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死亡儀式和神諭：在印度北部拉達克佛教的一個案
例研究

Death Rituals and Oracle: A Case Study in
Ladakh Buddhism, North India

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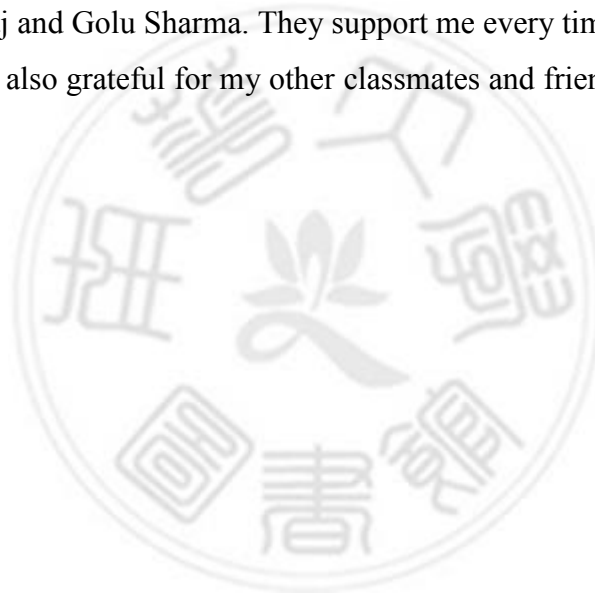
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摘要

本研究涉及死亡和喪葬儀式，揭示拉達克佛教信仰和對死亡的態度。尤其，側重於佛教宗教信仰和有關死亡的社會文化習俗。佛教徒相信靈魂轉世。因此，葬禮儀式不僅用於處理身體，還用於幫助死者靈魂投胎到下一世。本文討論家人和親屬協助亡者在中陰時期，如何用正確法式，執行喪葬儀式，超渡亡者之靈魂。本文還討論了拉達克中不同形式的神諭，當神降臨其身，則能為人們提供各項儀式。本研究還探討佛教神諭在儀式中的作用和重要性。

關鍵字: 拉達克佛教、死亡、儀式、喪葬、神諭、藏傳佛教



ABSTRACT

The study is concerned with death and funeral rituals that reveal the Ladakhi Buddhist beliefs and attitudes toward death. It focuses on Buddhist religious beliefs and socio-cultural practices regarding death. Buddhists believe in the cyclical reincarnation of the soul. So, funeral rites are performed not only for the disposal of the body, but also to assist the deceased soul to the next destination. The paper discusses how the responsibility of the family members and relatives to perform the funeral rites and the right way to assist the deceased soul in the intermediate state after death. This thesis also discusses the different forms of oracles in Buddhist Ladakh who present ritual services to people when they are possessed by gods. It also explores the roles and importance of Buddhist oracles in rites.

Keywords: Ladakh Buddhism, Death, Rituals, Funeral, Oracle, Tibetan Buddhism

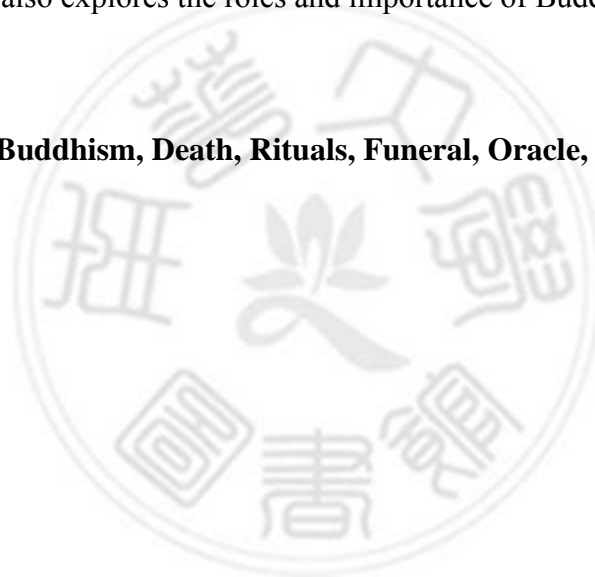
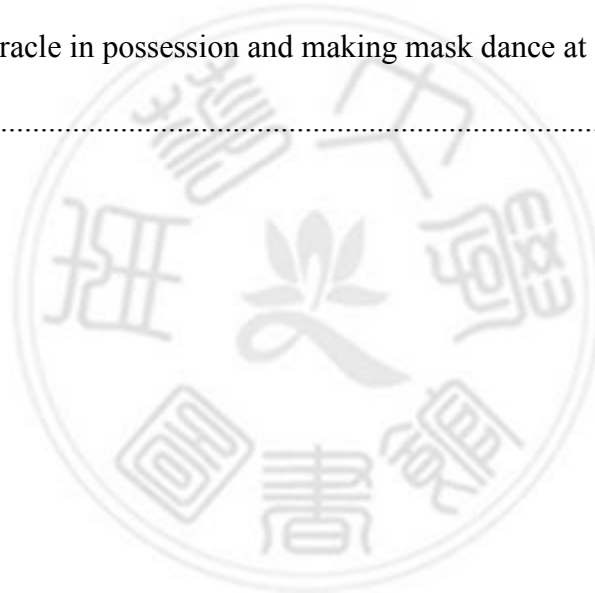


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CHAPTER 1: PREFACE

Ladakh is isolated from the rest of the world for many centuries and people lived here following ancient Tibetan rites for healing people from disease, sending off the dead spirit and for seasonal renewal. These religious rites became a part of their lives. In Ladakh, the death rituals are a very important part of the purpose of religious and historical view. Here Buddhist people believe in the cyclical reincarnation of the soul and think death is a new beginning of another life. The paper to describe what happens when a Ladakhi Buddhist person dies, how the rituals can assist the deceased, why are the funeral rites performed and how the body is disposed of. Depending upon different factors there are many differences in death rites also, such as the social status, geographic location, time of death, school of Tibetan Buddhism which practiced and the aged of the deceased. This thesis also focuses upon the diverse forms of oracles in Buddhist Ladakh who presents ritual services to peoples when they are possessed by spirits and gods. How these oracles are chosen and what is their role for society.

The methodology of this paper is based on qualitative research methods, doing research about previous journals, books, magazines, and interviews. The Qualitative information gathered from the research will help to understand rites at three different levels- at the monastic institution level, at the village community level, and at the household level and also the social significance of rituals. Most of the paper is on the interview-based method, where I have been an interview with religious people like Lamas, elderly and young people in villages. I also discuss the historical background of Buddhism in Ladakh, so that it brings out the importance of these rituals in Ladakh which could help the comparative study from modern Ladakh Buddhist rituals.

Ladakh has a unique Buddhist culture and tradition which can't see in other parts of the world. I truly blessed and feel so lucky to get an opportunity to write about my cultures and religious customs. I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to Prof. Chue Ming, Professor at Nanhua University in Taiwan, for the guidance given by him.

1.1 Research Motivation and Purpose

Whenever research is done that involves the study of texts as it is important to understand and remember all people when they are studying the text. To start with, my first motivation to choose my thesis topic on rituals is that it is an important part of every religion. I have noticed rituals play an important role in society and it provides a sense of stability in our lives. Rituals are found in our daily life activities and it also helps to work more effectively. In Ladakh, Buddhism came from Tibet as Vajrayana Buddhism and Vajrayana is a tantric rituals tradition so I saw in Ladakh every part of life is connected with rituals. Since my childhood, I had been experienced with most of these rites and I experienced that it helps me to stay focused on my goals and makes life flow more easily. I am not entirely familiar with all these rituals so in this thesis I will search and explain about death rituals in Ladakh.

The second motivation to select this topic was my own self. I am a Ladakhi and this is a part of my personal culture that influences many aspects of my worldview. In this world, we all know Tibet for its Buddhism especially Vajrayana Buddhism. But since it was captured by China then there must be less chance to know about Vajrayana Buddhism. So, this thesis gives me an opportunity to explain the worldwide about the Tantric rituals in northern Himalaya which has similar rituals as appear in Tibet. As a person that was born and has lived most of my life in the Ladakh, I have a view of how the villagers deal with this rite in a way that most likely differs from other villages. Another aspect of my Ladakhi identity is the role that I see religion play a role in every event or function happened in household and societies. This research is interesting because it shares a similar funeral culture with the Hindu religion. The ideology on dead and rebirth is similar in both the religion. In India, the elderly does not fear death; as it is not the end. It is an inevitable stage in the cycle of death, birth, and rebirth that will continue in perpetuity. Both religions believe the concept of samsara and rebirth, but I found there is any difference in the method of performing rituals. In comparing with Ladakh death rites there are many similarities in the rites of some dissimilarity from Tibetan death rituals. This difference will give me an opportunity to show my thesis topic in a new way. I also believe that I

have the potential to show these differences in my thesis about this rite celebrate in the region of Ladakh.

As a researcher, I have found previous many books and articles on ceremonies of Ladakh and I had noticed that all of them didn't explain or explore the rituals thoroughly. Most of them have explained in similar to Tibetan rituals and shown Ladakh rituals are entirely the same as Tibetan rituals. So, in the thesis, my aim is to bring the Ladakhi village oracles and funeral celebration in one title and explain each ritual in detail. This research explores the death rituals and working relations of oracles, Buddhist, Lamas and astrologers within the wider context of village life. This also considers the history of the Ladakh as well as its more recent modern changes. The rituals of the village are performed by the Buddhist Lamas, Astrologer (*Onpo*), and Oracles; they are a concern to villagers with the good prosperity of the crops, keep away bad spirit and demons, the fertility, cure from illness and misfortune. As a contrast, in monasteries, all ritual is headed by monks and in household ritual by all family members. But as most of these rituals are not successful without the support of each other so in my research I want to explain the relationship between villagers and monks and how important is all these rituals for each of them? As I have also many questions for my research and I will explain all my questions in each chapter and in conclusion.

My research question for this thesis is:

- Why the funeral rites are performed and how important is the death rituals for the Buddhist peoples of Ladakh?
- What happens when a person dies and how the rituals can assist the deceased?
- What is the role of oracles for the peoples of Ladakh and how it is related to social and other religions?

I also have sub-questions that will be explored:

- How the deceased family members and relatives are responsible to perform the funeral rites?
- How rituals performed in modern times and what are the changes came in it?
- How oracle possessed by local spirits or gods?

Based on the above research motivations and research purpose, this study collects data and conducts research of rituals in the Northern Himalayan Region (Ladakh). The main objective of the study can be summarized as follows:

1. To check and show the role of Ladakhi people toward annual rituals.
2. To find and analyze the relation between oracle and people.
3. To show and tell the world about the ancient rituals of Buddhists lived in the Himalayan region.

To understand the Buddhist rites in specific for the peoples I need to explore it from every perspective. I will study the importance of each individual in rituals and find their role in complete the functions. As an example, when some rites performed in a monastery then the monks have to accomplish every ritual in a particular period. But without the support of villagers, it was difficult to complete the rites. Likewise, in household rituals also need to contribute to lamas, relatives, and neighbors, etc. This will help me to explain that the history of Buddhist rituals will help people understand the special role which Buddhism plays in society.

Most of the Buddhist rites came from the Tibet in early century with the support of kings and this helps me to explore the history from some point of view. So, I will be able to explain Buddhist rites not only as of the keystones of the Buddhist religion but also as one of the main contributions of Tibetan Buddhism to Himalayan culture.

1.2 Research Methods and Materials

In this section, I will describe my method of analysis as well as my source materials. By contrast, qualitative research can be constructed as a research strategy that usually emphasizes word rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data and that emphasizes an inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research.¹

¹ A Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 32-33.

Therefore, this thesis requires qualitative methods for research about the importance of rituals for the people of Ladakh. Describing the method of qualitative document analysis will be followed because of my source material consisting of interviews and journal articles. Then I give a description of the other sources that were vital in gaining a better understanding of the context that these events are set in. I will also mention the strengths and weaknesses of my research.

The main method of research that I was inspired by was qualitative content analysis. Qualitative researchers are called journalists, or soft scientists, and their work is termed unscientific, or only exploratory, or subjective.² The journal articles describe document study as “an integrated and conceptually information and details, comparing technique and method, retrieving and researching documents for their relevance, importance, and meaning. This type of research provided me with the data that I needed to answer my research question. Studying such a method gives me more ideas and possibilities for me to study the relationship between culture and society. Focus on finding books, journal articles, news articles, and website and through that, I did a review for my historical background of Ladakh and Buddhism in Ladakh.

I will expect to use the field study that would be used as source material. Undertaking a field study has forced me to consider different theoretical and practical aspects than for a conventional paper, in the process of investigation as well as analysis. The general advantages of a field study can be said to be that it allows for a practical, deep and theory developing approach as well as analytical openness.³

Through the process of reading and rereading my source material, I started to establish the themes and ideas that would eventually become a part of my analysis. During this work, I interview several people who became key informants during the research, and I carried out more discussions with these people. Further, different types of the interview will be taken – individuals (male and female), religious heads, group interviews (family, Lamas) and elderly persons. The questions on rituals were asked into a different person as according to their knowledge. The material in this chapter was taken from participant observation, informal and main informant interviews which will be described here.

² Norman K Lincoln, S Denzin, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. (Sage, 2005).

³ Steven J Taylor, and Robert Bogdan, "In-depth Interviewing." *Introduction to qualitative research methods* 3, (1998): 87-116.

The research method used to carry out this study is focused on individual interviews where there is the interaction between the participants as important as the discussion of the topic. It further involves organized discussion with a selection of individuals, who were interviewed to gain information about their opinions and experiences of a topic.

Research Design

Research design is one method to arrange ideas for the collection and analysis of data. I will use proper and specific methods in a specific research issue. Moreover, it is the conceptual structure within which the research is conducted. A research design is a method to provide a framework for the collection and analysis of data.⁴ As the research method is the qualitative case study method. Qualitative research involves the studies used and collection of a variety of empirical materials case-study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interview; artifacts; cultural texts and productions; observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individual's lives.⁵ As mentioned earlier, this study is mainly based on interviews, but data is also gathered from primary and secondary sources. The primary data sources are from the individuals through in-depth interviews: telephone, video call interview and face to face interview if possible. Interviews help me to gather more knowledge about rituals and especially their opinion and ideas towards all rites. The secondary data were collected through literature reviews that are related to the study. I also checked at websites and try to find some previous field studies on similar topics.

Data Collection Methods

The selection of qualitative methods depends on the purpose of the study. Considering the research questions of this thesis, I have applied open-ended interviews and observation as primary qualitative data collection methods. My choices of methods were guided not only by the research questions I wanted to answer but I also had to consider the time limits

⁴ A Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (University Press, 2016), 39-45.

⁵ Norman K Denzin, and S Lincoln Yvonna, eds. *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* 3, SAGE (2003), 5.

given and so I had planned to complete my paper in this last semester, during which time I would interview and do research for the collection of better material. One of the reasons for choosing a qualitative method is that I think that my study will benefit from techniques that facilitate a deep and open-minded analysis.

1.3 Research Steps

Finding Source Material

My main reference is material from journal articles and books. These journal articles were found in the journal website like Google Scholar, Pub Med, and online Library. I also used newspaper articles that published within a few years as I felt they provided me new ideas of the rituals of today's generation. These articles were not used directly in the analysis but are mentioned to provide the methods used in rites and extra background context.

One of the main reasons that I decided to use journal articles as my source material is the fact that the journal holds a key point which helps me to research more about my thesis clearly. As I started to read through the articles, I found that there were many references to the Buddhist rituals in Himalaya and Tibet. I found the first article mentioned about the Tibetan death ritual. I used it as a starting point of the time period that my source materials would come from. There were other media sources that I looked at throughout my research to help me get gain background and context information. I looked at the books related to Tibetan Buddhism. It was important to look at this book to get a better understanding of the references provided about history. I also watched videos found online through YouTube to get a better understanding of the rites that are mentioned. The videos especially the documentary made on different rituals provide a better understanding of my thesis.

One of the media sources that I looked into to help me gain a better understanding of the topic to describe. These were the *Bardo* (intermediate state) teaching gave by His Holiness Durkpa Rinpoche video on YouTube which helps me to understand the topic clearly. I did not analyze this video as the main source of my research, but it did provide information

that was helpful in getting a better contextual understanding of a topic that is difficult to understand through books or journals.

Strengths and Weaknesses of my Research

During this thesis, I faced many challenges and solving this challenge because of my aspiration toward my topic and research is my greatest strength. Since I was living in a society where all the times covered with rituals and religious custom will make my research study simple, that I view as strengths. The systematic and thematically approach that I took in searching the articles that would be used as my source material, was something I view as one of my greatest strengths. I read numerous sources concerning a wide range of topics. These topics included the Buddhism in Tibet, Himalayan Religious ceremonies, books that were referenced to in the source material, documentaries made about the ritual, and other articles that gave me details. I also read a couple of books that were written by great Lamas about their experience of this ritual. All of these sources made it easier for me to understand about my research.

On the other hand, there were other decisions that can be viewed as a weakness. I reasoned that making an interview would have been difficult to arrange all the time and during wintertime in Ladakh internet connection is slow so making interview is also one of my limitations. So, taking the interview and collecting resources online all the time is unsuitable. But unless I have faced and challenges all the problems to complete and make my thesis effective.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

I had started my thesis with an introduction in chapter one where I expressed my topic background flowed by my research aim and motivation. The chapter shows how I have chosen my sources and what the methods are used to write my thesis. The different types of qualitative method are been used such as from books, journals, interviews, and online sources. It also discusses the literature and previous researchers worked. The limitation is also mentioned during my thesis.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the geographical and historical study where I explained how Buddhism reached in Ladakh through Tibet with the support of many Scholars and Lamas. In this, there are few case studies of ancient scholars and master who spread Buddhism around the Tibet. It's also important to protect and purify the local deities and environment to keep the demons and bad spirits away from the community. In rituals in Ladakh which carries daily, monthly and annually. The chapter also explores the different types of rituals and festivals that occurred in Ladakh Buddhist. This gives me the opportunity to understand these rituals and their importance for Ladakhi people. In the last part of this chapter is focused on the customs of Ladakh Buddhist culture.

Chapter 3 is about the death rituals of Ladakh Buddhist. The chapter explains how the funeral ceremony occurs in Ladakhi villages and urban places. Why the funeral is important, how relatives and family members played a role in rites, what are the method used during this ceremony. The chapter explained with each step of the funeral. It also discussed the different types of funeral. In the last part of the chapter is explained how in Buddhist Ladakh remember their deceased and ancestral.

The most villages in Buddhist Ladakh, the health care system included local monastic establishments, oracles (*lha* or *lhamo*), and astrologer (*onpo*), and Tibetan medicine doctor (*amchi*). In the following chapter four, I will be looking at the monastic contribution to this system and I will look briefly at how village and monastery oracles contribute in broad terms. I also explore some differences between oracles and compare the changes from historical view and how they may have contributed to solving the problem of peoples. This chapter also led us to explore the relation between villagers and monastery. The research explores the dynamics of religious practice in villages both in the past and present.

The Chicago Manual of Style 2010 edition has been utilized in this thesis for both footnotes and bibliography. In the last interviews, questions are answered in the context of Appendices.

1.5 Overview of Previous Research

As my research thesis is about the death rituals and oracles in Ladakh. My research is more based on the interviews than on the works of literature. So, for the literary review, I have referred to some journals, books, articles, and internet sources.

Buddhist perspective

In the past years, there have been more than 100 papers related to the theme of funeral or Tibetan Buddhist death rituals, which are divided into few categories: funeral ceremonies, funeral management, funeral facilities, burial culture, and funeral text. But among them, there are less than 20 papers related to the 'Ladakh Buddhist death rituals.' For example, the paper related to "the Ladakh Buddhist death ceremonies" is Martin Brauen (1982), in his journal no.4 "Death Customs in Ladakh" explored the funeral customs during the 20th century and how Ladakhi Buddhist people deal with the rituals at that time. This can do a comparative study related to today's customs. Same likewise in the book- "Ladakh: The Land and the People" by Prem Singh Jina describe how people competed for the dead ceremony in villages in Ladakh. In his book, he thoroughly explores the entire Ladakh in all fields.

The above two papers all take the role of the funeral ceremony in Ladakh, apart from that there are many other paper related papers to Tibetan Buddhist death rites, as Ladakh Buddhist is the same as Tibetan Buddhism. Margaret Gouin (2012) in his book describes what is done when a Tibetan Buddhist dies and also shows the differences in death rituals depending on a different factor. It also explains why the family and relatives are important during funeral ceremonies. As followed by Bokar Rinpoche (1993) answer the question of death and dying in Tibetan Buddhism. This paper is mainly based on the interview. He explained the theory of after death in Tibetan Buddhism and how death rituals are enacted for a deceased person. This will clear to understand the importance of Buddhist funeral in Tibetan Buddhism. It shows how important is the spiritual lives in Tantric Buddhism during the four stages: life, dying & death, the intermediate, and rebirth (Kathryn Coster 2010) in his journal. He also gives a summary of the stages of *Brado Thondol* (Tibetan Book of Dead), the principal source for popular understandings of Tibetan Buddhist

conceptions of death is first translated by Walter Y. Evans- Wentz in 1927. He translated Tibetan Bardo into English “The Tibetan Book of the Dead” where a part of a cycle of texts, the self-liberation through contemplation of the peaceful and wrathful deities. Through the inspiration of this book ‘The Tibetan Book of the Dead’, two films are made- Bruce Joel Rubin’s Jacob’s Ladder (1990) and Gaspar Noe’s Enter the Void (2009) and in 2018 an article has published an influence on this film by Paul B. Donnelly. In this, he explained the moment of death and death experience from a Tibetan Buddhist perspective. All these researches express their concept of Tibetan death rites through different contexts.

Tibetan Buddhism mainly found in Tibet, certainly, but also in Nepal, Bhutan, Ladakh, Mongolia, and other Himalayan region and you see the ritual. In Ladakh, the rituals are formed by overlaps between the rituals of Tibetan Buddhism and indigenous Bon religion. Due to natural geographical condition helps the people to develop their religious ideas and practices in a peculiar way. The variety of landscape had its influence further on the Tibetan mind and produced a faith, furious and mysterious, peculiar to Shamanistic cult⁶ by Anukul Banerjee in his book “Bon- The Primitive Religion of Tibet” (1981). His book is not only the history of Bon Religion but also gives an immense idea to different scholars researching on Bon. In terms of the history of Bon, a book by Waddell is a very old book published in 1926 has been referred that the Tibetan historical sources provide us with material which proves the existence of another religion called Bon, or also a type of Shamanism, prior to the advent of Buddhism.⁷ In the book of S.C. Das, he mentions that Bon is the ancient religion of Tibet which was fetishism, demon worship, and propitiation by means of incantation.⁸ Bon signifies like Shamanism which was the religion of Tibetan and Himalayan people before the introduction of Buddhism and in certain parts still exists.

In the book of Tibetan Rituals by Cabezon explore the real meaning of ‘ritual’ in term of Tibetan Buddhism and explained why these rituals are important. He translated the rituals (*choga*) is a method for accomplishing a goal, a way of performing an action and a procedure.

⁶ Anukul Chandra Banerjee, *Bon-The Primitive Religion of Tibet.* (1981), 1.

⁷ L. A. Waddell, and James Hastings. *Encyclopedia of religion and ethics.* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1926), 333.

⁸ Sarat Chandra Das, *A Tibetan-English dictionary with Sanskrit synonyms.* (Bengal Secretariat Book Department, 1902), 879.

Angela Sumegi (2008), *Dreamworlds of Shamanism and Tibetan Buddhism*, discussed the concept of shamanism and how it's related to Buddhism. In this, he gave details about the ancient Indian rituals and made a distinction between shamanism and Lamaism. This made my idea about the relation between shamanism and Tibetan Buddhism. This study is similar to Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956) and John Myrdhin Reynolds (2017) is based on the oracle's rites in Tibet and the western Himalayan region. The commonality between the two is that the researchers are the background of the ancient Tibetan oracle. Apart from the above paper, Sophie Day (1989), his research is mainly studied about the Ladakh oracles. He entirely focuses upon village oracles in Buddhist Ladakh. He explained how the village and monastery oracles possessed during rites. Samuel (1993) in his book, "Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies," not only identifies Tibetan spirit-mediums as shamans but goes on to creates an entire category he calls "shamanic Buddhism."⁹ Gibson (1997) considers Tibetan spirit-mediums and the Tibetan State Oracle as different types of shamans. This considers the difference of oracles in Tibetan Buddhism and gives us an idea about their individual work.

Many studies can be found which discuss different kinds of Buddhist rites. Mostly researches focus on festivals, marriage ceremony, meditation, monasticism, pilgrimage, deities, gods, and culture. Some of them discuss the history of Tibetan Buddhism and culture in the Himalayan region. Jose Ignacio (2010) in his book *Tibetan Rituals* concentrate on Mahayana Buddhism, especially on tantrism where he discusses tantric rituals and myths with reference to ancient bon text, rituals for deceiving death and rituals magic. Jose Ignacio discussed the empowerment rituals of tantric Buddhism where his paper is mainly basis on Tibetology. Eva K. Neumaier-Dargyay and Eva M. Dargyay in the year of 1998, "The Rise of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet" book deals with the Tibetan historical school, the transmission of Mahayana teaching, the transmission of tantrism has told the expansion of Tibetan Buddhism during the 4th-10th century. Later all this transmission was spread across the Himalayan places.

⁹ Geoffrey Samuel, "*Civilized shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan societies.*" (1993), 8.

Historical perspective

As it is important to understand the brief physical and historical perspective of Ladakh. In terms of history of Ladakh, a book by Alexander Cunningham which is a very old book published in 1854 has been referred and it describes the physical feature and ancient society, religion, and culture of Ladakh, which was followed up by John Bray¹⁰ book history of Ladakh began in a late 7th century or by late 8th century, when Ladakh was part of the Tibetan empire. Both these books give details about the social, religious condition in earlier times and help in understanding the situation of Ladakh in the earlier days. His book is not only the history of Ladakh but also gives an immense idea to different scholars researching on Ladakh.

Ladakh since from the ancient times follows the Buddhas teaching, but there were lots of changes in teaching and practice with the time, it is said that earlier the Buddhism had flourished in Ladakh during the reign of great Indian kings Kushan and Ashoka and later Tibetan Buddhism flourished with the rule of Tibetan kings over Ladakh. N. Ross Reat covers the history of Buddhism throughout the world from the time of Buddha to the present day. It helps to understand the early Buddhism in Ladakh.¹¹ Nawang Tsering Shaksपो in his book “A cultural history of Ladakh” had given a brief historical background of Buddhism in Ladakh from the Kushan period. Sanjeev Kumar Bhasin had mentioned about the later period when Tibetan Buddhism flourished in Ladakh and a series of dynasties which propagates the Buddhism in Ladakh and mentions in detail about every monastery and Buddhist sect of Ladakh,¹² whereas P. S. Jina discussed the Buddhism in Ladakh and the propagation of Christianity and Islam into Ladakh. Nawang Tsering also mentions Buddhism in the modern society of Ladakh and various religious problems faced by the people of Ladakh.¹³

Jolanta Gablankowska-Kukucz (2015) article published for Polish Journal of the Arts and Culture, Initiation Rituals in Shingon and Tibetan Buddhism, shows the Shingon village rituals and reading this article I can compare the local rituals of Shingon with Ladakh

¹⁰ Brill and John Bray, eds., *Ladakhi histories: local and regional perspectives*, 2005.

¹¹ N. Ross Reat, *Buddhism: A History* (Jain Publishing Company, 1994).

¹² Sanjeev Kumar Bhasin, *Amazing land Ladakh: places, people, and culture* (Indus publishing 2006), 240-255.

¹³ Nawang Tsering Shaksपो, “*A cultural history of Ladakh*,” 3rd ed. (Centre for Research on Ladakh, 2014), 158-180.

rituals. Andrea Butcher in 2013 published a journal on ‘Keeping the Faith: Divine Protection and Flood Prevention in Modern Buddhist Ladakh’ study about the Ladakhi local and mountain gods that act as guardians and protectors of the land. I’m very familiar with his research and it gives me to understand the effect of Buddhist rituals on the environment. It highlights the interdependent relationship humans have with the guardians of water.¹⁴ Sa Mtsho Skyid and Gerald Roche (2011), in journal “Purity and Fortune in Phugsde Tibetan Village Rituals” discuss the Daily, annual, and life- cycle rituals are described and the connections between such rituals, fortune, and purity are explored.¹⁵ This demonstrates the village rituals and daily practices which may relates to Ladakhi village rituals. Homayun Sidkyin Number 58 (2011) 71–99 “State Oracle of Tibet, Spirit Possession, and Shamanism” comparing the State Oracle of Tibet to the Oracle and studying the Tibetan oracular phenomenon have attempted to link it directly or indirectly to Siberian and Central Asian shamanism. This paper describes the Tibetan oracular phenomenon and then considers whether the State Oracle of Tibet can legitimately be classified as a shaman.¹⁶

Dargyay Eva (1988) in his journal (vol.2, No.28) deals with the remote western Himalaya Buddhist culture and he talked about the religious belief and customs about the western Ladakh area. All these data about previous I got it from visiting the library, the internet, and electronic databases to find preliminary sources, such as books and scholarly journals.

¹⁴ Andrea Butcher, "Keeping the faith: divine protection and flood prevention in modern Buddhist Ladakh." *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 17, no. 2 (2013): 113.

¹⁵ Sa MtshoSkyid and Gerald Roche, *Purity and Fortune in Phugsde Tibetan Village Ritual, Asian Highlands Perspectives*. 10 (2011), 231-284.

¹⁶ HomayunSidky, "*The state oracle of Tibet, spirit possession, and shamanism.*" *Numen* 58, no. 1 (2011): 71-99.

CHAPTER 2: GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL STUDY OF LADAKH

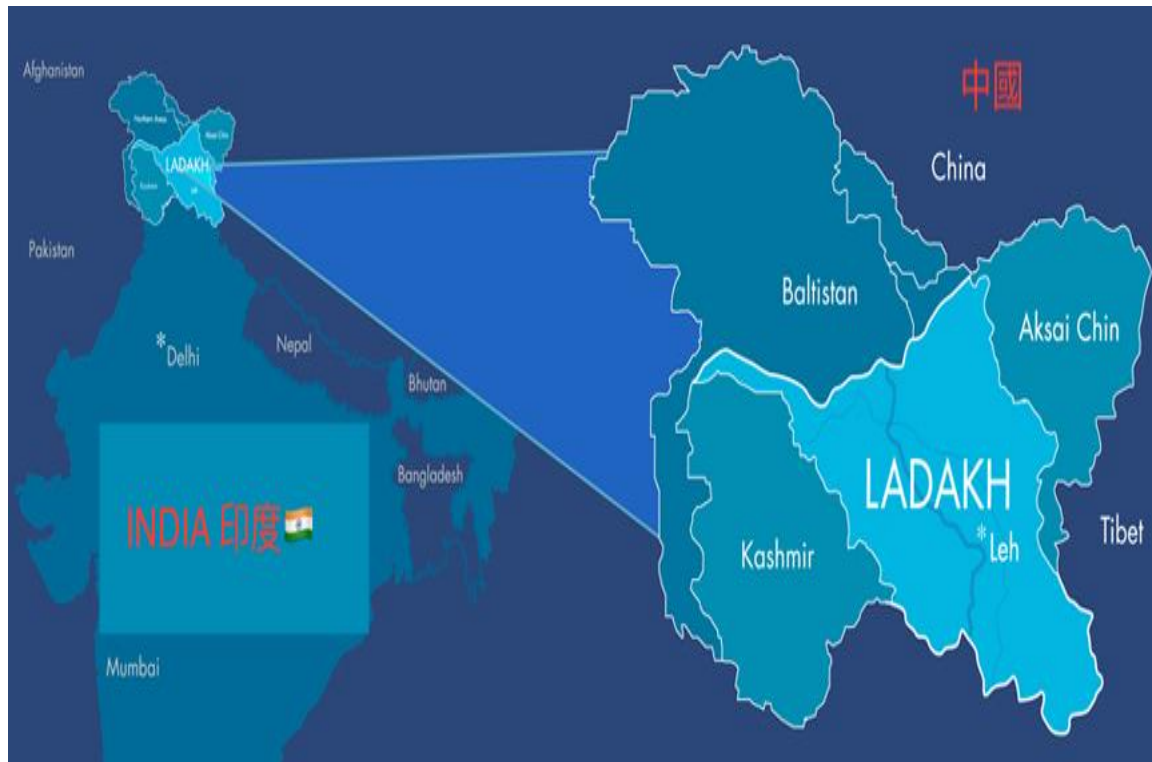


Figure 1 Map of Ladakh

2.1 Geographical Study of Ladakh

Ladakh is located in one of the remotest regions of the north most part of India and for many centuries it has been known by many names. Ladakh means “land of mountain passes” and is derived from the Tibetan “la” refer to passes. Ladakh region located at the highest plateau with more than 9800ft in Jammu and Kashmir, India and it consists of two districts Leh and Kargil. The north-east side of Ladakh is bounded by Aksai Chin and Tibet which is occupied by China, North-west side by Gilgit and Skardu which is now occupied by Pakistan. The western part of Ladakh in Kashmir valley and Lahual, Spiti village of Himachal Pradesh in the south. Leh is the second largest district in India with a

total area of 59,196 sq. km.¹⁷ Muslims and Buddhists are equally numbered in Ladakh with a majority of Buddhists in Leh and Muslims in Kargil district.

Ladakh is extremely dry land with a vast sandy desert full of gold granite dust and barren lofty mountains¹⁸ with extremely scarce vegetation. In every direction are full of high mountains and pale greenish grasses cover all over the mountains and hills. The snowy mountains reach towards the cloud and mild wind blowing the sand and dust. Ladakh is famous for this high barren and White Mountains. The summer weather starts from May-September of maximum temperature up to 36°C and the winter late November to mid of March. The temperature during winter is -5°C to -30°C but some places like Drass and Changthang reached more than -45°C. Spring season is very important for Ladakhi people because it's the beginning of farming and water starts melting from snowy mountains. Monsoon season arrives in July-September and there is very virtually no rainfall. So, each farmer depends on the water which comes from the melted snow of the mountains and glacier.

Ladakh is the place where during the day a person can have sunburn while at night one can have frostbite. Indus river runs through the whole valley to the west and this river water is used for agriculture. It is the backbone of Ladakh. Here people speak the language which is dialect to Tibetan called “Ladakhi”, but the script is the same as Tibetan which known as “*chosskad*.”

The Ladakh region is divided into five large geographical valleys. These valleys are the Zaskar valley, Drass valley, Nubra valley, Indus valley, and Changthang valley. All these valleys are identified with the rivers following in the valleys. In Drass River the water is melting from the Machoi glacier from ZojiLa pass. Drass is the coldest place in the Ladakh, the temperature reached a minimum of -40°C to -50°C during the winter. They speak their native language called Shinna and in some area also Balti languages. In Zaskar valley, the Suru river is rise from the Panzella glacier and Botkul glacier which later adjoined by many other small streams. It is the largest valley in Ladakh. Indus river is the longest river that begins from Tibet and following the entire Indus valley. The Indus River is mainly used for agriculture and hydroelectricity in Ladakh. The valley has few big lakes like

¹⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ladakh> (accessed Mar. 20,2019).

¹⁸ J. P. Singh Rana, *Marriage and Customs of Tribes of India* (M.D. Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1998), 200.

Pangong lake and Tsomoriri lake which are famous for the tourist attraction. The valley has many high mountain road passes which connected to other valleys, Khardongla(17,582 ft)¹⁹ is one the world highest road pass. Nubra valley is reached through Khardongla pass. The Shyok River flows through a great part of this valley. Changthang valley is a part of the high-altitude Tibetan Plateau situated on the western side of Tibet.²⁰ It is the home to the Changpa, a nomadic Tibetan people. They migrant from one place to another with their cattle for animal graze.

2.2 History of Buddhism in Ladakh

During the period of Ashoka, Buddhism was spread all over the world. During that time Buddhism was divided into two sections- Mahayana means great wheel and Hinayana a small wheel. The Hinayana/Theravada spread towards Southeast Asia like Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, and the Mahayana to the northern side like China, Japan, and Tibet. Ladakh also comes under the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. The Ladakh is also called 'Little Tibet' due to its cultural, religious and architectural closeness to Tibetan. Before Buddhism came to Ladakh the peoples here believe in Bon religion, worshipping spirits and mountains. Even now the Ladakhi people are following Buddhism but they still recognize the Bon culture and celebrate Bon festival every year. It is believed that Buddhism was introduced to Ladakh before it arrived in Tibet, during the Third Buddhist Council in Kashmir (272–232BC) when Emperor Asoka sent a Buddhist missionary to Ladakh.²¹ For proof, the caves, rock carving of Buddhas and bodhisattvas can be seen in Zanskar, Khalatse, and Mulbekh which dates around the same periods. According to chapter 12 of Mahavamsa Chronicle of Sir Lanka, Ashoka sent the monk Majjhantika to Kashmir to introduce Buddhism and to the neighbor state Gandhara.²²

¹⁹ DGPS Document supplied by the Cartographic Institute of Catalonia.

²⁰ Janet Rizvi, *Trans-Himalayan Caravans*. Oxford University Press. 1999, 301.

²¹ Max Lovell-Hoare, Sophie Lovell-Hoare, *Kashmir: Jammu. Kashmir Valley. Ladakh. Zanskar* (Bradt Travel Guides, 2014), 20.

²² N. Ross Reat, *Buddhism: A History* (Asian Humanities Press 1994), 78-79.

Later during the period of Kaniska, the Kushan king (127-150 CE), he sent 500 Kashmiri missionaries to Tibet for the propagation of Buddhist faith.²³ During the Kushan period, Kashmir became an important Buddhist center. The 4th Buddhist council in Kashmir also assembled in the Kushan dynasty. Moreover, Kushan craved many statues over Ladakh, as Maitreya Buddha carved on a rock at Mulbekh in Ladakh.

The lingering Buddhism was mixed with Hinduism and the pure Buddhism, but later growth of Hindu temples and Hindu philosophies started the decline of Buddhism from India and around the early 11th century it completely vanished from Afghanistan and north India. In the long run, the only place where Buddhism still survived was Ladakh and Buddhism in Ladakh was Indian origin, which came through Kashmir. Indian Buddhism which was didn't survive in India and the later Buddhist center shifted to Tibet known as Mahayana Buddhism or Tibetan Buddhism.

Padmasambhava

In Tibet, Buddhism is penetrated through many different ways and various people effort. In this one famous role to spread Buddhism in Tibet was a famous Indian Buddhist scholar, Padmasambhava who was also known as Guru Rinpoche in Tibetan. He was the powerful Buddhist Tantric master studied at Nalanda University, India. He was also the founder of Nyingma-pa Tibetan Buddhist School. During his way to Tibet, he blessed Ladakh by retreated at many places in Ladakh. He had left a footprint on rocks scattering through the area and later this rock area where was built Takthok monastery. This monastery is the only Nyingma-pa school monastery in the whole Ladakh.

Lotsawa Rinchen Zangpo

Around 842, the last Tibetan emperor Lang-dharma has assented, after that his lineage moved further west side of Tibet to establish a new kingdom. This kingdom was Rudok, Purang, and Guge, and Buddhism started to flourish. One of the kings of Guge, Yesh-es-Od invited Atisa, a scholar of Nalanda University, to be his teacher. Later he became a

²³ Sanjeev Kumar Bhasin, *Amazing Land Ladakh: Places, People, and Culture* (Indus Publishing, 2006), 74.

monk and sent a group of young students to India to study Buddhism. Only two students returned, one of whom was Rinchen Zangpo.²⁴ Lotsawa Rinchen Zangpo was the main figure who flourished in Tibetan Buddhism in Ladakh. He was a great translator and artist, born in west Tibet. He was studied in Kashmir (North India) and translated many Buddhist texts and sutras like- *Vinaya piṭaka*, the Prajnaparamita, and many Tantric works. He propagated Buddhism in Ladakh with building many monasteries and stupas at Alchi and, later, Sumda and Mangyu monasteries, which were built with the help of Kashmiri artists. These are some of the oldest monasteries in Ladakh. It's also said that he set up 108 monasteries in Western Tibet and Ladakh.²⁵

There were also many scholars and Lamas who helped to flourish Tibetan Buddhism in Ladakh, some of them are great yogi Norapa, Lachhan Gyalpo, and Lachhan Tashi Gon. During the period of Lachhan Norup Gon (1290-1340), the customs of sending Lamas to Tibet for education begin in his time.²⁶ Till the 1950s the monks go to Tibet to study with the help of Ladakhi kings, then after the captured of Tibet by China in the 1950s, the connection is been lost.

In every village, there have at least one small monastery and they are situated on the top hill or higher position from homes in a properly opposite towards the villages. These monasteries are considered as traditional mediators between the human world and the sentient landscape explains supernatural retribution as the result of karmic demerit that requires ritual intervention.²⁷

Invasion of Islam in Ladakh

In the 7th Century AD, Islam was founded by Prophet Mohammad. Later it has spread everywhere and reached Ladakh via Afghanistan. There are many Muslim invaders who enter into Ladakh to promote the Muslim movement. One of the invaders was Mirza

²⁴ Sophie Ibbotson, Max Lovell-Hoare, *Buddhism in Ladakh and Zaskar* (Bradt Travel Guides 2014). <https://www.bradtguides.com/articles/buddhism-in-ladakh-and-zaskar/> (accessed April 10, 2019)

²⁵ Nawang Tsering, *Cultural History of Ladak*, 3rd ed. (Centre for Research on Ladakh, 2014).

²⁶ Kaul, Shridhar, and Kaul Hriday Nath, *Ladakh through the ages, towards a new identity* (Indus Publishing, 1992), 42.

²⁷ Butcher, Andrea. "Keeping the faith: divine protection and flood prevention in modern Buddhist Ladakh." *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 17, no. 2 (2013): 103.

Haider who invaded Ladakh in the 14th Century. During this time many Muslim groups settled in Ladakh and forced Buddhists to accept Islam. Another accident is one of Ladakhi King Jamyang Namgyal was captured by Muslim king Ali Mir and later tied the knot with Balti princess Gyal Khatoon, daughter of Ali Mir, king of Skardu.²⁸ King Jamyang Namgyal made a mosque for Gyal khatoon in Leh and nearby Leh which now makes the half population in Ladakh is Muslim. Other invaders like General Zoraweer Singh who ruled Ladakh for more than Century.

2.3 History of Shamans and Oracle in Ladakh

A ritual performed by a shaman who called himself a *Bonpo*, that is belonging to the pre-Buddhist tradition in Tibet. The shamans from Ladakh area are referred in the local language, as *Lhapa*, and as well as in Tibet. *Lha* means a god and *pa* is a particle that represents the term which precedes it. It means “one person having to do with what comes before”.²⁹ So *Lhapa* means principally, “a person taking with gods”.

The oracle and shaman are basically the nature of what trances the person, the medium or spirit as we are familiar to call them in the west. In Ladakh they differentiate in two ways. If it is a deity tranced the person, then it is an oracle, which has very definite and clear features defining it. If the ghost of a dead person, or some spirits possessing the body then it is a spirit and called as a shamanic trance. On the other way, the oracle obeys very specific rules and it is very important that the high spirit or deity is strictly controlled by the ritual procedures. The shaman is a different as they do not have a teacher and they learn what they know- the reads they chant, how to get into the possess and play the instrument. Shamans receive instructions as to how to carry out all the procedures and how to control themselves in their dream.

²⁸ Sanjeev Kumar Bhasin, *Amazing Land Ladakh: Places, People, and Culture* (Indus Publishing, 2006) 70.

²⁹ Fabian Sanders, *Tibetan Oracles and Himalayan Shamans* (UK: The London Institute of Tibetan Studies, 2013), 6-8.

In Ladakh as elsewhere in Asia, shamanism is hardly a dead or desiccated.³⁰ Once thought to be scholarly survivals, shamanism and spirit possession are part of a growing social phenomenon within that indeterminate and contested cultural realm known as the Himalayas. At the western end of the Indian Himalaya, the shamanic traditions of Ladakh both bridge and exceed a few critical symbolic oppositions in local discourse—lay and monastic, male and female, purity and pollution, order and disorder, sickness and sanity.

Ladakhi shamans or oracles both interrupt and associate main cultural rules through their flexible, realistic, healing and divination. Since ancient, Ladakhi shamans are very important as oracles or spirit mediums that are tranced by one or more spirits of the local Buddhist pantheon. In Ladakh, as in Tibet region, the adaptation to monastic Buddhism between the 7th and 10th centuries never fully suppressed former shamanic traditions. The mixture between shamanic and a scholastic and traditional institute Buddhism is apparent in the two types of oracular transition: a simple village level oracle and a formalized monastic oracle. The two main types of Ladakhi oracles as- village/house oracles and monastic oracles are both recognized as *Lhapa*. *Lhapa* share a skill “to tell the future, diagnose disease and disaster, and bring relief to clients”. They can communicate with a distant spirit world, as their bodies become vessels through which the god can speak.

In recent times, oracles have mostly been women, especially as village oracles. The village oracles have more preferred as a healer and diagnose the body and spirit of their patients. They are also known as a spiritualists who deal with the demonic and misfortune. The monastic oracles serve as official spiritualists who are closely associated with the monastery. The monastic oracles are always men and they are chosen by lottery to be possessed by protector spirits. They remain few in number compare to village oracles. In Ladakh only 2-3 monasteries maintained monastic oracles, Matho and Stok monasteries. By contrast, village oracles are found in every village and especially as *Lhamo* (female oracle) along most the heavily populated area like Leh.

Ladakhi oracles are predominantly Buddhist population that is mainly found in Leh district and the Zangskar region of Kargil district. The others or spirit mediums across the Buddhist Himalayas, such as the Sherpa and Dolpo, *lhapa*, the Tamang *bombo*, and the Tibetan and Bhutanese called as *pabo*, *pamo*, and *lhapa*. Ladakhi shamanism is a

³⁰ Clifford Geertz, *The interpretation of cultures*. Vol. 5019. Basic books, 1973.

historically and culturally mediated social practice with traditional links to the monastery as well as the state.

Rituals in Ladakh



Figure 2 *Torma* and *Chodpa* (Rituals offering object made of food)

The Buddhist people of Ladakh believe that spirits are all over in the environment like in mountain, water, trees, land, and skies. All these spirits are not good; some of them is an evil spirit. So, the people here performed different rituals to protect these spirits or deities and practiced many methods to offer them. In most of the rituals, they make offering objects made of food called *torma* and *chodpa*. *Torma* is practiced to make a ritual offering to cast away the bad and evil spirits while *chodpa* is practiced in ritual as an offering to deities³¹ to protect from disaster, timely snowfall, good yield of crops, keep away from diseases and evils. These offering objects are made by monks during the rites at

³¹ Tsering Norphel, "Buddhist Rituals and Environmental Ethics." *A Study in Leh District of Ladakh* 7, XI (2018).

monasteries and houses, but the main annual ritual is held at the monastery. As I follow *Drinkgung* school order, so the annual rites festival is called *kabyat* means a ritual offering of *torma* to drive out evil influences and perform mask dance in monastery representing different deities. Every monastery has this ritual annually according to their Buddhist school followed and a huge number of devotees come this day to bless from protector deities.

In the village, there is a traditional ritual to perform called *skangsol*³² in which every household has to invite a group of monks from the monastery and the ritual performed each house by turn-wise. This ritual is annually performed by every household during the time of harvesting to offer the annual agricultural produce to the Buddhist deities for a high yielding of crops and high rainfall on time. When people build a new house then they call few Lamas to perform rituals to purify the land of the house to construct. People believe during the construct of the house killed thousands of small insects and sometimes affects the spirit of the earth (*sadak*) and water (*Ihu*). They can easily be angered and upset their peace so this ritual offering these deities for the apology. Sometimes small mound of the house-like structure with clay bricks has been built for the spirits, foods, and milk is offered.

Ritual activities also dramatically increase at certain points in the yearly calendar. As in the first two weeks of the 1st Tibetan month as part of the New Year festival, on 4th Tibetan month is the holiest month of the Buddhist liturgical year, the month in which Tibetans celebrate the Buddha's birth (*Sagadawa*). *Sagadawa*³³ is a particularly popular time for engaging in communal fasting rites (*nyungnes*) and on the 15th of the month, with the Festival of the Buddha's Great Miracles.

Prayer Flag Rituals – *tarchok*

In Ladakh and Tibetan culture, these prayer flags are flagged on house roof, mountains, monasteries, stupas, bridge, and three side road. Annually looking an auspicious day these prayer flags are changed with a new one and before these printed color flags are carried to

³² Martin A Mills, *Identity, ritual and state in Tibetan Buddhism: the foundations of authority in Gelukpa monasticism* (London: Routledge, 2013), 190-191.

³³ <https://www.learnreligions.com/saga-dawa-or-saka-dawa-449914> (accessed April 13, 2019).

a lama, who after making religious rites "*Rabnas*" then flagged on the four corners of the house in four directions. The flag is combined with five colors of cloth-red, yellow, blue, and green and white which represent the five elements of earth and these prayer flags show a poetic and spiritual contribution to the peace and well-being of the world.³⁴ People flagged these on high passes, stupas, mountain peaks and bridge which message this prayer through breeze wind.



Figure 3 Tarchok - Prayer Flag on the House

Sickness, misshapenness, cruelty, bad deeds, cloths (cover of evils), weapons (evil things), poison (which leads to death), etc., these are not helpful to human beings, therefore, soon be destroyed.

³⁴ Diane Barker, *Tibetan Prayer Flags: Send Your Blessings on the Breeze* (Connections Book Publishing, 2003), 6-9.

2.4 Ladakh Buddhist Customs

People in Ladakh are very simple, shy, and honest. Here the culture is to give respect to older and good hospitality to the guest. Peoples here are not actually a single ethnic group; it's mixed of various ethnic groups like Tibetan, Monpas, Aryans, and Dards that inhabit in Ladakh.³⁵ Most of Ladakhi are Mongoloid tribes who had comes from the Tibet side through the silk route. Mainly the main inhabitants live in remote villages depending on crops cultivated and gathering sheep and yaks. Meat, vegetables, and fruit are dried and kept in cold and dry places during summer, then during winter times, this dried food was used in a diet.

Musical Instrument

In Ladakh, there are many instruments used in the rituals and ceremonies at monasteries and villages. Mostly the instruments are used in daily prayers by monks. Some of them are *Dorje*, *Dung-Dung*, *Tiloo*, *Bugial*, *Gyaling*, *Daman*, *Surna*, Flute, etc. All these instruments have religious symbolic meaning for each. These instruments are producing different musical sounds and used for different religious gesture purposes. During the death ceremony, they are also used.

Dishes

The main food of the Ladakh is barley, wheat, rice, the meat of sheep and goat, potatoes, green vegetables. Meat and vegetables are dried for winter stock. The cheese of Yak is special food here. Some of the special local dishes which people here eat in a daily meal are *Thukpa* (noddles), *Mokmok* (dumplings) and *paba* (barley dishes).

³⁵ Lovell-Hoare, Max, and Sophie Lovell, *Kashmir: Jammu Kashmir Valley. Ladakh. Zanskar*. (Bradt Travel Guides, 2014), 19.

Birth

The birth of a child is an important occasion in Ladakh. After childbirth, relatives and villagers come to the house with gifts, *Khatak* (white scarf) and *Marsan* (special dishes of barley with butter). *Marsan* is only prepared during child born especially for mothers for good health after birth. During these days both mother and father are not expected to leave the house for at least 30 days and also the father is not allowed to go to any relative's house.³⁶ Even the relatives do not eat food made by the newborn child father and mother. The name of the infant is only given by Rinpoche or high Lamas according to the horoscope of the child.

Marriages

Earlier in Ladakh, in marriages, the brides are only arranged by parents or his relatives. The boy's parents choose the girl who is suitable for their family. The whole ceremony is arranged under the consultation of both-side parents and their relatives. The boy's father and uncle are sent to a girl house for a marriage proposal with *chang* (beer) and *khatak* (white scarf). If the beer is accepted, then the marriage is confirmed. Then they match the horoscope of boy and girl, if the horoscope is matched then they consulted the date of marriage from astrologer.

Death

The funeral ceremony is solemn occasions³⁷ and gives great respect towards the deceased. Prayers are chanted for many days and relatives come to meet deceased family members with *khatak* and biscuits to offer condolence. The monks or *Lonpo* read the Tibetan death book known as *Bardo Thondol* during the ceremony. For a rich family, a huge number of lamas assemble to read prayers and it takes place for 15-20 days.³⁸ But for the poor family, only a couple of Lamas can gather and read prayers for a few days.

³⁶ Prem Singh Jina, *Ladakh: The land and the people* (Indus Publishing, 1996), 60.

³⁷ J. P. Singh Rana, *Marriage and Customs of Tribes of India* (M.D. Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1998), 198.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 203.

Dress

Ladakh is extremely cold during the winter and to keep the body warm and fully covered, they wear a long-thick cloak of wool called *Gonches* (men) and *Sulma* (woman). In villages, a woman also wears plain skin of sheep to cover the backside.

Daily Prayers

Every day one of a family member does worship to Gods and deities in the family's altar room or *chotkhang*.



Figure 4 Chotkhang- Shrine Room

Chotkhang is a special Tibetan Buddhist shrine room where thangkas (scroll paintings), statues of Bodhisattvas and deities, rituals objects, and prayer books are arranged on traditional style furniture³⁹ where daily worship is done by lighting butter lamps and filling

³⁹ <https://rubinmuseum.org/events/exhibitions/the-tibetan-buddhist-shrine-room> (assessed April 15, 2019).

freshwater in a small metal bowl. The people here daily burned a Juniper (*shukpa*) in a small metallic box and take this into every room. They believe the smell of *shukpa* purifies the spirits lived inside the house. In villages, the head man of the house read Tibetan prayer books daily during the morning, this offer for the happiness and prosperity not only of own family but for every sentient being in the universe.



CHAPTER 3: DEATH RITUALS

3.1 Death, Dying and Ghost-Spirit

Buddhism is one of the popular religions in today world because of its own significant perspectives. The funeral rites in Tibetan Buddhism are very significant than other religions. It has a meaningful and important customs in Buddhism. Now, Ladakh and Tibet are divided into two different countries but the teachings and perspectives of Buddhism are similar. As the Ladakhi funeral rites are largely identical to those of Tibet but there are some distinct perspectives between two. There is one striking difference between the death ceremonies of Ladakh and those of Tibet with few exceptions in Ladakh all corpses are burned.⁴⁰ But in Tibet mostly the dead bodies are given to birds and animals to eat. Another difference is in Ladakh, the person here gives more important to relatives and family members. In villages, each family has several households that are more close to one another called '*phaspun*' and when someone dies, the *phaspun* of the deceased are informed first.⁴¹ *Phaspun* participate to help on every occasion like a birth, marriage, death, etc. They play an important role in each other's family affairs.

The Lamas or spiritual master are the main roles of a successful death ritual. They stay with the corpse and continuously chant prayers until the body burned, sometimes up to 49 days. They chant various prayers and each day performed the rite to purifying the deceased of his or her deeds.

Signs of Death

The sign of death appears in different stages shown by the dissolving of each of the five elements. According to Tibetan Buddhism if someone is about to die, then the person's body shows different signs that death will occur in the near future, especially in natural

⁴⁰ Martin Brauen, Death Customs in Ladakh, *Kailash - Journal of Himalayan Studies* 9, no.4 (1982): 319. <http://www.dspace.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/227419> (accessed Mar. 18, 2019).

⁴¹ Ibid.,

death cases. The signs of death exist in two kinds: distant and close.⁴² The distant signs of death can be experienced with or without having a particular illness and these signs occur from a day to few months before, come in different forms as in dreams, physically, and mentally. These signs are such as talking with non-existent people, changes in skin color, no longer see shadow under sun, dislike of objects of attachment, loss of interest in eating or drinking, saliva no longer forms in mouth, intelligence decreases, stop talking with people, dreams of running from a mountain naked, traveling towards south, restlessness, lose the ability to control bowels and bladder, continuous hiccupping, blood does not quickly return to fingernails if pressure is applied, tongue shrinks and feels swollen, tongue tip can no longer be seen and eyeballs sink further into the hollow of eyes.

Ladakhi Buddhists, especially in villages during the death of a person, never touch the corpse of the deceased. It is said that the consciousness is attracted to that part of a body that was touched and leave through that side of the point. Then the consciousness leaves the body below the waist, rebirth in low realms and high realms if touches above the waist.⁴³ It is why one should avoid touching the body for at least three days or until the consciousness transfer (*powa*) has been performed, if one really has to touch the body of the deceased, this should be done at the top of the person's head. Otherwise, one risks misleading the consciousness toward an inferior birth. So people usually check the dead through checking to breathe or not, stops pulse working, the body became cold and nail color changes to bluish.

Indeed, consciousness can leave through what is called the eight impure doors. They are the anus, urinary tract, navel, eyes, mouth, ears, nose, and the space between the eyebrows. These doors are impure as they give rise to rebirth in the conditioned worlds of the six classes of beings. When *powa* is done, the doors are closed. However, the door of the orifice of Brahma, located at the top of the head is opened. That is where consciousness must pass through for the person to be reborn in a pure land.

⁴² Kathryn Coster, *Tibetan Tantric Buddhism: Envisioning Death* (Trinity University, 2010), 24-27.

⁴³ Thupten Sangay, and Gavin Kilty. "Tibetan Ritual for the Dead." *The Tibet Journal* 36, no. 3 (2011): 50. https://www.jstor.org/stable/tibetjournal.36.3.49?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents (accessed Mar. 19, 2019).

The Ladakhi Buddhist people believe that they can counter the death by doing a long-life ritual and offerings goods to Gods if the persons whose karma and merit is exhausted.⁴⁴ They said by properly reciting millions of mantras against obstructing forces and enemies and by performing offerings, all obstructing forces will be warded off.⁴⁵ One of such ritual they do to cheat death is known as *chislu*. In Sanskrit called *vancana* means “deceiving” and the oldest *chislu* texts are found in the *Tengyur* (Tibetan Buddhist Canon), indicating their Indian origin. It is said that three causes of death are karma, lack of merit, and ⁴⁶interferences/obstacles (*parchad*). Only in cases where death is caused by interferences will a *chislu* ritual be potentially successful.⁴⁷ But now day’s people believe less in such rites and seen only a few doing such ritual in villages. Some also believe if the rituals are not successful then obstacles like diseases and evil influence arise.

Preparing the body

In Ladakh, there is a significant way to conduct the funeral rites and the entire performance of the funeral is completed by both *phaspun* and monks. When someone dies, the *phaspun* arranges a monk to the house of a dead person. Then for positively the state of mind of a dying person, a statue of buddhas and bodhisattvas is placed in the room and start reading prayers. The monk then checked the horoscope of death person and find whether the consciousness or soul is escaped or not. If the soul has escaped the body, the monk tries to bring back the soul. The monk then rips a hair from the corpse's scalp, thus allowing the soul to leave the body. If he is successful the corpse again and blood flows from the nose.⁴⁸ Then the small opening is made in the head by ripping out the hair and if the soul does leave the body through this opening, it can penetrate to Pure Land. This ceremony is called ‘*phowa dabches*’, if this is not to be performed then the soul would depart through other openings in the body, which could have a been effect on its future. Sometimes there are

⁴⁴ Stephan Beyer, *The cult of Tara: Magic and ritual in Tibet*. Vol. 1. Univ of California Press, 1978, 368.

⁴⁵ P. C. Verhagen, A Tibetan Sanskritist in Nepal. *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies* 4. (2013): 45-46.

⁴⁶ José Ignacio Cabezón, *Tibetan ritual* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 100-120.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁸ H Ramsay, *Western Tibet* (Lahore, 1890), 26.

some different rituals from village to village, but generally, all those are conducted according to the Tibetan Buddhist traditions.

The corpse is covered with a blanket and locked separately in a shrine or adjoining room. The monks do rites where the body kept, and a portion of food and drink are placed in front of the body to please the deceased and they changed the food during every meal until the corpse is removed from the house. The death ceremonies performed are concerned with making the deceased aware that he or she has left the body and must now be prepared to behave fearlessly when faced with the various deities who will appear in visions. Ladakhi Buddhists understand that death is not an end, only a transition from one to another, it is acceptable to show grief.⁴⁹

Beginning the *Bardos* of Death

In Tibetan Buddhism it's said that the *bardos* of death is differentiated into three stages and it just started at the moment of death, our four elements of body are absorbed into each other as solid constituents that belong to the earth element; fluids that belong to the water element; respiration that belongs to the air element; body temperature that belongs to the fire element. These raise the two series of phenomena, external and internal. This complete darkness experiences the mind into emptiness. The consciousness exits through the chakra located on the crown of the head, known as the "brahma aperture" and is facilitated by the recitation of "hik" over and over again by the dying individual.⁵⁰ The death person consciousness is absorbed into the bright white drop, if practice reciting "hik" then an appearance on the top of the head which represent the white path, red drop on the spine represent red path and finally, the black path combines of white and red light at the heart. The three paths also have these three Buddha bodies as their own pure essence: white path, the body of emanation (*nirmanakaya*), red path, the body of perfect experience (*sambhogakaya*), black path, absolute body (*dharmakaya*).⁵¹ If the elemental clear light isn't recognized, the mind stays into a deep state of unconsciousness for up to three and a

⁴⁹ Rijan Maharjan, Rites and Rituals of Funeral in Theravada Buddhist Countries, *Academic Journal of Buddhist Studies* 01 (2018): 3.

⁵⁰ John Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1995), 359-360.

⁵¹ Bokar Rinpoche, *Death and the Art of Dying in Tibetan Buddhism* (Clear Point Press, 1993), 16-19.

half days. The time period from the absorption of the four elements to the end of the three and a half days is appointed as the *bardo* of the moment of death. After that three and half days of unconsciousness, *bardo* of dharma begins where five Buddhas manifest and these five represent the five pearls of wisdom. Each of them manifests different color of light and the 42 peaceful and 58 wrathful deities have existed in the mind. These deities are the production of our mind and if we recognize these expressions, we will not fear them. This existing lasts for about three weeks. If we recognize these lights and deities, then the mind skips the third *bardo* which is the *bardo* of becoming. In the third *bardo* of death, a person realizes that he/she has died and this experience his pain. Then the mind tries to talk with the family members and relatives known in the past life, without a response from these peoples the mind suffers painful experience.

The mind has no existence of physical sense and body, so it can go anywhere in the universe within the speed of second. Terrifying sounds are heard without real existence as it is just a reflection of our past life karma by the mind. That time if a person remembers Amitabh Buddha, he or she exists the samsaric cycle and born in a Pure Land.

3.2 The Disposal of the Corpse

The burn of the body has been calculated on the basis of death horoscopes. In case a monk or astrologer checked the exact time of death (time, day, week, date, zodiac sign, month, year), the year of birth of the deceased and his/her *sparkha* (soul level).⁵² On the basis of this data and astrological books, the monk was able to tell which day the body should be removed from the house and burned. This culture of burned has been following in every part of Ladakh, nowadays in the urban part of Ladakh peoples are so busy in their modern lifestyle and works. They think following such culture loses their precious time and burned the deceased as soon as possible. Even during summertime, the corpse smells the bad odor, and in such cases, the deceased members couldn't burn the body on day consulted by monks. The checked of astrological books important for Ladakh Buddhist because of it clear the questions about the deceased; such as, did a person die before his time and what

⁵² Martin Brauen, Death Customs in Ladakh, *Kailash - Journal of Himalayan Studies* 9, no.4 (1982): 319-320.

can be done in such a case? During the moment of death what was deceased thinking about and what should be done if thought any negative? Where the deceased take rebirth and if he or she reborn in the lower realms then what kind of rites and methods can be done to help him? Clearing all such questions through following rites assisted the deceased soul to a good rebirth.

Wrapping the Corpse

When the *phowa* ceremony has been completed, all those present in the house of the deceased rub their bodies with pieces of white cloths. These cloths remove the evil which has been infected to the people and then thrown away outside the house. After that the deceased is wrapped in white burial clothes (*roras*), the head is drawn towards the knees and the hands are laid in front of the face in such manner that the tips of the little fingers are resting in the nostrils while the other fingers cover the eyes.⁵³ All this is only done by *phaspun* as only they are allowed to touch the body during this time. Then the corpse was placed in a box (*spurgang*) covered with white cloths around. The box was tied with two long strong straight poles along either side and placed the corpse in a crouching position.⁵⁴ Now the corpse can be carried outside the door. A flag (*rgyalshan*) has been affixed at each of the four corners.

The corpse was carried on the shoulders from four sides by the *phaspun* and relatives. In most of the funeral, the close relatives of the deceased or the children had carried. In Ladakh, the woman is not allowed to carry the corpse but, in some places if no male in the house then woman or daughter also allowed to carry. But usually, in villages, the woman is not allowed to touch the corpse during cremation. They also thought the corpse was first carried by a *phaspun* and then by a friend or relative. But now people did not maintain the exact rules. A long time before in Ladakh, if the deceased is poor or doesn't have *phaspun*

⁵³ Martin Brauen, Death Customs in Ladakh, *Kailash - Journal of Himalayan Studies* 9, no.4 (1982): 320.

⁵⁴ Thupten Sangay, and KiltyGavin, "Tibetan Ritual for the Dead." *The Tibet Journal* 36, no. 3 (2011), 55.

then one of the people carries the corpse on his back⁵⁵ to the cremation site. Now, the corpse is carried in the vehicle to the cremation site.

This is mainly seen in cities but now even in villages, people preferred to take the corpse in a vehicle then carried. But I saw in some of the villages they made a strict rule that the corpse is only allowed to carry out by people and is not following such rule the deceased members and *phaspun* are fined. Following such kind of rule maintaining the ancient culture of rites.



Figure 5 Corpse carrying to the cremation site

Cremation

The corpse should be taken from the house before the sun drawn, a few hours before the sunset. The funeral was followed by relatives, villagers, and monks to the cemetery. The numbers of monks are depending on the family financial conditions.

The monks wear sacred clothing which consists of a brocade smock (*smadgos*), a large brocade collar (*stodle*), a black headband with long braids which or the eyes (*migdar*),⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Martin Brauen, Death Customs in Ladakh, *Kailash - Journal of Himalayan Studies* 9, no.4 (1982): 320-326.

black color crown covering the head. The monks play bells, oboes (*rgyaling*) and drums circling around the funeral place (*spurkhang*). The corpse box is placed inside the *spurkhang* by *phaspun* of the deceased. The friends, relatives and family member circle the *spurkhang* three times and lay three times on ground paying their final respect to deceased. The mourners do not remain long at the cremation site, soon returned to the house. Only the *phaspun* stay the cremation site to conduct a fire ceremony (*shinreg*). During *shinreg* the monk read texts and does many rituals for the good life of the deceased. After completed of *shinreg* the *phaspun* is able to return the house of the deceased. At the outside of the deceased house, they are washed with water and barley to eat. The monks also given food drink and paid his services and later called to conduct the various rites. On that day no one visits the deceased's home except the monks and *phaspun*.

Disposal of Ashes

Early in the morning of the fourth day after the burned of the corpse, few of the deceased's *phaspun* go to the *spurkhang* and remove the ashes. The monks also invited to the house of the deceased to produce triangle clay figures (*tsatsa*)⁵⁷ to do a purifying rite (*rabnas*). Usually, in Ladakh, the ashes are mixed with clay to form a shape of *tsatsa* and this rite is called bone ceremony (*ruchog*). The *tsatsa* is produced by a monk from the bone fragment which is mixed with clay and the dust of five metals. The monk made at least one *tsatsa* from the ashes. Then the *tsatsa* was put in a pure place such as a stupa, in the niche of a chorten or of a *mani* wall or on a hill. Sometimes they throw the ashes into a religious river (*lu*) like Ganges and Indus or laid on a mountain (*lha*). On the same day, the relatives and close friends once again visit the house of the deceased while the *phaspun* of the family help with the cooking and serving the guest.

Child Funeral

⁵⁶ Martin Brauen, Death Customs in Ladakh, *Kailash - Journal of Himalayan Studies* 9, no.4 (1982): 320-325.

⁵⁷ <https://www.vajrasecrets.com/tsatsas> (accessed April 20, 2019).

The exceptions are people who died in epidemics and children who were not yet eight years at the time of death. If a very young child dies "before it has cut its first teeth"⁵⁸ and if an astrologer (*onpo*) deems it necessary, the child's body is placed in a box and walled up within the parents' house. This takes place whenever the astrologer determines that the family's good fortune is strongly connected with that of the dead child. If the child's corpse is interred in the wall, the family in question retains its good fortune. Usually, however, the corpse of a child whose age is less than 8 years old is placed on a mountain in a box with salt. Sometimes it is even thrown in a river or buried under a stone. A lama makes a sacrifice for this purpose, says a prayer and gives the children who are present rolls, roasted barley, etc. which are called the children's meal.⁵⁹

3.3 Family and Relatives

Usually in Indian religion, during mourning, the family members and relatives wear only white clothes, especially the spouse. In Ladakh, however, at mourning family members and relatives wear normal old clothes and do not wear any jewelry. The deceased families do not wash their faces and kept their hair loose showing grief towards their loved ones. The deceased's spouse is not allowed to go outside until the ritual completed. In villages, they are not allowed for the whole month and not allowed to touch cooking utensils. All cooking and other works are done by *phaspun* of the deceased around one month and at least one member per *phaspun* is compulsory to stay at the deceased house. Nowadays, these cultures are not followed and seen after the burned of the corpse they start going back for their business and work.

In Ladakhi culture, if some elderly parents died then the oldest child of the family has to carry out the funeral duty. But other brothers and sisters also have the responsibility to complete the ceremony. They bring all the food, cooking stuff like butter, salt, rice and even paying tea seasonings.

Gathering of Relatives

⁵⁸ Walter Asboe, *Disposal of the Dead in Tibet*, vol. 32: 66.

⁵⁹ Ribbach, Dragpa Namgyal, *Ein Tibeterleben* (Mfinchen 1940), 211.

As Soon as they heard of the death, all relatives, friends and *phaspun* members are gathered at a deceased home, they take care of the family. The friend and relatives come with biscuits for deceased family and give their sorrow of respect towards them. They also help in arranging the ceremonies as well as by cooking and serving those who are not related to the deceased. They started reading texts of Amitabh and an offering of butter lamps for deceased to born in a pure land. This rite continuous till seven days or burned the corpse, but sometimes in close relation with deceased read Amitabh mantra until 49 days. Relatives who come from far places are served better food than the other guests and accommodated in a special room. The deceased's family and *phaspun* are responsible for providing them room. These days they eat only vegetarian food in order not to associate any hiddenness with the deceased's journey to the Pure Land.

On the day of burial, friends and relatives gathered outside the house waiting for the corpse with holding few sticks of incense and followed with corpse till the cremation site. The guests who have joined in the mourning are served by giving little money by deceased family, so they can eat food and drink themselves from outside because people who are not related to the deceased should not accept food or drink from the house of the deceased for around one month following the removal of the corpse.⁶⁰ In Ladakhi traditional culture, the guests are not allowed to eat food prepared for the houses where there has been either a birth or death or to use eating utensils from these houses.

Donations and Auctions

The relatives and friends donated goods or things to the family of deceased such as clothing, utensil, jewelry, furniture and so on. Some people also offer a few small goods as a donation with scarves. Sometimes the deceased clothes, necklaces, rings are donated to auction by the deceased family. All these goods are given for auction after one month of funeral rites. The monks are responsible for the auction off the personal effects of the deceased and things donated by the relatives.

3.4 Remembering the Deceased

⁶⁰ Martin Brauen, Death Customs in Ladakh, *Kailash - Journal of Himalayan Studies* 9, no.4 (1982): 325.

Remembering of the deceased is continuous until 49 days because it is said that the belief the soul of the deceased roams around 49 days intermediate state (*Bardo*) existence up to 49 days. The most important time to perform rites for the deceased is during the first 21 days because it is in this period that the deceased has his or her strongest links with the living.⁶¹ During the time period following the death, people would offer *soor*. *Soor*⁶² is a rite in which a small meal is mixed with flour and put on hot charcoal. Buddhist belief that the deceased has only smelled sensation, they can smell the food which offered. Thus, *soor* has the function of offering this smell, food is offered only during mealtimes and recite 'om ah hun' three times. The Deceased people are to be burned in the same funeral hut (*spurkhang*) of their ancestral. But in cities, the corpses were burned at anywhere near mountains.

Death Anniversary

It is a remembering ceremony of deceased one year after the death. All the *phaspun* and deceased's relatives should be there, although, for a woman who has married far away from her birthplace, it is sufficient to have one close male family member present.⁶³ They bring biscuits and scarves for the deceased family. Few monks are invited from the nearby monastery for ritual and chants. All relatives and members start chanting mantra 'om mani pad mai hu' and Amitabh, the whole day they stay inside the house. The families believe that chanting mantra has resulted in the favorable rebirth of the deceased. On this day family of deceased send offerings and scarves to a nearby monastery and prayer flags are raised for the deceased on houses and hills. They also made *tsatsa* (triangle clay figures) in memory of a deceased one. In villages, the deceased family offered *tsog* (food of triangle figure) biscuits and sweets to every house of the village. *Phaspun* serves the monks with butter tea and snacks during the rites and a later small amount of money is offered for their service with white scarves. They also serve friends and relatives with food and drink. All

⁶¹ Robert Goss, Tibetan Buddhism and the resolution of grief: The Bardo-Thodol for the dying and the grieving, *Death Studies* 21, Issue 4, 1997, 377-395.

⁶² Martin Brauen, Death Customs in Ladakh, *Kailash - Journal of Himalayan Studies* 9, no.4 (1982): 326-328.

⁶³ Geoffrey Gorer, "Death, grief and mourning. A study of contemporary society." (1967), 361.

this work is managed by *phaspun*. Next day friends and relatives leave the house and they are presented with scarves by deceased family as thanks.

Offering Food to the Ancestral

There is some indication that at certain times the Ladakhi commemorate their dead and even honor them. Ladakhi observes an annual ceremony called *shimi* (remembering dead person) when at least one family member goes to the family cremation oven and offers food and drink to all the ancestors he can remember.⁶⁴ The ancestor worship (*shimi*) ceremony is celebrated on the last day of the year or tenth month of the Tibetan calendar. On this day all *phaspun* members are gathered at one of their ancestral places with lots of dishes and drinks. Then at least one member of the family goes to each ancestral burial place where he offered them food and drink. This shows their respect and invokes the spirits of the ancestors as remember. In cities, if they don't have *phaspun* then every family sends one member of the family to the funeral place (*spurkhang*) where they are laid out as food for the ancestors. These examples clearly illustrate that the *spurkhang* is not only the place where the corpse is cremated but where, on occasion, a form of communion takes place between the living and their ancestors.⁶⁵

A special dished mixed of barley with melted butter called *paba* is prepared and before eating food this is put on some of the stones which mark the mother field (*mazhing*).⁶⁶ This comprises an offering to the ancestors who first staked out and planted the field. In Ladakh believed that the souls of some of the dead could not find peace and are therefore still roaming around having found no satisfying existence. The reasons for this may be that they lived a wicked life or were thinking bad thoughts at the moment of death and, as a consequence, they reappear as evil spirits (*shinrey*).⁶⁷ Certain rites are done to enabling these left souls to be free and reborn, sometimes transformed into local deities.⁶⁸ The fact

⁶⁴ Brauen, Martin, and Kantowsky Detlef, "Young Tibetan in the Switzerland." *Konkrete Fremde* (1982), 326-27.

⁶⁵ Walter Asboe, *Disposal of the Dead in Tibet*, vol. 32: 66—67.

⁶⁶ Martin Brauen, Death Customs in Ladakh, *Kailash - Journal of Himalayan Studies* 9, no.4 (1982): 327.

⁶⁷ Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracle: and demons of Tibet: the cult and iconography of the Tibetan protective deities* (Graz 1975), 311.

⁶⁸ Ribbach, Namgyal Dragpa. *Ein Tibeterleben* (Mfinchen 1940), 235.

that the dead sometimes becomes beings who interfere in the affairs of the living and themselves try to influence the spirits is an indication of the not inconsiderable role of ancestor worships in Ladakh. This contention is further supported by the fact that a year after the death of some person a ceremony is held in his or her honor.



CHAPTER 4: VILLAGE AND MONASTERY ORACLES



Figure 6 Village oracle in possession at Leh

4.1 Tibetan Buddhism, Oracles, and Shamans

Oracle is developed from the encounter between Buddhism and indigenous beliefs and practices centered on local deities and spirits. It is an ancient form of practice in which God appears in a human body and these bodies are described by different names. They are largely known as Shamans in most parts of Asia and in some parts, they also called Mediums. In English, they called Oracles and the translation of oracles in Ladakhi called *lha* for males and *lhamo* for females.

Padmasambhava is closely connected to the discussion of oracles and mediums. He assumes that it's the role of dharma protectors, or "protectors of religion" and among the supernatural beings Padmasambhava subdued was *Pehar*, a powerful wrathful deity, whom

he appointed as the principal guardian of the treasures of Buddhism in Tibet.⁶⁹ Later they assume the role of a chief oracle of the land. In this context, the term “oracle” refers to the numinous being that possesses a human, and the word “medium” refers to the person who is possessed and acts as the mouthpiece of that deity. Later in Tibet, the term *kuten* refers specifically to the person whose body is taken over, while the words *sungma* and *chokyong* (dharma protector) refer to the deity that enters the body of the *kuten*. However, what makes matters confusing is that sometimes the mediums themselves are honorifically addressed as *chokyong* or *sungma*. Since⁷⁰ now the selection of *kuten* becomes most important and only confirmation by high Lamas.

When the body doesn't have consciousness then it formed the trance or possession state and in Ladakhi the trance state is called *zhugshes*. In local they have three categories of people who go into possession; first, mostly village women who have lower spirit are attacks by someone another person spirit; in second the person learn these in ritual practice and they know when they have to go in possession; third, these are elected by monastic heads and they trance only during monastic festivals.

Shamanism in Tibetan culture has been overlaid with both Bon and Buddhist traditions,⁷¹ to Ladakh this shaman or Oracles came from Tibet. According to Zheng Zhung mention in his book tradition of Tibet that shamanism was a technique used by Bon Religion before Buddhism in Tibet. He writes “This ancient Tibetan shamanism and animism, the pre-Buddhist spiritual and religious culture of Tibet, was known as Bon, and a practitioner of these shamanic techniques of ecstasy and ritual magic, the methods of working with energy, was known as a *Bonpo*. *Bonpo* is still the designation for a shaman in many tribal regions of the Himalayas. Shamanic rituals held by various specialists among Tibetan Buddhist communities such as the Sherpas and the Ladakhi usually have either disappeared and the influence of forms of Buddhism that did not support such worldly practice or have been absorbed into the hierarchy of the Buddhist monasteries.”⁷²

⁶⁹ René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and demons of Tibet: the cult and iconography of the Tibetan protective deities* (Mouton, 1956), 102.

⁷⁰ Joseph Rock, “*Sungmas, the Living Oracles of the Tibetan Church.*” *National Geographic* 58 (1935):475–486.

⁷¹ Angela Sumegi, *Dreamworlds of shamanism and Tibetan Buddhism: The third place* (SUNY Press, 2008), 9.

⁷² Anna Balikci, *Lamas, shamans and ancestors: village religion in Sikkim* 17, Brill, 2008.

But increasingly, over the centuries, the ecstatic shaman has been replaced by the priestly Lama or ritual expert, and so later *Bonpo* in Central Tibet also came to fill a role more ritualistic than ecstatic.⁷³ In Ladakh also many monastery practices oracle and every village have each own oracle. In some contexts, Ladakhi and Tibetan oracles do the same practices as reincarnate lamas and the same set of religious beliefs. In a local dissertation, oracles, or *lhapa* are one of a kind of healers who involve in the strategic and professional transformation of personal and social suffering. The other traditional healers include monks, Rinpoche, astrologers (*bonpo*), and practitioners of traditional Tibetan medicine (*amchi*).

Ladakhi oracles are a mainly Buddhist population working in Leh and the Zangskar region. However, it has been found that oracles are not only Buddhist. Oracles also seen in another religion in Ladakh and according to Sophie Day (1989) research states that: In 1982, there was one Hindu soldier oracle in the army and, in the recent past, at least one Muslim in Kargil district, who died in the late 1970s, as well as a Christian in Leh, who stopped practicing a few years ago. All seemed to conform to some Buddhist conventions: I was told that the Muslims used incense and butter lamps in a trance while the Hindu followed simple Buddhist practices such as reciting *mani* prayers. There may be others in Ladakh who practice spirit possession in distinctive Muslim and Hindu contexts, of whom I am unaware.⁷⁴ This evidence proves that in Ladakh the spirit can also be possessed in other religious bodies. Their religion is different, but they usually followed the Buddhist process and Ladakh has a mixed Buddhist and Muslim population. Leh and Kargil districts whose combined population is less than 300,000 people. Buddhists and Muslims each make equal amount of the population; the few of the population includes Sikhs and Christians. Usually, clients and oracles are also come from Muslim, Christian, and Hindu communities.

⁷³ John Myrdhin Reynolds, *The Precepts of the Dharmakaya* (Nepal: Vajra Books, 2017), 2.

⁷⁴ Sophie Day, "*Embodying Spirits: Village Oracles and Possession Ritual in Ladakh, North India.*" PhD Thesis, London School of Economics, 1989.

4.2 Selection of Village Oracles

Since my childhood I saw comparing the occasion and the people, there are two types of oracles that appeared one in monasteries and another in houses. Initially village oracles are not elected by the people; instead, the oracle is selected by the god itself through possessing involuntarily into the body and s/he loss of control and madness. In the beginning weakness and loss of control shows signed of God possess but in Ladakh when people see such kind of madness or loss of control then they consider it as negative energy. They thought bad spirit or demons possess into him until some Rinpoche or head oracle reveal the truth. Both senior oracles and Rinpoche play important roles; new oracles would be referred to their seniors for training and senior oracles will help to install the gods. In some case, if the person doesn't like the god to possess in himself then Rinpoche may help to do an exorcism and stop god spirit to come back again as Rinpoche made banning or swearing the gods to an oath. Monks and Rinpoche play an important role in purifying gods and vessels during the beginning of training and the monastery plays an important lawful role throughout an oracle's career. Usually, gods seize men and goddesses take possession of women.⁷⁵

The *lhapa* are mediums known as *pawo* are possessed by relatively minor deities associated with local cults.⁷⁶ The new oracle finally controlled the spirit they are called gods (*lha*) and also "gods and demons" (*lhadre*). The demons are separated from gods and throw away according to the reading of the text in the form of *storma* or broken black arrow. The separation rite shows that a new oracle is possessed by a mixture of bad and good, demons and gods. In the rites of selection, the new Oracle is guided by head oracle and the new god is asked to prove himself by picking out the four "Buddhas" from the five arrows in pots. The new god points to the Buddhas and breaks the black arrow, shouting that it is demons. Then the head oracle chooses h/she as a true oracle who is able to treat and teach others.

In the training of new oracle, they give the teaching of how to extract needles from animals and pollution from people. Generally, animals eat needle and other small metals with

⁷⁵ René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and demons of Tibet: the cult and iconography of the Tibetan protective deities* (Mouton, 1956), 409.

⁷⁶ Rolf Stein, *Tibetan Civilization* (London: Faber 1972), 188.

fodder, and they learn how to extract such substances. Mainly they have to learn extract of poison (*tuk*), pollution (*tip*), and other small objects from the human body by suck through mouth or pipe. Oracles also have to learn how to do the exorcism. They also have to spend praying every day, meditation and pilgrimage near monasteries.

4.3 Work of Village Oracles in Society

There are many types of practice done by oracles. Some oracles work every day while others work rarely. In villages work at own home but sometimes visit nearby villages on the invitation. In a city like Leh, some oracle works mostly at their own homes while others visit their clients. All the time oracles deal with pollution, poison, and bad magic. But sometimes oracles are also doing the exorcism.

Tibetan oracles are not shamans because their souls do not leave their bodies, but rather their bodies are overtaken by spirits, and afterward, unlike shamans, they claim that they cannot remember what was uttered during the trance event.⁷⁷ In early times in villages, if someone got sick when they first go to the oracle for check and now also many people preferred to see oracle than the doctor. In villages, oracle goes in a trance whenever the people asked to possess but mostly oracle trance depends on their mode of spirit. But in Leh city, few oracles do work every day and people also visit every time in there. Oracles have to avoid alcohol, onion, garlic, and meat before a trance. Oracle is possessed in a small room where on table few pictures and statues of Buddha and bodhisattvas are placed, and small bowls of water and rice arranged to offerings of homage to Buddha. The items used during trance also found near the table like a bell, prayer beads, and thunderbolt. There also some butter lamps and incense for offering Buddha. Another item which used during treating peoples is a pipe, used to extract substances from people, and bowl to hold such substances, and small two-sided drum. This drum provides music for the gods and it is an important instrument for divination. A few cups of grains which are placed on the drum and their movement reveal the answer to a question.

⁷⁷ Homayun Sidky, "*The state oracle of Tibet, spirit possession, and shamanism.*" *Numen* 58, no. 1 (2011): 91.

Clients will be seated before the oracle enters this room by holding a white scarf in their hand to offer oracle. The oracle is possessed as s/he puts on the clothes and starts chanting in a thin voice with this change in state is clearly seen in trembling, a strange voice shows the possession is starting. Then they put on first a cape (*stodle le*) and a scarf are tied around the mouth, in final a crown (*ringa*) of Buddhas drawn which is put on the head. This scarf put on mouth is to prevent pollution (*tip*) of the gods by people. Then the gods are invited into their vessel by singing and chanting and throwing grains in air, pick up bell and thunderbolt for the offerings and prayers which often continue during the first few minutes of trance. Sometimes "drinks" (*serkyem*) are an offer to gods. As the ritual chanting finished and the butter lamp (*chodme*) is lighted, the spirits are drawn into their vessel. Then the oracle will turn toward peoples and start asking questions one by one.

As the oracles ask questions, the client will be offered scarves and small amounts of money to oracle. The house will have a bundle of white scarves offered by the people and sometimes the oracle family member also sells scarves to clients. The oracle will deal with all questions by sucking out pollution or poison from people and speaking advice. While speaking the voice and behavior will change; the oracle usually speaks in Tibetan language but some oracles mixed Ladakhi and Tibetan together.

Oracle also visits households of wealthy or immobile clients. Sometimes client brings cattle to extract objects from oracle and oracle go outside to extract small needles or metal objects from animal neck and abdomen. But people mostly sucked a black liquid from the body. They sucked from stomach, leg, hand, eyes, and head with the help of a pipe. Sometimes sucked directly with mouth and split in the bowl. They later buried this substance outside the house compound. The other extracted substances are small stones, poison (*tuk*), liquids water (*schu*), and paper (*shugu*). The liquids extracted from the channels (*rtsa*) around the eyes, throat, and head. The papers (*shugu*) from the stomach are usually unrolled and which is consider as bad magic or spell given by someone who wishes him to harm. In some case oracle suggest do praying and making prostrations, to visit a monastery and offer things to gods; tell stop eating meat or bad food and drinking alcohol. Most case oracle suggests the client go to a doctor or local doctor (*amchi*) for a checkup and also suggest visiting Rinpoche. Sometimes tell to do rites of purification (*sangs*) for remove of ghost and bad energy, they were told to do purify the local gods and do a ritual wash (*trus*).

In Ladakh (1990) most oracles maintained a powerful relationship with other established sectors of the health care system. People also preferred to diagnose their diseases through oracle because of the following reasons- firstly in villages the modern health care Centre has not available, visiting oracle became a cultural follow and people are more religious so they believe in spiritual healing. People think all bad happened due to evil spirits, poisonous and bad luck. But nowadays the health care system is connected to every village in Ladakh, thus people now choose to go to the hospital before than oracle.

4.4 Monastery Oracles in Possession



Figure 7 Monastery oracle in possession and making mask dance at Sekthi Thakthok Monastery

Ladakhi distinguishes the two types of Oracle and gives more importance to monastery oracle and as monastery oracle does not extract substances from people. In Ladakh, the village oracle is found in every village, but all monastery doesn't have own oracle. Few monasteries have their own oracles and the highest oracles are appearances of two monks of Matho monastery and two laymen of Stok monastery. The White and Red *Rongbtsan* animate the chapel, as well as a hermitage build higher up in the mountains. They take possession of two monks during the celebration of the Ladakhi New Year, a festival season is known in Ladakhi as *naghrang*.⁷⁸ Every five years the two monks serve as an oracle are elected from the monastic member. The slip of the monks' name is written is put in the bowl and rotate until two names slip fall out. Then the two monks name on the slip is chosen as next oracles. During selecting day, the monasteries do much chanting and perform *Mahakala* puja. Then the two chosen Lama have to undergo a one-year full retreat near the village in an isolated room to develop their spiritual ability. During these periods the monks go in deep meditation and do the tantric practice.

After completing their retreat monks come back to the monastery and soon later, they go in possession by gods. The oracles then offered by new clothes and the gift by villagers and a request to response their various questions from the public regarding of forecasting future events. The monks only go in a trance during the first month of the Tibetan calendar. During this month the mask dance festival celebrates and with the other monks, oracles also performed mask dance. During possession, the tow oracles visit the *Rongbtsan* temple (*gonkhang*). After an ablution offered to the *Rongbtsan* the two oracle monks, who have already into a trance, receive the upper garment of the founder of the monastery. They hold the cloth above their heads and enter the main temple. It is said that in ancient times the oracles flew to the temple while holding on to the cloth. In the temple, they receive the blessings of the Vajra master, and then they proceed on their inspection tour through the monastery and its sacred premises. Along with their route, hundreds of people flock, eager to catch a sight of the oracle monks or to ask them about the future.⁷⁹

Villagers ask the questions about their future events related to weather, livestock, crops, disaster and the general prosperity of the Ladakhi people. Then people offered local beer

⁷⁸ Eva K Dargyay, "The White and Red Rong-btsan of Matho Monastery (Ladakh)." *Journal of the Tibet Society* 5,1985, 56.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*,58.

and incense to oracles. While during the festival the oracles run over the monastery roofs, railings and walls through their eyes covered by clothes as said they can see through two painted eyes on their stomach. They throw barley in all directions for good harvest of the Ladakh crops.



CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Discussion

In Modern humanity, the word 'death' is so scary and people concerning 'death' to a taboo. They do not want to come forward for a discussion on death. All these consequences mainly come from modern western culture and religion. Buddhist funeral rites help to deal with a fear of death and make us aware of the link between life and death. People who are dying need to think that they have not been left out, they need to think people are concerned about them and their suffering. Ladakhi and Tibetan Buddhist belief that death is not an ultimate end but a path to one of three other states- a rebirth into the cycle of existence, either into the world of human or other beings, where a constant flow of pleasure and suffering goes on. The entry into a pure land, a domain of manifested light as we shall see later; the flowering of the ultimate nature of being as a pure, non-dual, unlimited, all-knowing and all-loving consciousness, which is called Buddhahood.

The cyclical nature of life and death is one of the foundations of the Hindu religion. Buddhism, the end goal of one's spiritual path is to obtain enlightenment and transcend the bounds of earthly existence. To achieve this goal, one must endure several earthly lives where the previous life and the choices made greatly affect the following life. If the spiritual development, we have acquired will make it easier to experience the three *Bardos* of death and perhaps recognize their real nature; we would then be free of them. The *Bardo Thodol* confirms the spiritual path for the dead and for the living. The *Bardo* reading for the Ladakhi is a process for transcending both death and grief. When a close friend or relative dies, people suffer a lot. So at death, the deceased loses everything that was love. The death rites help the deceased family to resolve their sorrow by concentrating on their providing spiritual assistance to the deceased. It is very necessary to invite an experienced monk in consciousness transference. The rites help to get back the lost consciousness or soul into the body and transfer the consciousness under guidance of monks or spiritual master. This prevents the deceased from being reborn in samsaric life or at least save him from being in lower realms.

Buddhist belief the consciousness of the deceased roams around 49 days before finding a new existence. These funeral rites duration has depended on the wealth of the deceased. Rich families can invite 40-50 monks and rites continues the whole 49 days; in winter a corpse can be kept at home longer than in summer. Dying people need to feel and perceive it in our behavior and in every word. Tears and crying are not the real way to express a deceased our love. This behavior is not positive to the dying person because the deceased soul strong attachment toward that person and makes his or her more pain and this born him in lower realms. The fear and craving linked with grief which brings the deceased into the negative karma that leads him towards a lower rebirth. The attachment being the main source of suffering during dying. So, it is important to show much more love toward the dying person and help the person have a better rebirth. The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism⁸⁰ are Life is suffering. All suffering is caused by craving; suffering can be overcome, and happiness attained; the path leading to the overcoming of suffering.

The cheating death is based on different methods to collect merit through meditational, yogic, and alchemical techniques that stop aging and extend the life span which came from the Indian religion. When this introduced in Tibet, these methods are aspects in the form of rituals—like the collecting merit, the recitation of mantras, tantric mudras, meditation practices, and visualizations. Some spiritual Lamas give consciousness transference pills. The pill should be pressed upon the head of the deceased before anyone has touched the body. During the moment of the dead, the monks spend time with him to guidance about his past deeds and help to face death. The reading mantra rites during dying or after death are important to guide the deceased. It is said Lamas saying special verses can reach the dead person. The Ladakhi engage in death rituals to ensure that the deceased becomes an ancestor, enshrined in a position from which to bless and reward filial descendants. Ladakhi people belief local deities were incorporated into the same context as the gods of the Buddhist heavens and Tantric deities.

The Buddhist people chant a mantra, such as Om Mani Padme Hum (which is associated with the Bodhisattva of Compassion) or another mantra that is related to a Buddha to keep the mind focused and maintain a connection with that Buddha or Bodhisattva.⁸¹ People do

⁸⁰ <http://www.buddhanet.net/ans24.htm> (accessed May 11, 2019).

⁸¹ John Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1995, 306.

prayers and good deeds on behalf of the dying or dead person also benefit to a suitable rebirth.

In a hospital, as soon one is declared dead, the body is sent to the postmortem and morgue to be refrigerated. While in Tibetan Buddhism, the body is allowed to rest for a period of time until the signs that the consciousness has exited the body are present, and burial is the next step. In Tibetan Buddhists, it is a belief that if someone died of suicide, the body taken by flood, died from head cut and done postmortem then that person not able to get the *Bardo Thondol* and difficult to find better rebirth.

The Vajrayana Buddhism that started in Tibet and further reformed in Ladakh assimilated a different form of local shamanistic traditions. Buddhist beliefs about enlightenment, non-violence, meditation, and monasticism are combined with Ladakhi shamanistic traditions, magical practices, and faith in local divinities.⁸² The *lha* or *lhamo* are mediums possessed by relative acceptance depended upon confirmation by Lamas. Therefore, they are referred to as less powerful and give low statuses while on the other hand the monastery oracle is possessed by gods with high statuses and give high ranking. In Ladakh people often compare the monastery oracle with the Buddhist gods and always go to take less from them. The belief that village oracle commune with spirits for the benefits of their clients or community, and monastery oracle are benefits for entire social animals and society. Despite that, there was also a person who is possessed by a high spirit or medium gods and people often choose to go to this oracle to consult and solve their problem.

Oracle and Lamas are believed to protect livestock and villages against harm, offer wise advice, purifying the pollution and make a prediction concerning the future course of events. Chants, mudra, art, rituals objects, and musical instruments are used for protecting dharma, avoiding enemies and demons, purifying karma and spirit, and successful living and harvest. This study presents the rituals within the different religions and decreasing the problem of discrimination in religion inside the community.

Result

⁸² Helena Norberg Hodge, *Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh*. Random House, 2013, 180-190.

This is qualitative research, which seeks to develop an understanding of Ladakh Buddhist experience of death and funeral ceremonies, and the role of oracle in the socio-cultural. The rituals of dead are done by different practice in Tibetan Buddhism and in the thesis, I am expecting that I will explore every practice and technique used for death rituals in Ladakh Buddhist. I am also hoping that my thesis will be interesting for what it can say about rituals in Ladakh. In conclusion, I hope I had discussed every problem and question so that the thesis is under stable and clear. I expected my primary source like the interview cleared my queries.



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APPENDICES

Interview Transcription

Name: Khenpo Tundup Namgyal

Date: 2019-03-19

Device: Video calling/ Audio recording

Interviews

Question: Why in Ladakh Buddhist people do death rituals and is there any effect of this ritual on the deceased soul?

Answer: Yes, it is absolutely related to the soul of the dead person. The main reason for doing the rituals have many reasons, such as- 1) Main reason for doing death rituals in Tibetan Buddhism to guide the deceased after the death of life. In this, we read a book called '*Bardo Thodol*' which was written by Guru Padmasambhava. The book was read loud near the dead body repeatedly for several days after the death of a person. The book guides the lost soul to his right path to pure birth and tells him to not fear of peaceful and wrathful deities meet during the way.

2) The rites also tell people that everything is impermanence and in end all we must pass away and leave our loved one. This means to know people that the funeral also happens to them one day and to ensure that they can keep in their mind.

3) To wake up ourselves that everything is impermanence and to start a life meaningful. Life is suffering, pain, and misery, so in order to get an enlighten or born in Amitabh Pure Land, do good deeds.

Question: How does a monk experience with grief?

Answer: As a monk, one encompasses of potential to assist eliminate the grief and sorrow of communities. The explanation for that's a monk one is single, a bachelor, and not allowed to marry. A monk doesn't need to pay for the family to care for. In that situation, being a monk, one has many times for personal practice, and he can do work for the

community. As a monk, one has only a pair of clothes and stay in the monastery and eat there.

Question: What useful actions can one do to help a dying person?

Answer: As a Buddhist background, if, as a family member, relatives, friends, you are joining somebody who is dying, the main thing is to show your best ability, not to hurt the soul of the dying person. You should avoid doing and saying things that will cause pain, try to protect him or her by talking pleasant and peaceful words, and creates happiness because this dying person's mind is vulnerable and is going through enough pain. Anything unpleasant may have a great implication that may affect his or her soul.

Question: What is the door of the body through which the deceased's consciousness leaves and how it has an effect on future rebirth?

Answer: Consciousness can leave the body through many different parts of the body. If the consciousness goes through above the waist then he or she may be born in the upper realms of samsaric life and if it goes through below the waist of the body, then born in a lower realm. But there are also some impure doors that exist on the upper side of the body. The eight impure doors are the anus, urinary tract, navel, mouth, ears, nose, eyes and the space between the eyebrows. These doors are impure as they rise to rebirth in the lower six classes of beings.

Question: What is *phowa* and how it helps the soul?

Answer: *Powa* is an old tantric method to transfer consciousness. When *powa* is done, the impure doors are closed and open the pure doors by visualizing. The door of the Brahma located at the top of the head is opened and the consciousness passes through from this purest door to be reborn in a pure land.

Question: What would happen if touch the lower part of the body?

Answer: if you touch the person's knee, then consciousness will be attracted toward the lower doors and if touch the above the waistline would attract consciousness to one of the impure doors above the waistline such as from eyes and nose. So never touch the body

directly after expired. It is also said that one should not talk out loud or make a noise near the body.

Question: In Tibet, the corpse is cut in pieces and offered to vultures. Which is the best way of disposing of a corpse?

Answer: There is no difference whether you cut into pieces, bury, or cremate. The way we do funeral is no importance and there is no connection with a spiritual practice. In Buddhism, we burned the corpse; the meaning of this is it helps to burn the errors and the karmic veils of the deceased. In another case, the deceased will benefit the same if the corpse is cut and gives to birds or dropped in a river for fish. These differences are differences in customs related to religion and countries. It is right to follow their own local customs.

Question: What is the purpose of making *tsatsa* with the ashes?

Answer: You may keep them and purify them through a ritual. The ashes are mixed with sand that has been consecrated by blowing on it after reciting mantras. One can also ask great lamas to blow on the sand and ashes when they do rituals for the deceased. This is called purifying the ashes and helps the deceased a lot. Then the ashes can be used to make *tsatsas*.

The making of *tsatsa* is merit accumulating of action. These merits are eliminated obstacles, purify negativities, and create positive energy. The ashes of the deceased are mixed with the clay and form a figure like structure which puts in a pure place such as a stupa, in the niche of a chorten or *mani* (stone inscribed with mantra) wall or on a hill. Putting *tsatsa* inside this place keep the deceased soul away from obstacles during rebirth.