rituals convert into Christianity some of them convert because of faith. There is one more reason people converting into Christianity is when a person fell sick they grow faith towards Christianity and the support from the church and other people convince them to convert

### **Continuity**

Despite of scarcity of *lamas* in Darjeeling, people are trying to maintain the ritual practices. Some of them even call *lamas* from Bhutan and Sikkim to conduct the authentic death rituals. Majority of Dukpas follow the instruction of *lamas* while conducting the rituals even when the *lamas* are not Dukpas. Majority of the Dukpa population living in Lamahatta are dependent upon agriculture and because of that the people cannot afford to perform expensive death rituals. Since the death rituals are performed according to instructions of *lamas* people don't ask questions and they do whatever they are asked to do because they want the soul of the deceased to find peace. Despite the expenses and other limitations, they still try to conduct authentic death rituals and the Dukpa association has taken various steps to help the poor people who are unable to conduct the rituals. They contribute money and also provide *lamas* for the family and the ritual.

Dukpas in Darjeeling and Lamahatta is trying to keep their rituals as authentic as possible because even they believe that they are different from the other Buddhist

community present in Darjeeling. People are of the idea that the traditional ritual is fading away even though they trying to protect whatever is left of the rituals.

## Chapter 5

### Summary and Conclusion

#### Buddhist Concept of Death

According to Buddhist philosophy, death is something which no one can escape everyone has to meet his or her end. One is born one has to die which is truth which everyone has to face. According to the Buddha everything is temporary in this world nothing is permanent. When people start give meaning to those temporary things it becomes harder for them to leave because they get attached to the thing. (Khadro 1999)

Buddha discovered and pointed out to us is the truth of impermanence. That all the phenomena in nature, and all human made things will not last forever, but will go out of existence at some point. (Khadro 1999)

As Buddha himself said:

*What is born will die*<sup>[1]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

*What has been gathered will be dispersed,*

*What has been accumulated will be exhausted,*

*What has been built up will collapse*<sup>[1]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

*And what has been high will be brought low.*

*This existence of ours is as transient as autumn clouds.*

*To watch the birth and death of beings is like looking at the movements of a dance.*

*A lifetime is like a flash of lightning in the sky, Rushing by, like a torrent down a steep mountain. (Khadro 1999)*

People may fear that accepting and thinking about death will make them morbid but surprisingly, the opposite is true. Denying death makes us tense accepting it brings peace. And it helps us become aware of what is really important in life for example, being kind and loving to others, being honest and unselfish so that we will put our energy into those things and avoid doing what would cause us to feel fear and regret in the face of death. (Rinpoche 1992)

The process of dying is explained in conservable detail in different Tibetan teaching. Essentially it consists of two phases of dissolution an outer dissolution, when the senses and elements dissolve, and an inner dissolution subtle thought and emotions. The whole human existence is determined by the elements earth, water, fire, air and space. Through them our body is formed and sustained, and when they dissolve we die. (Rinpoche 1992)

These five elements are minds ability to serve, as the ground for all experience is the quality of the earth, its continuity and adaptability is water, its clarity and capacity to perceive is fire, its continuous movement is air and its unlimited emptiness in space. (Rinpoche 1992)

Dying and taking rebirth are two of the symptoms of ordinary, *samsara* continuous rebirth it the state of where a person has to face problems such as dissatisfaction, illness, loss of someone and death which all of us are caught in, until

and unless one achieves *nirvana* and frees from all this suffering. The reason we are in this situation is because of the presence in our mind of delusions chiefly attachment, anger and ignorance and the imprints of our *karma* action performed under the influence of delusions. (Khadro 1999)

Lamahatta is the only place in Darjeeling that has a high concentration of Dukpas. Otherwise Dukpas in Darjeeling are very much in minority. Dukpas trace their origin to Bhutan but in Darjeeling they are in minority and have taken up the Bhutia identity. In this scenario, the Dukpas of Darjeeling have either assimilated or adapted to other cultures or have forgotten their rituals. The main problem of Dukpas in Darjeeling was not being able to perform authentic death rituals. Lack of Dukpa *lamas* in Darjeeling has affected the ritual performance. The Dukpa monasteries like *Druk Choling Monastery* or popularly known as the Dali Gumba in Darjeeling is considered the headquarters of Dukpa Kargyu sect of Buddhism in Darjeeling but there are no Dukpa *lamas*. The monastery has to call *lamas* from Bhutan because they don't have local Dukpa *lamas* present. In this backdrop, this research makes an attempt to provide a descriptive account of the Dukpa death rites also to examine the influence of the other culture on Dukpa death rituals and to study the change on death rites of Buddhist and non- Buddhist Dukpas.

Death rites are very important in every culture. Different cultures have their different ways of performing funeral rites. Every culture has their own experts who perform the funeral rites. Birth is the beginning of the life in the same way death is the end of life, and so both are very important in every culture. Among Dukpas too whenever a person dies, the spirit of the deceased goes through various stages for the rebirth depending upon the karma of past. Since most Dukpas are Buddhists, they

believe in reincarnation, so when they die they will be reborn again. The goal is to escape the cycle of death and be reborn and eventually attain nirvana or a state of perfect peace.

Dukpas or Drukpas are from Bhutan. "Druk" in Tibetan means "Dragon" and it also refers to the sound of thunder, as Bhutan is also known as the land of thunder dragon. In 1206, Tsangpa Gyare Yeshe Dorje saw nine dragons fly up into the sky from the ground of Namdruk, and he named his lineage "Dukpa" or "lineage of the Dragons" after this auspicious event. The Dukpa lineage is the branch of Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism. In Darjeeling, Dukpas have been living there for a long period of time. The population of Dukpas in Darjeeling is very less compared to other communities residing there. Since Dukpas fall into the minority community, they have either adopted or assimilated to various cultures, rituals of other dominant cultures. In this context, the cultural practices of Dukpas have been dwindling or assimilated to other practices. Likewise, the cosmopolitan nature of Darjeeling, allows lot of syncretism visible among the Dukpas and neighboring communities of Darjeeling. The stagnant population has also affected the culture of Dukpas and has also affected in number of Dukpa *lamas* that resulted into the change into the ritual practice of Dukpas in Darjeeling. The coming of Dukpas in Darjeeling can be traced to their original homeland of Bhutan. Though there are no official written documents which proves the migration of Dukpas from Bhutan to Darjeeling, according to Subba (2010) it is plausible that the Bhutanese had settled there even before 1706 when Bhutan annexed it from Sikkim. The Dukpa in Darjeeling hill comprises of various groups whose ancestors migrated at different periods of time, commencing as early as 6<sup>th</sup> century. But there is some evidence which proves that Dukpas in Darjeeling has been living before the independence. Example can be taken of Gaga Tshering Dukpa,



a Dukpa freedom fighter involved in the freedom struggle for India along with other freedom fighters from Darjeeling.

However Dukpas of Darjeeling do not occupy a separate identity. Instead, Dukpas of the Darjeeling fall under the Bhutia community. Bhutias comprise of eight other groups including Sikkimese Bhutias or Denzongpas -a mixed race of Tibetans and Lepchas; Sherpa Bhutias -who came from east of Nepal; the Dukpa Bhutias, the descendants of the Bhutanese who were settled on the land at the time of annexation, and the Tibetan Bhutias who had immigrated from the land of Tibet. However, the Dukpas of Lamahatta were the sample population for this specific study as this is where the Dukpa population is concentrated compared to other places in Darjeeling. There are various stories and histories associated with Lamahatta which can give us idea about how Dukpa people came to Darjeeling.

In detailing the account of death rituals among Dukpas, the important rituals like *pho* -the process of guiding the soul into the afterlife, *sur* -the process of giving food to the deceased and *chi* -looking into the horoscope of the deceased to fix the date, time and direction is discussed. Further the role of *lamas* who reads *bhardo* and guides the soul by letting the deceased of soul know where he or she has reached and to move further. These processes continues till the cremation of the body. After cremation, the other processes like disposal of ashes, chasing away of the ghost away who has come to retrieve the soul of the deceased, is done on the 13<sup>th</sup> day, and on the next day which is the 14<sup>th</sup> day, final rituals are performed and it usually involves praying. Though even after these ritual *lamas* are called once a week for the prayer till the 49<sup>th</sup> day and then *gewa* is done as a feast where villagers and friends are called.

Buddhist philosophical view on death and how death is not considered as the end and it the fact that everyone has to accept the truth. Today majority of people think speaking of death is considered taboo but according to Buddhist philosophy one has to accept death and has to be prepared before it comes.

This research reveals that the rituals have changed in some ways due to the influence of other cultures, and what happens when one accepts another culture. The case of non-Buddhist Dukpas opens up to the Christian Dukpas who do not practice any of the traditional Dukpa death rites. Though the number of Christian Dukpas is very less as compared to the Buddhist Dukpas, they don't practice any Buddhist rituals rather they follow the Christian rituals. They do not have lengthy funeral process and is inexpensive as compared to the Buddhist rituals. Major reason for the change is also because of the Dukpas rituals are so expensive that people have accepted Christianity to do away with all the expensive rituals.

Majority of Dukpas today don't perform authentic death rituals but there are few elderly villagers who have witnessed the rituals. While asking whether they prefer authentic death rituals or they want to what is been practiced today. Most of the elders reacted that they prefer authentic death rituals rather than other. Some also mentioned that they wanted people to use meat during rituals though most of the villagers were not in support of the statement they said not using of the meat in death rituals is good thing that they left. Same question when asked to the middle aged villagers they replied they don't have any preference their family can use whatever *lamas* they can get for the rituals.

With the scarce practice of authentic Dukpa death rituals, it is difficult to tell how long it will last because the death rites today are all a corrupt version of how it

used to be. Unfortunately, there are also no attempts being made to revive the death rituals of Dukpas. It is only hoped that organizations like the Dukpa association etc. can revive and ultimately safeguard the Dukpa death rituals.

To revive the traditional death rituals among the Dukpas of the Darjeeling, the Dukpa association of Darjeeling need to play a very important role because of the branches of the association which are spread all over Darjeeling. This can help spread awareness regarding the traditional death rituals to those people who don't have access to this information. The Dukpa population is scattered all over Darjeeling district and they don't often have any interaction with other groups. They can also help those groups to come together so they can share their tradition knowledge with others and also help to guide one another for any tradition death rituals.

Dukpas in the Darjeeling don't speak *Dzongkha* instead majority of them speak Nepali which is the *lingua franca* of Darjeeling. Setting up of the schools that can teach *Dzongkha* language to the Dukpa population so it can help the people to track the rituals conducted by the *lamas*. So if we can understand what *lamas* are doing we can interpret the rituals how to do what to do and what are the rituals that are not conducted, so we can ask the *lamas* to perform those rituals. The text that is used by the *lamas* are written in Tibetan. Since the *Dzongkha* and Tibetan share the script we can be able to understand the rituals. Which can help to conduct authentic death rituals.

Dukpas in Darjeeling through the Dukpa association can gather money to send *lamas* to Sikkim and Bhutan to learn the ritual practices. After gaining that knowledge they can practice the rituals in Darjeeling and also pass those knowledge and encourage the coming generation of *lamas*.

The expensiveness of the rituals also forces people to go for the cheap method for conducting death rituals. The majority of the Dukpa population in Darjeeling live in village and practice agriculture because of which they don't have enough income to conduct authentic death rituals. To prevent this from happening Dukpa people can help these people not only by monetary way but also by providing items which are essential during death rituals which they cannot afford to buy with their own.

But most importantly, it is also the responsibility of the Dukpas to know about their tradition. Thereafter, they need to protect, preserve and the practice the same. The responsibility lies in the hands of each Dukpa individual to safeguard their tradition.

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## Glossary

Alu dum- it is food made up of potato and chilies and is usually in red colour.

Chi- the process of looking into the horoscope of the dead, for the cremation time, date and direction.

Cham- *lama* staying in meditation for 3 to 4 years is called *cham*.

Chemi- butter lamps that are used during the death rituals that usually consist of 108 lamps.

Chaang- home made alcoholic drink

Dashai- festival celebrated by the nepalese

Druk yul- name of Bhutan in early days it was only after the coming of British in India it was called Bhutan

Drukpa Kargyu- school of Tantric Mahayana Buddhism in Bhutan

Dorji- the ecclesiastical scepter or the double-headed thunderbolt (in Tibet the word *vajrah* became *dorje* the common of all emblems associated with priestly power), which the Lama holds in his hand during service

Dzonkha- it is the national language of Bhutan

Ema datse- dish made up of cheese and chilies. It is very important dish for Dukpas and made during any rituals and ceremonies.

Gho- traditional dress of Dukpa men

Gyaling- brass wind instrument blown during the death rituals.

Gewa- on 49<sup>th</sup> day of death ritual *gewa* is done, it is feast where all villagers and friend are invited

Jhurumuru- traditional biscuit made of flour prepared during the special ceremonies.

Kargyu- one of the sect of Tibetan Buddhism and Dukpas comes under this sect.

Khapsyo- same as *jhurumuru* but it is bigger in size made out of flour.

Kira- traditional dress for Dukpa women.

Lama- ritual experts who conducts most of the rituals and ceremonies.

Lamini- they are the women *lama* but they do not conduct the any ritual or ceremonies.

Lungdar- prayer flag that is erected for the good of the deceased soul. The flags are in various colour but the white is used for the dead rituals.

Lossung- festival celebrated by the Dukpas in Darjeeling and fall during the month of December.

Ling- it means place.

Mani- it prayer done during various rituals not only for death rituals

Momo- Tibetan style dumpling made during the festivals or special ceremonies.

Nirvana- the state of deliverance from the suffering or *samara*.

Pecha- book used by the *lamas*.

Pho- it is process of guiding the soul to rebirth.

Samsara- the world of suffering and ignorance created by karma can be refered as cyclic existence.

Sakadawa- it is the most sacred day in Tibetan Buddhism. On the this day Sakyamuni Buddha was born, became enlightened and died.

Sem- is the soul of the deceased.

Sel roti- it is bread made out of rice powder usually made by Nepalese during special occasion.

Si bow- thanka that is use in all the ceremonies to chase all the evil on the way.

Sunday- the process of chasing the evil sprit from home.

## Appendix



Fig 6.1: Lamahatta School

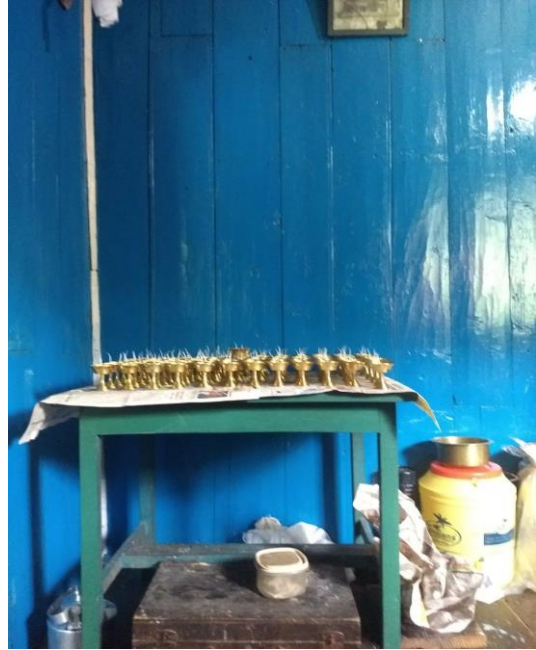


Fig 6.2: 108 *Chemi* or Butter Lamps



Fig 6.3: *Druk Sangag Choling* Monastery



Fig 6.4: Lungdar or Prayer Flags



Fig 6.5: Picture of Si Bow Thaka



Fig 6.6: People helping in Erecting Prayer Flags