

Paganism and Spiritism

A Study of Religion and Ritual in the Sherpa Society

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Man in all times and climes has to adjust himself to a host of variable situations especially with the nature - environment in his quest for food, clothing and shelter; and he must depend on his friends and neighbours to satisfy his expressively felt needs, as also or persons with supernatural potentialities who can seemingly exercise control over life and destiny when many questions relating to man's existence remain unanswered. In this vast universe, man has to face problems of varied natures, and these problems are not solved all at once, despite his technological progress and the gradual growth of his reasoning. Instead he persues relentlessly for solutions to those unsolved questions, and when the solution fails he attributes it to the bizarre design of supernatural forces and, through the media of magic and propitiation, as performed by these practitioners of magical art he solicits their grace for a better, trouble-free and assured life (Bhowmik, 1973:2). Especially among cultures in which people do not have the technological ability to control the environment, they resort to magic and religion. Chandra (1981) as a major ingredient of culture, and argues that "Religion, both as a dogma and as a way of life, helps in maintaining a well adjusted plane with the ecology thus satisfying people to fulfill their requirements in terms of (i) deriving remedial treatment to their problems, and (ii) achieving psychological satisfaction". According to him, harder ecological conditions contribute to a stronger

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religious faith. It is also considered that religion, as a belief system, serves two important functions in society: as common binding force, and as method of social control.

In order to fulfil the aforesaid aims man must go through different rituals for his pragmatic and transcendental concerns. The ritual is generally categorized into two classifications: one is the type of ritual performed for the society as whole (rites of intensification) and the other is the ritual performed for an individual (rites de passage). According to time and situation, both types of classificatory rites may also come under domestic ritual. In the context of ritual, sociologists and anthropologists have defined ritual in different ways: "Ritual has invariably been shown to be socially necessary act as one which promotes group cohesiveness" (Durkheim); or as one which sacralizes tradition and acts as a guarantee of legitimate order" (Weber); or again as one "that allays anxiety, protects the social organization against the forces of instability and keeps in a state of balance" (Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown), and "it is a transcendently necessary" act which means that reality symbolised is metaphysica" (Sharma, 1971:113).

In order to know man, his society and culture, anthropologists have followed different approaches as a part of their methodology. In this context I have followed the concept Nature-Man-Spirit Complex propounded by Vidhyarathi (1963). The concept has been developed under the theme of cultural ecology and functionalism. The trichotomy stands for cultural ecology,

social system and spiritism respectively. As the same author (1981) writes, "Arising out of man's close interaction with an dependence on Nature is his belief in the supernatural and the spirit world. The three are then intertwined inextricably, at times merging into each other. Therefore, the concept has become very useful in analysing the life styles of simpler communities". However, the study reported here within is not exactly in tune with the study of the Maler by Vidhyarathi (1963). There is a great difference between the whole cultural surrounding of Maler of Santhal Paraganna of Bihar and the Sherpa culture of Nepal Himalayan region. The purpose of writing this article none-the-less is to show how the Sherpas are associated with nature, gods and spirits (supernatural forces) on one hand, and to explain why they perform certain rites and rituals on various occasions on the other.

Anthropologists seek not only to know the explicit culture but also the implicit culture of people. Without studying the implicit culture no ethnographic study will be complete. Thus, for the purpose of conceptually highlighting the religious scenario prevailing in the Sherpa society, this article is written on the basis of ecology (science of connexion or adaptation to environment), symbology and typology. While describing the ritual processes and performances I have not given so much Tibetan transliteration form of the Sherpa terms.

Methodologically, the work reported here-in is based on participant observation and unstructured interviews. Though fieldwork was done in Lamobagar, Bigu, Labchi-

Lumnang, Rolwaling, Simigaon, Khumbu and Solu in 1984-85, the title and the whole description of this paper is developed from three different communal and household rites. It was observed in Lamobagar for several times and twice in Mt. Everest Base Camp. The rites are locally known as *lhapso*, *lhabsang*, *chilhapso*. The word *lhapso* is derived from Tibetan words *lha-gsol* which means invocation and offerings to the local gods. Similarly, the term *lhabsang* is derived from Tibetan word *lha-bsang* meaning offerings of incense to the gods. The term *chilhapso* means invocation and offerings to the local gods by all villagers at the same time. The term *lhapso* is used by the Sherpas of Khumbu, *hyulsang* (*yul-sang*) by the Sherpas of Solu-Junbesi, *chilhapso* and *lhabsang* by the Sherpas of Lamobagar. However, this rite is not observed by the Sherpas of Bigu. While interpreting these terms in Nepali, the Sherpas of Lamobagar say, *bhume bujhaune* which means 'worship to the earth' (in my own understanding). They further interpret it as "your dewali" (family deity's worship which is performed either once a year or once every two years). The term *bhume bujhaune* or *sime bhume ko puja* (worship of local deities or spirits) is also used by the Tamangs, the another Tibetan Buddhist group of hilly region. These people worshipped or pleased the gods in the past; they worship in the present; probably they will worship in the future too. In fact, it is a continual cultural process of human beings. This can be applied to those who worship gods (almost unseen) to seek some favour. "This means that God is the focal point of man's religious sentiment" (Chaudhari, 1966:45).

On one side it seems clear how certain rituals have functioned as a system

of a particular society in the context of structural arrangement; and on the other side, how the altar items, ritual offerings, mode of worship, ritual objects and other ingredients give a true picture of the society in a symbolic way. Therefore, to study the aforesaid rituals Geertz's (1973) concept "model of" and "model for" (two aspects for single process) is not out of place in understanding the symbolic culture of the people within this acro-cultural study.

The Sherpas while generally defined as an independent ethnic group, are racially Tibeto-Mongoloid, habitationally high altitude dwellers, occupationally agro-pastoralist and trans-Himalayan traders, and socially unstratified within the core clan group and *matawali* (alcohol-drinker or sacred thread unwearer). They have developed mountaineering skill by following the concept "He who hesitates is lost" rather than the concept "Look before leap." But this does not mean that they practice those type of slogans in behavioral aspect.

Though the Sherpas are members of a little community, they are guided by Buddhist tradition in terms of 'great tradition' propounded by Redfield (1955) or 'oral, textual and ascetic tradition' propounded by Saraswati (1970). But, this does not mean they are not characterized by both 'shamanic' (preliterate) and 'clerical' (centralized) nature (Sammuel, 1985:383).

In order to know the Sherpa culture implicitly, one has to know the full version of trichotomy-*chhi-rang-sang sum*. The trichotomy refers to 'exterior' 'interior' 'secret' 'three' respectively. Functionally the trichotomy has influenced an important role

in shaping not only their religious culture but also their social life. The way of maintaining secrecy is a part of the covert aspect of human behaviour. Therefore, it has become one of the important covert features of this snow bound culture. Change in their community goes on, for example, the process of urbanization, but still *chhi-nang-sang sum* remains a part of their life.

Ecological Setting of Lamobagar

Lamobagar is situated on the northern side of Dolakha district of Janakpur zone. The shape of the studied village is parallel and is one kilometre in length and half kilometre in breadth lying on the south-western side of Mt. Gaurishankar. The name of this village is derived from the flat Sandy land which is known as *chhyoksam* in the Sherpa language and the inhabitants of the area are called *chhyoksampa* by the Sherpas and Tibetans of the other regions.

Seven hour drive along the motor road linking Kathmandu with Jiri brings one to the Bus stop, Charikot (District head-quarter of Dolakha), the starting point to reach Lamobagar (35.5 kilometre); it can be reached in two days' walk for local people and three to four days for outsiders. The route goes through Dolakha-Ratomate-Torikhet Gumukhola (Pikhuti)-Singhati-Bhorle-Suridovan-Totala Bari-Manthali-Jagat-Gongar Chhyochhyot and finally to Lamobagar. After following the right track from Chhyochhyot one may reach Simigaon and Rolwaling valley. Rolwaling is another Sherpa village situated still farther from Mt. Gaurishankar. Labchi, Lamobagar and Rolwaling Sherpa villages are quite attractive from the acro-

cultural perspective. Labchi, the last north western Sherpa village of the district is 26.61 kilometre (two days' walk) from Lamobagar. There is an intimate relationship between the people of Labchi, Lamobagar, Rolwaling and Rongshyar (Nep. Falak: a Chinese village) in the socio-economic sphere. But, there is special touch due to the natural environment and geographical situation, between Labchi and Ngenam (Nep. Kuti: a Chinese village); Lamobagar and Rongshyar; Rolwaling and Khumbu. Rongshyar has become the popular traditional trade centre for the Sherpa of Lamobagar.

The elevation of Lamobagar is 6,170 ft. with the temperature ranging upto 22° celsius (May, 1985). On both the eastern sides of the village, two big hills are situated and on the northern side is a narrow gorge which leads Labchi - Lumnang and Rongshyar. There is a small mountain, *risumgonbo*, on the northern side of Lamobagar which consists of three small peaks. The eastern hill seems mostly rocky. Timber is abundant on the western and southern sides of the village. According to the local people, they face no problem regarding the availability of firewood and house construction, provided that the forest is protected from fire.

The Bhote Koshi, a big river flows down from north to south. Physiographically, due to the river, the total area of Lamobagar can be divided into four sections while politically it is divided into two wards (ward no 2 and 3) of Lamobagar Village Panchayat. The village, one of the four small sections on the right bank of Bhote Koshi, is called *farken yul* where

Tibetan refugees and three Sherpa families have settled down. The second village is situated on the left side of the river and is known as *chhyur'ka yul* or *yul tyang* and is occupied by the Sherpas and some Tibetan families. The third village, *yul chhok*, lies on the lowest part of the area where some Sherpas, some non-Sherpas and the government staff have taken residence. Saldong, the fourth village, situated in the south-eastern part of the area, is occupied by the Sherpas. The Lamobagar village is comprised of different ethnic groups: the neo-Kshatriyas (cross-breed from Kshatriyas and Sherpanis), Newars, Tamangs, and Gurungs.

There are 310 individuals and 74 refugees which comprise total 75 native and 21 Tibetan households in Lamobagar. Out of these, 14 households belong to non-Sherpa groups. There are a total of 218 livestock including local and high altitude cattle, owned by the people of Lamobagar.

On the whole, the Sherpas do not live in nucleated villages, but in homesteads dispersed around a limited area. A Health Post, Lower Secondary School, Police Check Post, Border Administration Office, Post Office, Northern Belt Pasture Development Office, Agricultural Sub-section have been established in Lamobagar.

There is one *chhorten*, one long *mani* and two *gonpas* inside the village. Among the two *gonpas* the *chhewar gonpa* belongs to the Tibetan refugees. Here religious education is provided for the Tibetan children. Previously this *gonpa* belonged to the *kagyupa* sect but now it has changed into the *ge-lug-pa* sect of Tibetan Buddhism. The abbot of monastery or *gonpa* is Tibetan reincarnated

lama. In this monastery one Sherpa boy also learns monastic education. The Nepali *Pemachholing gonpa* (Village temple) is under the *nying-ma-pa* sect. The three huge stones in the three corner of this village are regarded as *dwarapalas* (village guardians). There are three sacred sites of Seti Devi, Kali Devi and Jala Devi on the western side of the *yul chhok*. The Seti Devi is known as *karchhyok kyoki siddhak. kalibhairun* for Kali Devi and *dubchhyu* for Jala Devi among the Sherpas of Lamobagar.

The village is comprised of different Sherpa clans, such as Salaka, Gardza, Lhaksindu, Ngomba and Chyawa. Therefore, Lamobagar is not a single clan village like in Solu. From the view-point of clan affiliation, Lamobagar is similar to Rolwaling and Khumbu (multi-clan village). Prior to 1959, the Sherpas of Lamobagar practised cross-cousin marriage but after 1959, due to the impact of Tibetans of Rongshyar, they have abandoned this practice. Despite being influenced by the Tibetans of Rongshyar, they have never entered polyandrous marriages as was practiced by some Sherpas of Khumbu (Furer-Haimendorf, 1964:68-74).

So far as their dress and interior sanitation of the house is concerned they rarely change clothes and one gets peculiar smell from the interior parts of their houses. They use their clothes as dusters and towels and take them off only when they attend a certain ceremonial occasions. But, it does not mean that the Sherpas do not take their clothes off at the time of sleeping in the night. However, the dresses are never washed because it takes a long time to dry. Bathing is also rare because of cold climate. But the ritual bath is taken once in a year, is known as *mal chhyu* (summer water).

However, this is not a study of aqua symbolism. Besides *mal chhyu* bathing, few young Sherpa girls take bath before *dumje* (local: *dimju*) (exorcism rite) festival for the purpose of becoming neat and clean before the audiences. Otherwise the hair is also completely neglected, greased with oil or butter to drive away fleas and lice. On the whole, the body emits a peculiar odour non-favourable to outsiders. However, among the Sherpas, one is not neglected by the others, their behaviour and dress are entirely accepted in their community because they have same type of ecology. Due to the poor ecology, Sherpas of Lamobagar are maintaining simple life-style and also their life is very hard. If the village is electrified, the poor (economically) people of Lamobagar would be busy in developing handloom (particularly carpet) industry in village.

Religious Sect

Many anthropologists (Haimendorf, 1964; Paul, 1976; Ortner, 1978), including this writer (1987) are of the opinion that the Sherpas are followers of the *sang-ngag-nying-ma* school of Tibetan Buddhism. But, now, it is realised that not all the Sherpas of Bigu are mostly dependent on the lamas and nuns of Tashi gonpa who religiously belong to *dug-pa kagyupa*. Very few Sherpas of Bigu have heard the name of Guru Rinpoche, the founder of *nying-ma* school. Similarly, the Sherpas of Labchi are dependent on the lamas who are the followers of *di-khung kagyupa*. Likewise many individual Sherpas of Thame (Khumbu) have become the followers of *ge-lug-pa* school of Tibetan Buddhism. There is one *ge-lug-pa* gonpa at Laudo in Thame area from where many Sherpa monks have come to stay at Kopan

monastery (linkage gonpa of Laudo) for their religious education. However, the majority of the Sherpas of Solukhumbu, Rolwaling and Lamobagar believe in *sang-ngag* subject of *nying-ma* major sect of Tibetan Buddhism. The term *sang-ngag* means literally the secret formulas (Dargyay, 1977:75, F. N. 52).

Reincarnation

The institution of reincarnation, *tulku*, is considered another important aspect of Sherpa religion. Even though the question was asked- why Tibetan reincarnated lamas get prestigious personality and why not the Sherpas? -the answer came *chirim-chhe-chhe hrorm thyanga-thyanea*. The meaning of this proverb, *kharpe*, is "the more you respect the more he seems proudly, the more you heat the more that seems cold." It is applied not only in the context of religion but also in social aspect. However, this type of scenario can not be found in the Tibetan society particularly in religious field. Most of the Tibetans are maintaining religious law order, and identity; that is why the institution of *tulku* is still growing more popularity in the world, even though the Sherpas do not maintain it properly and it is therefore gradually declining in their community. This is mostly concerned with little Sherpa reincarnated people.

Reality in Religion

In the Sherpa community many young and old people including both sacred and secular at different times and situations invoke *Om-Mani-Pe-Me-Hum-Rhi* (prayer to compassionate god-Fawa Chenresi or Arya Lokeswara). Similarly, the terms *kon-chhok-sum* (Buddha, Religion and Community) and *kangyur* (Buddhist canonical texts) are equally used by them in daily behavioural aspects. Besides that there are some people,

however, who have turned from secular to sacred, are not able to understand their religion properly and even they do not follow the religious order as well as basic principles of Tibetan Buddhism. This type of superficiality is known as *necho chos* (parrot's religion). Though the Sherpas have different term for parrot, *chya-mechu* but they also follow the same Tibetan term in the context of religion. In their version, the parrot also invokes certain hymns if the bird is taught properly by somebody else. But, after reciting the hymn the bird takes insect from the floor. Therefore, according to them, simply reciting the hymns does not function positively until and unless they will be able to understand well. This is the reason why they have compared their religion with the action of parrot. However, this is neither a signal of destruction nor a looseness of religion.

Comparatively, the Sherpa women though there are some nuns, are very poor in their religion relative to the males of the community. In context of this subject matter many questions were asked to the nuns of Tashi gonpa of Bigu but, no answer came from their side. Similar type of scenario was found in ThubtENCHHOLING monastery, Takshindu and Devuche gonpa.

Now-a-days those monks who have settled in the monasteries of Kathmandu valley, some of them occasionally go to see the video movie and football matches along with musical instrument like *sangdung* or *geling*, are losing their religious personality in the vision of lay people. The native Buddhists particularly lay people have given the term 'modern monks'. Comparatively this type of scenario can not be found in acro-cultural zone. The reality

of modernity is however different subject matter which is not dealt here.

Religious Merit

The Sherpa's another important religious aspect is *chhe dhitang chhi mangi*. For this the Tibetans use the term *dhi chhi ngi yoeth* which means 'this life and next life concerning'. In other words, it can be interpreted as pragmatic and transcendental concerns. Under this theme, as it is said, one has to follow the sacred performances, *kon chhok la chhopa*; to give alms to the beggars, *ngen long la zinba*; and to give service to the lama, *gyedun la ngenkor*. It is believed that if one could follow this clerical interpretation (in my own understanding) he or she will have *phayen* (Tib. *phen-yon*) which means if he has helped he will get same type of return. Finally this helps him to increase more *sonam* (merit). The Sherpa lamas further stress that the villagers' concept *sonam, gewa* (virtuous act) and *gewa-jinba* (meritorious act or donation for religious activities) includes all aforesaid principles. With a view to gaining religious merit or to increase more *sonam* the Sherpas have heartily followed the clerical interpretation.

Functionally the term *sonam* seems very important in the Sherpa society. One's *sonam* (in a sense covertly attached destiny) is determined by birth. Each and every people are proud of their *sonam* and it is believed that *sonam* remains on one's forehead. Therefore, no one wants to lose his or her *sonam* through any type of negative actions. This is the reason why the Sherpas do not bow their heads to the feet of the secular people, they believe that *sonam* may transfer to each side. But they do not mind to bow their heads to the big lamas for the purpose of increasing more *sonam*.

According to the Sherpas and Tibetans, the feet are not considered sacred because in one aspect they kill many insects which is considered as a profane act and on the other the feet seem very untidy because of touching human fecal, etc. Therefore, instead of bowing the head, the Tibetans touch their forehead to their respected kin to which they call *thopa tukpa*.

Buddhism is not only a religion of renunciation but also a religion of non-violence. Therefore, no Buddhist is allowed to participate on strife and violence. But strife and violence is common among the secular and alcohol-drinkers society even if they are Buddhists. Though alcohol is considered as an indispensable food, from the view point of cold climate, and culture, it some times may create strife and violence. But, the problem is what will be the situation of *sonam* as being a Buddhist? Many informants replied that they will not have *sonam* in front while quarrelling and fighting with each other. They believe that it transfers from the front to the back side of the head. Then after, neither can they control their emotion nor do they remember that they are Buddhist. However, this is the disfunctional aspect of *sonam* in the context of religion, role and behaviours of the people. Sometimes covert cultural features as well as emic versions are equally important to know man, his society and culture in a better way.

During the discussion of religion the Sherpas said that the lama, gonpa, monastery, *mani*, etc. are not the religion. "Our religion is based on *le gyunde*" (le=deed, *gyu*=seed, *de*=fruit). Ortner (1978, 1978: 181, F. N. 5: 19) also writes, "However, the Sherpas do not use the term "Karma" but it is a standard term in Buddhist literature and I shall use it for convenience. In Sherpa the

term for Buddhist retribution, the cosmic principle of cause and effect, is *le*." If it is the main theme of Sherpa religion how far can it be related with *chhi dhitang chhe ma ngi*? In the context of this problem, the informants expressed that it is a Buddhist retribution. If one has a good deed or good *karm* (effect-creating deed) in his present life the result will be good for the next life and if one has done a bad deed in the present life he will have a bad result for the next life. This is the theme of *le gyunde*. *Sonam* also comes from his nature of deed. However, the etic understanding is that both the Sherpas and the other Tibetan Buddhists are motivated by the lamas to perform certain acts for this pragmatic (this worldly) and transcendental (the other worldly) life. Therefore, the concept *le-gyunde* also seems as part of the aforesaid clerical interpretation.

While talking about pragmatism and transcendentalism more people came to the point of the wheel of life, *sipakhorlo*, in terms of Karma. Therefore, from the view-point of suffering and Karma, *sipakhorlo* is considered as one of the important teleological symbols in this community. In this regard while writing about *sipakhorlo*, Govinda (1970: 242) writes, "This form creating activity (Tib. *hdu-byed*) is adequately symbolized by the picture of a potter. Just as a potter creates the Sherpa of a pot so we form our character and destiny or more correctly, on Karma, the outcome of our deed in works, and thought." However, *sipakhorlo* gives the certain themes of suffering and condition of life in this temporal and transcendental world.

Insiders and Outsiders

Unlike Tibetan, the Sherpas also have the concept of insiders and outsiders..

According to the informants, those who believe in Buddhism they are all regarded as insiders, *nangwa*. Those who do not believe in Buddhism but who have their own religion are categorized as outsiders, *chhiwa*. As the Sherpas understand that the Hindus, Christian, Muslims and people of other religions are all *chhiwa*. The lamas generally distinguish the *chhiwa* into two sub-groups. According to them, those who are eternalists are taken into *tagparmarwa* and those who are nihilists are considered as *chheparmarwa* under the *chhiwa* group.

Sacred and Secular groups

In the Sherpa community, a man who becomes a householder is known as *jikten-pa* or *mi kya* (*mi kar-po* = white dressed man). Though the Sherpas traditionally wore black dress, they follow the traditional Tibetan terms to distinguish sacred and secular persons on the basis of dressing patterns. Those who wear yellow dress are known as *mi s'ru* (*mi syar-po* = yellow dressed man) and are considered sacred. In the context of *mi kya*: long ago many secular people of Tibet wore *nambu* (woolen dress of white colour). Therefore, they were simply called *mi kya* in short. In the Sherpa understanding the white dressed or black dressed people seem unknown to the religion. However, the short term *kya-ser* (white and yellow people) symbolically functions to distinguish among the Tibetan Buddhist groups by typological phenomena of sacred and secular.

Lamas

The Sherpas believe that certain lamas have sound knowledge about *semge* and *miwa* which means that he follows the principles of 'live and let live,' equal behaviour, good feeling and he is moral, sincere, pious, honest, kind, simple, and spiritual. Thus considering the

high status of the lama the Sherpas generally send their middle sons to ordain monkhood and later to become permanent monks, lamas or only ritual masters, thereby gaining merit of the family. Generalizing the activities of a lama, according to circumstances he becomes a ritual master, medicinal man, doctor, printer, painter, reader, writer, spiritual father, fortune teller, advisor and a pious man before the lay people. These lamas, according to their profession, might be married or celibate. Comparatively, a celibate monk or lama is more highly revered than a married lama of the village. Again typology comes to this point. Those lamas who live in the village and have spent family life are locally known as either *ngag-pa* or *banzin* or *dhong chho-pa*. These are the lamas who have big responsibilities to preserve their village and community culture. Therefore they are the key factors of village and community.

There are other monks and nuns who permanently reside at the monastery and nunnary and practice celibacy as well as following the monastic discipline. They are locally and religiously known as *dulva* lamas. A *dulva* lama is not necessarily a reincarnate, *tulku*, among the Sherpas. In case, if a *dulva* monk or lama or even a *tulku* leaves his monastery and enters into family life he will lose much of his sacred personality in his locality. The same goes for the nuns.

In order to be a lama, according to the rules and regulations of monastic institution, one must spend three years, three months and three days, *lo sum da sum*, studying in the monastery as becoming a monk. Then after he can be addressed by the term lama. But it does not mean that he will be perfectly expert in religion. It only means that he gets the designation of "lama." The word lama means the "Superior One" (Stein,

1972) or "the one who has no superior" and is taken to correspond to Guru or Uttara in Sanskrit; a specific connotation is that one who can administer initiation (Skt. Dīkṣha = Tib. Dbang). The word lama, meaning preceptor or priest, was in currency in Tibet before the advent of Buddhism, and the priest in the pre-Buddhist Bon religion was, as is still called lama. There are numerous examples in *Kanjur* and *Tanjur* authenticating lama for Guru. An historic example, and perhaps the first such, designating an Indian master as lama is noticed in the grammar of Thonmi Sambhota, the reputed author of Tibetan script (circa 640). In his grammar Thonmi makes obeisance to all the lamas (*bla-ma rnam-la*) Shalu Lotsava, in his commentary on Thonmi's grammar, identifies as Devavidhya Simha and Lipidatta and calls them Thonmi's "own lamas" (*bday nvid kyī blama*)" (Sinha, 1967: 36-37). Religiously one who becomes lama he should be able to follow certain postures which is known as *nyamja ki chhyak gya*. Besides this, he should have sacred outlook, *dag nang*. "Sacred outlook is perceiving the world and oneself is intrinsically good and unconditionally free" (Klimburg-Satler, 1982: 229).

All lamas, however, are not expert in every aspect of the universe, even though they are greatly revered by the society. The reason he is so respected that he is rich in ritual practices, religious icons, praying-wheels, monastery, religious books, lucky trinkets, rosaries, prayers, formulas, charms and amulets against all possible and impossible misfortunes, remedies, incantations and horoscopes. Including all these characteristics, the attributes (drum, sceptre and bell) of the lamas also tremendously affect the heart of lay people.

It is also said, "without the Lama in front, God is not approachable" (Waddell, 1969). When a man is married or dies the lamas come in a congregation to assist him and for their services they charge money. When he meets misfortune they charge him for driving his bad luck away. When he meets his good fortune they charge him for offering up thanks; when nothing happens to him, good or bad, they charge again for preventing things from becoming worse (Grenard, 1974: 343). Therefore, it can be said that the lama seems both sacred and authority of secular power. "A village lama is simply a person who has received religious instruction that enables him to perform certain rites and is resident in the village as a householder. He may have been taught by another village lama or may have spent some years as a novice or monk in a monastery before returning to secular life" (Haimendorf, 1984; 94-95).

However, the *ngagpa* or village lama is the focal point of Sherpa village culture. Upto the present time there seems no problem of village lamas particularly in the Sherpa villages, but there is going to be a lack of their successors under study which indicates a problem twenty years from today at the time of the next generation. Even the monk is not supposed to stay in the village regularly. Though married monks, *thalok*, can perform certain rituals but he is not revered by the local people because of getting back from the monastery. There is also a great difference between the socio-religious status of a married monk and the married lama. Generally, the lama is considered higher in status than the *thawa* (monk). But an unmarried senior monk and unmarried *dulva* lama are both much

revered than the aforesaid married monk and the lama.

Archaic World

In order to survive in society, man has developed two traditions which can be called social tradition and archaic tradition. However, here it is confined only to archaic tradition. The Sherpa's archaic culture is represented by *gonde* (monastery), *gonpa* or *lha kang* (village temple), *mani* (free standing sacred stone wall engraved with many mantras), *chhorten* (stupa), *labtsu* (sacred shrine of mountain pass), *kani* (village entry gate), *dharbujen* (free standing long wooden pole with sacred flag), *tharchok* (prayer flag) and *lungta* (the airy horse).

Among these overt cultural features of Sherpa archaic world, the *gonpa* is considered as one of the integral parts of religion and ritual. In addition to all meritorious activities, prostration before the altar, circumambulation towards the *gompas* *chhorten*, *mani*, imploration to the gods is frequently practiced by the Sherpas in their settlement areas.

Typology of Gods and Spirits

The Sherpas' gods are divided into two groups. The first group is commonly known as *jik-ten-bi-lha*, which is concerned with the present life: and the second group is known as *jik-ten-bi-la-du-pa* whose gods are addressed as high gods, who are primarily concerned with the next life. In this regard, Ruegg (1976:26) has clearly discussed these two classification. As he writes, "In Buddhist thought furthermore, the gods are classified as either mundane (Sans. *laukika*, tib. *jig ten pa*) or supramundane (Sans. *lokottara*, tib. *jig*

ten-la da pa), a division that closely follows a more general classification. In the first case they are minor deities, genii or local gods, and in this category are included deities of what may be termed the pan-Indian or Tibetan religious substratum capable of granting earthly boons or assisting in mundane matters, a well as genii who have to be propitiated. The supramundane ones are thought of, on the contrary, as beings far advanced on the path of spiritual perfection and as protector of the Dharma, possessing great psychological and spiritual significance for the *sadhaka* or practiser. (the possibility moreover exists for a *laukika* divinity to become a *lokottara* one in certain circumstances)".

The high gods are worshipped only to obtain religious merit and forgiveness of sin, *digpa*. There is another group of deities which resides in and around the villages supervising the good and bad acts of the people. According to time and situation of human behavioural roles they seem both benevolent and malevolent beings. This is why the spirits are appeased by the lamas to support the sentient beings of the temporal world. While talking about the Sherpa gods, Ortner (1978:277) writes, "the gods lack physical bodies and physiological processes, and exist in a state of peaceful non-violence, hence they are, by definition perfectly pure. Animals mired in their physiological processes embody the physical side of pollution, while demons, who are by nature angry and aggressive, model the violent side of pollution". However, the Sherpa's high gods are Sangechemdende (Gautam Buddha), Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava), Fawa Chenresi (Aryalokeswara), Hopangme Amitabha Buddha, Chhyagna Dorje (Samanta Bhadra), Jyambiyang (Manjusree), Dorjechhyang (Vajradhara), Dorje Sempa

(Vajrasattva), Chhepangme (Amitayus), Sungma (protector deity), Gonpo (protector deity). The high gods are worshipped for transcendental concern while the local gods are worshipped for pragmatic concern.

Therefore, the Sherpas will always be anxious about negative actions of evil spirits, demons and other local spirits. That is why, for their survival, they first appease the gods before fighting with their enemies (demons, ghosts, witches and other evil spirits). Ortner (1978:137) writes in this aspect "the primary object of offering ritual is to get the gods to renew their primordial struggle against, and re-enact their original triumph over, the demons and the forces of anarchy and violence, and has pointed out the two extreme types—high gods who preside over the system (and over every ritual) and the demons who pit themselves against the system and against every ritual." According to the Sherpas, furious gods may give trouble to their life or livestock at any time. So in their present life, they have to keep in touch not only with the Buddhist gods but also with local spirits because they need mercy, bliss, luck, longevity, happiness, yearly gathering, success, wealth, sound health, and protection.

To further attaining of these needs, people usually try to avoid sin and try to gain merit. For this they are helped by lamas, who perform coercive rites on the occasions of birth, marriage, illness and death. Due to the different circumstances the laity are constrained to keep in good communication with the lamas who are only the people who can perform necessary rites. Similarly, the lamas, though they are sacred, closely interact with the

villagers because they also have to survive in this temporal world. Hence, the lamas and laity worship local gods considering them as benevolent spirits because of fearfulness and also they have to stay on nature's lap.

As far as spirits are concerned, the Sherpa term for this is known as *hrendi* which is derived from Tibetan religious term *lha-de*. The belief is that *hrendi* are spirits that have never been human and are destined to roam the earth eternally, ever anxious to inflict harm on the living. "Sherpa resort to measures to keep them away, for example, scattering thorns on a trail to prevent them from following. It is also said that the doors of Sherpa houses are low to prevent the stiff-backed *hrindi* from entering easily. Every year public rites are held in all Sherpa villages *hrindi* and other evil spirits from harming community" (Presern and Halligan, 1987:137).

However, the term *lhade* does not cover the whole groups of spirits which can be found in the Tibetan Buddhist communities. All the spirits and local gods, as mentioned before, can be categorized into five main types: (i) godly spirits *yul-lha*, *daf-lha*, (ii) animality spirits—*siddhak*, *lu*, *sabtak*, *neddhak*, *terdhak* and *chen*; (iii) ghost spirits—*shindi*, *gyaptak*, *dyu*, *theurang*, *de*; (iv) demonic spirits—*du*, *gyak*, *simbu*; and (v) living spirits—*sonde* or *pem* and *sondimu*.

So far as godly spirits are concerned they are worshipped on various ceremonial occasions because they are considered as village protectors and enemy destroyers respectively. For example, some mountains like Khumbu *yul-lha* of Khumbu, Sorung *yul-lha* or *tashipalchhen* (Mt. Numbur) of Solu,

tsashi chheringma (Mt. Gaurishankar) of Rolwaling, Simigaon and Lamobagar are regarded as guardian deities of concerning localities. Similarly *def-lha* is worshipped because it helps to suppress the enemies of the people.

Among the animal type of spirits, *sidhak* are regarded as the supreme local spirit under whom *lu*, *sabtak*, *nedhak*, *terdhak*, *chen* come to exist. However, these are all unseen spirits which have both negative and positive function in terms of causing good, *ngodup*, or bad, *nerpa*, acts in the community. Therefore, people always try to appease them at any cost through the help of lamas. *Sidhak* are regarded as the lords of soils; *lu* are regarded as the guardians of purity of hearths, houses, streams and lakes; *sabtak* are regarded as male *lu*. *Nedhak* are highly revered because they are considered as the lords of certain localities and pilgrimages. Similarly, *terdhak* are also revered because they function as the guardians treasures left by Guru Rinpoche, and *chen* are spirits whose residual place is believed to be at precipitous mountains or inside the forest.

Coming to the point of ghost spirits: *shindi* are considered as dead spirits which try to attack living beings at any place at any time. Generally the act of giving trouble is known as *nerpa* in Khumbu and *norpa* in Solu. In this concern it is very important to know the meaning of *de* (the dead spirits) which have gone neither to heaven nor to hell. Therefore, there is no difference between the term *shindi* and *de*. While showing the function of spirits, Ortner (1978:99, 180, F.N.5) points out, "While the Sherpas have names for many different kinds of demons, the distinguishing features of the various types

are not all that clear. In the case of funerals, the chief villains are creatures called *de*. It is *de* who are attracted by all the feasting that goes on in the course of the funeral. The tiger exorcism (*do dzongup*) is directed against *de* although the *gyepshi* is directed against a different type of demon called while both *de* and *du* are greedy, vicious, cannibalistic and anti-religions (as any proper demon must be), *du* show up mainly in tales and rituals as being defeated by lamas, while *de* perform more specific and immediate anti-social personal acts."

Anthropologists Presern and Halligan (1987) have defined *nerpa* differently, and have written that "*Nerpa* are the ghosts of people, who during their life, were known for their greed or evil deeds, all of which can lead to a rebirth without material incarnation. Such a fate may also be brought about by the manner of death, and people who die suddenly, through violence or accidents, are likely to become *nerpa*. Those, however, who had not been guilty of evil conduct in their last life may after a time, cease being *nerpa* and achieve rebirth in any of the six states on the wheel of life." But many informants are of opinion that *nerpa*, the act of giving trouble may arise from any type of spirit like the *nerpa* of *lu*, *nerpa* of *lha*, *nerpa* of *chen*, *nerpa* of *dyu*, etc.

"*Du* are similar to *lu* though much more dangerous and they are offended by polluting acts in their vicinity" (Ibid). The *dyu* (*du*) reside around rocks and boulders, springs at the meeting points of three rivers and rivulets. There are mainly four types of *dyu* which are called *dyu si*; (i) *ngyomon ki dyu*, (ii) *fungpi dyu*, (ii) *lhe pi dyu*, and (iv) *chhi dak ki dyu*. Though *dyu*

are taken under demonic forces, these spirits are not counted as the demon. These four *dyu si* are generally worshipped as mentioned earlier by Ortner, on the occasion of *gyepshi* rite. According to time and situation, this rite might be both communal and individual. As people strongly believe that create obstacle in society, for the purpose of avoiding these spirits the lamas perform the *gyepshi* rite after consultation of the *nakchi* (astrological text). It is said that *dyu* are under control of *garawangchhok* which is regarded as the king of *dyu*. According to the lamas, the *dyu* are pleased when the people perform negative activities in terms of inclining desire, ignorance and anger from which they can not transmigrate from this temporal world to transcendental world. *Theurang* are another type of evil spirit which also reside in residential localities.

Gyaptak are spirits which are functionally regarded as followers of people, as they believe that *gyaptak* may erupt the deceased soul, *sem*, at the time of transmigration.

Among the demonic forces, *gyak* are considered as the most dangerous hinderers. These spirits always create obstacle at the time of religious performances. Generally *gyak* are under the control of king *Binayak*. While performing the religious ritual, the lamas first and foremost propitiate the *gyak* by providing *torma* (*gyaktor*) outside of the home.

Coming to the point of witches, the Sherpas of Solu distinguish male witches *sonde*, from female witches, *sondimu*; the Sherpas of Khumbu use *pem* for both. The function of these living spirits is more

social than religious. The nature and function of *pem* is to cause illness and misfortune to people and especially people who seem alert, such as during the period of confinement of a pregnant woman.

The other spirits, except *pem*, *sonde* or *sondimu* are also concerned with religious activities. Some of the local spirits are considered as benevolent while others are malevolent, according to time and situation. If the spirits are malevolent, the lamas do not at once try to suppress them through rituals. Their best effort seems to be to appease them by providing food, drinks and invocation. One of the most important examples is *konchhen chundi ki chhoka* (sacred performance for the Union of the Precious One) in which the food, *torma*,² is served to *gyak*, who is then requested not to create any sort of obstacles during the ritual performance. It is also said that if the *gyak* does not follow the lama's request the malevolent spirit will not be excused. This proves that there is a symbiotic relationship between the man and spirit world in the Tibetan Buddhist society. This functionally shows not only that there is a close relationship between man and their supernatural world but also that there is close relationship between the nature and spirit world. Therefore, it can also be said that there is close interaction and interdependence with each other. Thus nature-man-spirit world has formed a complex in the Sherpa society.

Sacred Occasion

Before describing the ritual processes of *thapso*, *chilapso* and *lhabshang* it is essential to mention the significance of the four

seasons of the year and the sacred and secular days of the month.

The first season of the year is known as *sola* which begins from *dawa ngiwa* (March) and ends by *dawa siwa* (May). Bista (1972:261) writes the first '*chika*' is a fine season. Anyway, the word '*chika*' means 'one' or 'first' but it is not a name of the first season. The second season is known as *yerla* which begins from *dawa ngiwa* (June) and ends by *dawa dyunwa* (August). The third season, *tyunla*, begins from *dawa gyepa* (September) and ends by *dawa chiwa* (November) and the last *gunla*, starts from *dawa chyuchikpa* (December) and ends by *dawa thangpo* (February). In Lamobagar and Khumbu the *lhabsang* or *lhapso* rite is performed on the month of *dawa sumba* of *sola*, *dawa thugpa* of *yerla*, *dawa chiwa* of *tyunla*, and *dawa thugpo* of *yerla*, *dawa thangpo* of *gunla*.

At Himalayan Base Camp, Sherpa people do not care which season it is that the expedition arrives, for it is only after fulfilling this rite, *lhapso*, that they start climbing. But in the village, before enacting the rite people want to know the auspicious dates of the month. Most of the domestic rites are performed in between the first and the fifteenth of the month. According to their horoscope, *dattu*, the first fifteen days from *chhewa chik* to *chhewa chyanga* of the month are considered auspicious days for performing any kind of rites. This period is socially and religiously known as *dawa hyarngo*. The remaining fifteen days (from *chewa churuk* to *namgang*) of the month are taken as inauspicious or secular days in which the Sherpas generally do not perform ceremonies. This period is known as *dawa marngo*. In most of the Tibetan Buddhist

monasteries, the lamas perform certain rites particularly on the eighth, *chhewa gya*, tenth, *chhe chyu*, fifteenth, *chhewa chyanga* and twenty-ninth days, *namagang* (waxing moon) of the month. On these days people do not perform any sort of sinful activities, as slaughtering of animals.

Dress Symbol

Another important overt feature is dressing in the Sherpa society. On the occasion of religious ceremony, festivals, marriages, feast or other social gatherings, people wear their traditional dresses like a Tibetan hat and *chhiwa* or *chhyuwa*, is a male dress which looks like a gown, 5-6 feet long from the shoulder consisting of long sleeves, tapering at the waist and gathered up so as not to fall below the ankle of the men. Women wear the same type of dress which is known as *angi* in Solukhumbu and *angdung* in Lamobagar and Bigu.

In regard to changing of dress, the Sherpas talk about two occasions known as *ga lhachhok*. (god's gathering) and *dugmisi* (death pollution or sorrow). Gathering on special functions like a feast, festival, marriage, and other religious ceremony is compared with *ga lhachhok*. This is the reason that they use to change to their new dresses and ornaments on special occasions. In this regard the Sherpas of Junbesi distinguish materials for pomp and show to which they use the term as *sabto chhyaup* (make up), *manja* (dresses), *genja* (ornaments), and *tenja* (sitting materials). According to their belief, the gods are gathered on the occasion of *chho* or *chhowa* (worship). Therefore they would love to go with full of ornaments and new dresses.

As it was observed that people changed their dresses on the occasion of communal

worship *chi lhapso*, in Lamobagar and changed their dresses on the occasion of *lhapso* in Mt. Everest Base Camp before starting to climb the mountain. In such a situation people seem quite happy because of the presence of gods. But, it does not mean that the Sherpa's gods are visible. In its opposite aspect, *dugmisi* symbolizes that people do not resort to any kind of pomp or show although they have to gather to fulfil their social custom. The concept *Dugmisi* does not allow one even to laugh, dance or joke with another at the time of sorrow.

Ritual Texts

The ritual, for *lhabsang* or *lhabso*, is performed through different alternative liturgical texts. The name of the texts are *gyan lhabsang*, *pema lhabsang* and *sangjuhisinorbu deke sirkim*. If the ritual is to be performed in a complete way, then the book *gyan lhabsang* is consulted. If it is to be done in a medium way, the book *pema lhabsang* in Lamobagar and *riosangchhoe* in Junbesi is consulted; and in Lamobagar *sangjunghisiorbu* is consulted only when the time is short. At Everest Base Camp the ritual is performed through *deke sirkim* due to the lack of time, ritual objects, offerings, and ritual experts. Besides this, it is very difficult to arrange a full scale ritual there. At Lamobagar people perform this rite through *pema lhabsang*. The ritual can be performed in forty minutes if *deke sirkim* is consulted. It takes at least four hours if the ceremony is performed through *pema lhabsang*,

Altar

In the Sherpa language the altar is called *chhosam*. It is usually built in a common room of the Sherpa house. If it is separated from the common room then

it is called *chhokhang* and *lhakhang* for separate houses. On the altar are three shelves bearing lamps, bowls of water and flowers, while beneath a table sacrificial cakes, *gtor-ma* are placed (Stein, 1972:214). These are the common characteristics of an altar. But, at the time of worship, the altar is decorated with many ritual offerings and objects according to the nature of rites.

The altar as mentioned earlier is characterized by three shelves. Religiously, the lowest self is known as *chhi* (external), the second one is known as *nang* (internal), and the upper one is known as *sang* (secret). On the upper portion of the upper part there are displayed some statues of Buddha, Guru Rinpoche, Fawa Chenresi and one picture of the Dalai Lama. But there is no hard and fast rule to displaying all those statues properly. However, the upper part of the altar is generally characterized by three different icons which are known as *chho-lung-tul sum* in short. The full term of trichotomy is *chhoku* (Dharmakaya), *lungku* (Sambhogakaya), *tulku* (Nirmanakaya). In the absence of these statues of the following gods people use to display any one but it should be related with the main sect of their religion. However, the displayed icons are considered as the representation of Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya as mentioned before.

Preparation of Altar

The Sherpa term for sacred performance is known as *chhyak chhopa* and the act of worshipping is known as *chhyak chhopa kidup* or *bulup*. The term *chhoka* refers to worship and the ritual master is known as *chhone* in Solu and *chhopa* in Khumbu and Lamobagar. He who performs the ritual in a funeral ceremony is called *chhone* in

Khumbu. The process of sacred performance is called *chhoka chhaglen*. According to the Sherpa lamas, the performances can be divided into two groups which are known as *kerim* and *jogrim*. *Kerim* type of worship can be observed easily while *jogrim* cannot be understood by secular groups. As the lama says there is close relationship between *jikten la da pa* and *jogrim* type of performance.

The altar items are collectively known as *chhoje* which are used under *chhinchhe* 'exterior worship'. The *chhoje* includes the eight basic offerings: (i) *chhyuen* (water for drinking), (ii) *chhepsil* (water for washing), *metok* (a flower for good smell), (iv) *dukpo* (burnt incense), *marme* (butter for fire or butter lamp), (vi) *thichhap* (scented water) *syalse* (simple uncoated torma), *rolma* (music). These eight offerings are not apart from the Sanskrit terms like *argam*, *padyam*, *puspe*, *dhupe*, *aloke*, *gandhe*, *naibitte*, *sabda* or *baddhya* respectively.

The offerings which are placed on the second shelf are all taken into *nang chhe*, 'interior worship' and offerings. Symbolically they represent six senses namely, *juk* (mirror for the sight-two eyes), *da* (an instrument which produces sound for hearing-two ears), *dhi* (incense for the smell-nose), *ro* (food for the taste-tongue), *rakchya* (a cloth for touch-heart or body), *chho* (mind or concentration). These six senses (*tho* form of worship) are represented through *torma* to which the lamas call *wongbu go nga* or *wongbi metok*. Generally the ritual is based on *chya gyud* (Tib. *bya rgyud*, Sans. *kriya tantra*).

The third step *sang chhe* (secret worship) and the meaning of offerings are

related with vajrayana form of worship. In this form some *tormas* (the sacrificial cakes), butter lamps and others are placed. The ritual is based on *nal jyor pai gyud* (Tib. *rnal byor pa'i rgyua*), Sans. *yoga tantra*). However, the lamas say that the occult practices and occult versions, *lama gyopa*, can not be interpreted as mentioned earlier.

In addition to all the above mentioned materials, some other materials are also placed. These include food, *torma*, *dorje* (sceptre: the symbol of wisdom, *thabtang*, and method, *serab* which symbolizes the admantine and indistructible nature of ultimate reality), *dhilbu*, (bell), a miniature *chhorten*, *dadar* (a sacred wand dressed up with silk streamers in five colours), *pumba* (holy jug with peacock's feather known as *mapchi do*), *kangling* (a thighbone triumphet), *corthung* (a conch shell), *bukshill* (cymbals), beer for *dutsi* (ambrosia), *rakta* (tea for blood) and *damar* (drum). All these materials are used during the usual worship. But there is no hard and fast rule regarding the use of any or all such materials in a worship. Many rites are performed even without these materials. While performing *lhapso* rite in Everest Base Camp, Urgan, the brother of Tyangboche reincarnated Lama arranged the stone altar bearing three shelves accordingly. But there were not necessarily the items as mentioned earlier.

While following any form of worship, the lama follows three important processes known as *ngondo*, *ngosi* and *je*, under which he follows another seven sub-processes which are functionally, ritually and symbolically known as *chhyakchhalwa*, *chhopa*, *syakpa*, *jesuirangba*, *dulwa*, *saibadep* and *gewa ngowa*. These seven sub-processes are religiously known as *hyantlokdonpa*.

Under the first process *ngondo* the lama follows *kyamdo* (to take refuge), *semge* (cultivating bodhichitta), and *hyanlok donba*. The purpose of invoking these prayers is to collect religious merit for oneself and all. The term *syakpa*, letters, is related with *higya* mantra to Vajrasattva, the god of removing sin. So far as *kyamdo* and *semge* is concerned, these two prayers are simultaneously invoked by the lama during performance. Even though *kyamdo* functions for an individual, *semge* functions for all sentient beings. The prayer to Vajrasattva is related with Vajrayan sect.

On the second process of *ngosi* the lama mainly follows musical instruments. All the musical instruments are divided into three categories which are known as *bu dung tul sum* (music from blowing, clashing, beating three). The purpose of giving music is known as *chenden* which means to welcome. The purpose of using music is to make the gods alert. Accordingly, the gods are invited to arrive at the altar through providing musical voice which is known as *ngensen* (*ngen*=ear, *sen*=to listen). Side by side juniperus incense is also burnt. The act of requesting to the gods for their arrival at an altar by the lama is known as *juksoolu*.

In the main time after completing the process, host is ordered to prostrate toward the altar under the process of *chhyak chholu* or *chhyak chholwa* three times continuously. The purpose of following this act is to surrender to the deities by promising not to follow sinful acts and, in case it was done before, to ask for excuse from the gods. Side by side it is also tried to gain religious merit from the following performances. Then after *chhopa* is performed under the principle of *chhir chhe*.

So far *syakman* is concerned, some

lamas follow this process first and then start the other processes, and some lamas do not follow it before *chhak chhopa*. Then the lama will follow the another process which is known as *kyamdo* and *semge*. The purpose of following is similar to the act of *syakman*. Those processes are also to get in touch with the Buddhist gods.

After this another process is performed which is known as *jesuirangba*, under which moral and ethical values and retribution are traced by the lama. Then the lama follows *kusing salbadep* under which every body is requested to follow the religious activities for gaining merit. The process *ngowa* throws light on collecting the religious merit for other people. The last process is known as *tashi* (good wishes). In this process the lama places a butter-mark, *karken*, on the forehead and head of all household members with some blessing prayers, *tashi molam*. Thus the lama completes the worship at the Sherpa altar. Most of the process are related with *kriya tantra*, *yonga tantra*, and *mahavoga tantra*. While performing ritual, the utterance of secret version and gestures of the figure, *lama gyopa* is very difficult to understand and the lamas are not permitted to interpret it according to the Vajrayana rule. One of the tantra rituals, followed by the Sherpa lama is *conchhek chhndi chhoka*. This is also known as *dekhona niki chhyopa* which is followed under *maha yaga* tantra relating to Guru Rinpoche.

Method of Worship

In regard to the nature of worship, the lama reported that there will be no unanimity of processes and performance of worship. Therefore, the nature of worship depends on the quality and ability of the

Lama and liturgical texts, the economic capacity of *jindak* (sponsor) the availability of materials and the number of the monks. In dealing with this matter the lama noticed that there are three alternative methods of following worship which are collectively known as *gya ding du snm* (*gyepa, dingba, duwa sum*). The worship which is followed with full processes is known as *gyepa chho* and this is quite expensive. The worship which is followed with medium processes is known as *dingba chho* and the worship which is followed with simple processes is known as *duwa chho*. The majority of informants reported that they follow the medium processes of worship. Those who advice to follow *dingba* type of worship and he who can perform this type of worship is highly respected by the villagers and religiously they are addressed by the term *sangi henden* and *nangi henden*. The lama who knows the simple method of following worship is called *chhi henden*. According to the Sherpas, a *sangi henden* or *nangi henden* lama is considered an eminent lama of the village or monastery because he follows full fledged rituals and maintains the lamahood.

Lhabsang

This household rite was observed at four houses on *dawa sumba* of *sola*. Among eleven married lamas of Lamobagar one will be sufficient to perform this rite. Before the arrival of the lama the head of the household arranges everything which is necessary for the altar and the ritual master. The hostess seems preparing *gonde* or *syau* (boiled millet flour) for the lama and household members. When the lama arrives at home either *puri* (*tongba* drink) or *chhyang* (local beer) *suchya* (salt tea mixed with butter) is first served to him. There will be light-hearted conversation following

on all subject matters between the lama and the householder. Thereafter, the householder is ordered to burn incense and purify the altar and the exterior environment of his house with the incense. *Chbyak-chho-lu* (prostration) is then performed thrice before the altar.

In order to go through these rituals, the lama too, has to purify his body, as his body is considered impure. Before starting his work, he first chants some hymns for at least ten minutes to purify his body. According to the lama of Lamobagar, this act is known as *majyok*. Haimendorf (1964: 177), however, in regard to the first process of ritual writes "Common to all acts of worship are certain set features. First the deities are summoned to the feast and this invocation is accompanied by loud music and the clash of cymbals aimed at attracting their attention." But, the scenario which was observed in Lamobagar was slightly different from the description given by Haimendorf. It was asked to lama why the certain processes are different from other Sherpa areas. The lama of Lamobagar replied that *Langba re la khe lug re lama re la chhoelug re* which means "Every villages have own social system and each lama has his own religious system". After completing the *majyok* act, the morning meal, *gonde* is served to the lama. After having the first meal the lama then performs one ritual known as *sang* (a fragrant smoke offering or offering of incense). In this ritual the householder offers burning incense to many local gods alternatively while the lama invokes their blessings for many purposes. The gods, who are worshipped through the *sang* ritual, are the big lamas, *Palahisi gonpo khandu chheringa* (Mt. Gaurishankar), *Singyong* (the god of Labchi), *yulki sidhak* (village god of soil) and others.

After completing the *sang*, the *sarkim* (libation drink to the god) ritual is followed by him. In this process, the gods are generally worshipped through *chhyang*. In order to fulfill this ritual, the gods *sajyok gyalpo rahule*, *rinjin pema jyungne*, *khandu tashi chheringma singyong* and four corner deities are invoked.

The third process of *lhabsang* ritual is known as the *yangup* (to call for luck). This is one of the most important rituals of the following act. Ortner (1978:40) writes, "And any family may at anytime commission the performance of a *yangup* ceremony by the lamas, to regain shore up the luck of the house." In this ritual, the assistant to the lama holds the *dadar* before the lama. *Dadar*, a symbolic material of luck, is a sacred wand dressed in silk or *khata*, in which money, grain, a written paper (describing the name of year and months) is compiled on the top, symbolically representing *yul-lha*. Therefore it is regarded as a sacred symbol of the family and the village. The symbolic meaning of holding the *dadar* is to regain or retain the luck of the house. The lama suggests to hold the *dadar* for some minutes for luck in spheres of life.

Then another ritual begins which is called *dazem*. Here *da* means (enemy or (demon) and *zem* means 'to drive away). In one hand the ritual performer or the assistant holds a *dadar* and in the other a knife, representing *daflha* (enemy killing god). A knife is considered a weapon of the god and is used only for defeating demons, enemies or evil spirits. In this ritual the lama worships the god as *daflha* as it helps to drive away enemies. Finally the lama takes both the symbols above his head pretending to kill the enemy

with this action. According to their belief if they are unable to drive away their enemies, they may be besieged with all kinds of trouble.

Coming to the last part of the ritual, the lama follows a blessing ceremony which is known as *tashi* (good wishes). This is performed even on the occasion of *losar* (new year festival). In this concluding ceremony the lama and some household members go out of the home and erect *tharsing* and invoke some hymns offering some *chhondi* (*chhoede*) then they all cry *ki-ki so so lha gyal lo* which means victory cry and glory be to the gods. Therefore, this is victory cry, 'thanking and seeing-off' the gods. The lama then distributes *tsampa* (flour) to everybody to get *tendil* (material fortune). The Sherpas believe strongly in their daily life.

It is common for every member of the family to seek the blessing and *gyan* of the lama in the form of butter. This is known as *tashigyan*. After the blessing, the lama places *gyan* (*tika* in Nepali) at three places of the head. At the time of blessing the lama invokes some blessing hymns, which are as follows:

"Jigten denpi chou chepangme tyumin
chhiwa malu jomjepi gonme dungal
kurpa namki kyap. Sange chhepangme
la chhyak chhalo logy chhosing tenggya
thongwar syok. Tashi delek phinjum
chhokpa syok."

Lunch, which generally comprises of cooked rice and curry, is then arranged for everybody. Besides this, *chhyang* is also served. However, at the time of serving *chhyang*, one should not forget to keep some portion of *tsampa*, known as *chamgen* (*tsamgen*) on the

the glass. This indicates *tendil*. If there is no *tsamgen* (flour and butter or grains) it is considered as *namdok* (ill-luck). Generally *tsampa* (flour) is not kept on the rim of glasses for deceased person or during mortuary rites.

By observing some Sherpa ritual in Junbesi, Ortner (1978:186) has noted three points which are as follows: (i) Those peculiar items, the *torma* cakes; (ii) the special kind of help or benefit sought from the gods as protection, against the demons; and (iii) through which the right is formulated—that of social hospitality and the host-guest relationship. Actually people attend the party, *den*,³ because they are invited and there is *chhyang*. They talk, drink and laugh. Strife among guests is not unusual. People are also invited on the occasion of *khaalak* which is performed at home annually. On this occasion, the host invites his neighbours not just to maintain good relation but because of social tradition. In this context there seems an artificial relationship between host and the guests. This is what I could see in the same village in 1978. The same characteristics can be found in Namche also. The Sherpas of Namche talk about the problem of *khaalak*, a kind of traditional gathering which is observed once in a year within their *pin* (consanguinal kin) group. Rotationally one has to invite the others for the purpose of fulfilling the cultural tradition. Although there may not be a good relationship between the host and the guests, except primary and consanguinal kin groups, one must arrange the following programme. Even on the occasion of *khaalak* in Namche Bazar, there was observed the artificial relational behaviour between the host and guests. But there will be no unanimous reason of breaking relationship

between the two groups. As one informant expressed, the host invited his neighbours at *khaalak* gathering immediately after their meal or lunch. This is however a tricky invitation from which the invitees can not consume more food as they desire because of having food earlier at their own home. The host's cleverness and the invitee's ultimate understanding shows only the internal formal relation between them.

Now-a-days the young generation of Namche Bazar are gradually willing to transfer the *khaalak* at the time of *losar* (new year) festival because of realising inconvenience due to the involvement in trekking and mountaineering occupation.

In this connection, Lamobagar Sherpas do not invite to their neighbours on the occasion of *lhabsang* rite. As such there is no argument about the third point of Ortner. For this rite one household of Lamobagar spends about six *manas* rice for lunch and three *pathis* of *chhyang* is prepared for everybody. Besides this, butter is also essential for ritual as well as for the tea. As far as rice is concerned, Furer-Haimendorf (1984:80) has written, "Thirty years ago even wealthy families lived mainly on potatoes, buckwheat, dairy products and a minimum amount of vegetables, while rice was eaten only on the feast days. Today rice has become part of everyday diet....." By the same way Bjønness (1983:273) has also written that "Rice is the highest status food eaten by those who can afford it, while potato the main food for poor families. Almost all food supplies for the tourists and to a lesser extent for the locals, must be transported into Khumbu and aircrafts." "Rice is also consumed but the high cost of transport confines it primarily to ceremonial

use and the making of *chhyang* (local beer)" (Presern and Halligan, 1987: 133). Even in Khumbu, majority of the Sherpas who have not opened tourist lodges are still dependent on traditional food as is provided them by nature. Culturally they have a system of *khaponi sawo* whereby the menu of the house is changed daily. As they say "we have to change our mouth daily means some food varieties are changed for consumption. Even there are many Sherpas who have settled in Kathmandu, who also take their cultural food according to the system of *khaponi sawo*. But it does not mean that they do not take rice. Though rice is eaten but it is not considered as their liked food. In most of the villages (in Lamobagar, Bigu, Rolwaling and few villages of Solukhumbu) the Sherpas prepare rice at the time of ceremonial occasions.

Chilhapso

In regard to the communal or village rite, it commences at 9 o'clock in the morning. The villagers arrive, each carrying two or three sacred flags, *tharsings* or *tharchok* consisting of thin bamboo pole with squares of coloured plain cloth attached to it. These they tie on the flag-pole and carry out of the gonpa courtyard or go directly to *lhasu* (sacred shrine). It is that place where all *tharsings* and *tharchoks* are erected in the name of mountain gods with many offerings like burning incense, *chho-chhyhan*; (offering beer), *chhondi* (offering grains), and prayers.

In course of performing this ritual, the lama while invoking the gods, chants, "you are the lords, we are your guests, "you are our parents we are your issues, so do not give us any trouble, save our village and make us happy. We want to be rich like the water in pond. You will not create any problems

rather you will help to solve them and give us peace and prosperity instead of strife. Help to eradicate diseases from the village." Concluding in loud voice, the lama and all other attendants give a big voice for victory as mentioned earlier. And they pray to the same gods as in *lhabsang* rite.

Conclusion

In order to perform this ritual, people collect two *manas* (Nepali measurement) of grain from every household for preparation of the *chhyang*. The responsibility of collection and preparation of this goes to one house according to monthly rotation. The man to whom the responsibilities goes by is known as *chhyangbi*. His main duty is first to collect the grain from every households. Then to prepare the beer and finally to serve the drinks to all attendants of the ceremony. On the appointed day, fourteen to sixteen people (both sexes) gather and consume five to six *pathis* (Nepali measurement) of *chhyang* which is considered as part and parcel of Sherpa life. Thus the *chilhapso* ritual is completed over. Most children do not drink but they gather and observe the activities of the lama and his attendants.

In conclusion, the Lamobagar Sherpas believe that they are attached to worldly gods and detached from evil spirits through the actions of a lama in the ritualistic context. Because of the automatic formation of natural and supernatural world, the villagers, except for the lamas, are all laymen who are sacred from supernatural forces. That is why the way of attachment and detachment through rituals has become a continual process in Nature-Man-Spirit world of the Sherpas. In one sense mountain (not all) is regarded

as a village god but in another sense it has played an important role in the economic life of the Sherpas. As far as the *lhabsang* rite is concerned, this is performed not to achieve any religious merit for the next life after death, but to safeguard, in the secular context, the maintenance of their livelihood. Thus the nature and spirits still determine Sherpa life. The major areas of Sherpa life and culture have continued to be in act because of ecology, religion and supernatural world has continued to remain the same. Man is (also) an expert being who forms an idea as to how to exploit nature to some extent and to get control over the spirits so that he can survive in society by any means.

Notes

- (1) According to the Buddhist tradition, the term *gon-pa* should be located in solitary place which is to be built in 500 *domba* or 2000 feet (*Idomba* = 4 feet in measurement) of distance from the village. Generally this place is very close to the forest. The Sherpa *gon-pa* is generally characterized by different canonical texts which are as follows: *kangyur*, *tyengyur*, *terje*, *bum* or *hyum*, *nyingmi gyu bum*, *jo chhembu nga* (I) *rincheen terje*, (II) *sechya kungkhyap jot*, (III) *damngak jot*, (IV) *kagyu nga jot*, (V) *gyachhen ka jot*, *dorje chepa* (little *bum*), *tongchhar manikambum*, *kathag de nga*, *kumjang lami syakung*, *pema kathang* etc. But, there is no hard and fast rule to be all religious texts in all monasteries and village temples.
- (2) "Formerly in Tibet, as now in Sikkim, people used to kill animals to appease the wrath of evil spirits who were

supposed to spread plagues and ride men or women. They were a terror to the people. Padma Sambhava abolished the system of animal sacrifices for which he substituted meal, rice and cake sacrifices called *torma*. This is the origin of Buddhist worship with flour cakes now so common in the Himalayan countries and Tibet" (Das, 1980:79, F. N. 42).

- (3) The Sherpa term *den* is derived from Tibetan term *mgon*. There are four types of *den* which are known as *dyon si* in Tibetan religious texts. Therefore, the Sherpas are also not unfamiliar with four types of *den*. The first type of *den* is known as *kon chhok si sui den*. The second one is known as *gonbo yonden ki den*. The third one is called *rik thuk ngingje ki den* and the fourth one is called *pulan lenchhyak ki den*. The first three type of *den* are mainly concerned with religious activities while the fourth one is related with social activities.

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