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Lha Soishi: A Ritual to Mountain God- A Study of the Monpa of Dirang Circle, West KamengDistrict, Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract— *The Lha Soishi ritual is practiced by the Monpa people of Dirang circle, West Kameng district, Arunachal Pradesh. Although they profess Buddhism as their religion, they also practice non-Buddhist religion known as Bon. In the Bon religion all the rituals are performed by a priest called Bonpu. The followers of Bon worship nature and benevolent and malevolent spirits. Rituals are performed through animals and birds sacrifices or by making figurines out of maize paste along with the fire to the nature or to the spirits. The Lha Soishi ritual is performed at the foothills of the mountain called Diphung. This ritual is performed for the welfare and longevity of the people. During the ritual the people offer items such as Gasha Sharang (one Deer head), one basket of Phudang (local noodles), one basket of Jambalomnang (rice balls), one basket of Kakung (popcorn), one Lhayak (one cow), and oneGoga (one cock) to Ata Shypchang and God of mountain. These offers are made to appease Ata Shypchang as the people believe that he will protect them from unnaturalphenomena. The Monpa are the largest followers of the Mahayana sect of Buddhism in Arunachal. They are settled in west Kameng district and Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh. According to their ancient traditions, the Monpa of West Kameng district are known as Tsangla and the Tawang Monpa as Bramin. Agriculture is their principal means of livelihood and Loser is their main festival.The study is explores the worship of Diphung Mountain and Ata shypchang in three villages namely Khaso village, Lachang and the Phudung village, in Dirang circle of West Kameng district, further research involving a larger sample is recommended.*

Keywords— *Monpa, Lha Soishi, Bonpu, Moitang, Yoiza*.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Monpa people belong to tribal communities and worship nature through animism. They believe that trees, rivers, mountains and animals possess spiritual or conscious qualities rather than just material value. The Mountain God is a deity widely worshipped by the people. They believe that with the blessing of Mountain God they can lead prosperous lives. The people of Khaso and Phudung worship a mountain called *Diphung* through a ritual popularly known as *Lha Soishi.* The word *Lha* means God, while *Soishi* means to personification.[1] This ritual is performed annually in the month of *chukchipa Lanyi* (December) and on the day of *Tse -Shangyen* (18th December).[2]The villagers perform the ritual in a festive atmosphere and all the villagers gather on these occasion. This paper focuses on the importance \and functional aspect of the *Lha Soishi* in the lives of the Monpa of Khaso village, Lachang village and Phugung village. It also explores the myth associated with the ritual. Furthermore, it examines the *Bonpu* and the materials required for performing the rituals.

II. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To explore the importance of the rituals in the lives of the people.
2. To examine the materials required for performing the rituals.
3. To understand the role of the priest in performing the rituals.
4. To examine the relevance of rituals in the lives of the people.

III. DISCUSSION

3. 1. Lha Soishi

Lha Soishi is a Bon ritual, predominantly preformed by the Monpa tribe inhabiting Tawang district and West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh.The term *Lha* means God and *Soishi* means to personify. The *Lha Soishi* ritual is performed by the village at the foothill of a mountain called *Diphung.* It is regarded as one of the oldest surviving Bon rituals, rooted to pre Bhuddist belief system of the Monpa people. This ritual is preformed to appease the presiding deities known as *Ata Shypchang*. It is conducted by a priest called *Bonpu.* The people make offerings to *Phu* or *Kela* to appease the deity and seek his favour for the village and its people.The nature of the ritual appears to involve an exchange of offerings for divine favour. However, the *Lha Soishi* rituals is observed by all people as a festival.[3]

3. 2. Offering Articles

During the ritual the people make offerings consisting of various items collectively known as *Tsok or Yoiza.* These offerings includes one *Gasha Sharang* (deer head), one *shomba of Phudang* (one basket of noddles), one *shomba* of *Jambalomnang* (one basket of rice ball), one *shomba Kakung* (one basket of popcorn), one *Lhayak* (one cow) and one Goga (one cock). These offerings are accompanied by *Moitang Khawong* (colourful local cloths), *Phan* (some kind of local flag) and *Tserung* (sacred thread). All these offerings are presented to the mountain God known as *Kel*a or *Ata Shypchang.*[4]

3.3. Ritual Perform by Bonpu (Priest)

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The *Lha Soishi* ritual is exclusively performed by a priest called *Bonpu* who is accompanied by two *Phramins*. The ritual involves chanting the mystical spells and offering the items one by one to the *Phu*. While offerings, the *Bonpu* seeks the deity's favour and prays to *Phu* or *Kela* to protect the villagers from unnatural events such as flood, landslide, epidemic and accidental fires.[5]He also prays to *kela* to protect the people from illnesses, disease and various forms of suffering. Futher the *Bonpu* also prays for a good harvest and increased agricultural productivity for the villagers. The people believe that the rituals and prayer preformed by the priest remain effective for one year.[6]

3.4. Sha Lung (Ritual place)

The people construct a special place for performing the ritual known as *Sha Lung*. This structure is hut shaped, and covered by the leaves of *Thongpa shing shawa*. Inside the *Sha Lung* the offering items known as *Tsok or Yoiza* are placed. These include one *Gasha Sharang* (deer head), one *shomba* of *Jambalomnang* (one basket of rice ball), one piece of *Nya* (fish*), Yu* (local wine) and *Tserung* (a sacred thread) among other items. These offerings remain inside the *Sha Lung* for three days. In addition to these items one *Lha Yak* (one cow), one *Goga* (one cock) are also offer to the *Phu* (deity). However, these two offerings are kept outside the *Sha Lung*.[7]

3.5. Process of performing the ritual

The ritual is performed by the priest called *Bonpu* who is accompanied by two *Phramins*. The ritual involves chanting the mystical spells and offering the items one by one to the *Phu*. While making the offering, the *Bonpu* seeks the deity's favour and prays to *Phu* or *Kela* to protect the villagers from flood, landslide, epidemic and accidental fires. He also prays to *kela* to protect the people from illnesses, disease and various forms of sufferings. The *Bonpu* also prays for good production of crops of the village people. Furthermore, the *Bonpu* prays for a good harvest and good agricultural productivity for the villages and safety of the people throughout the year.[8]

IV. Myth of the Ritual

The ancestors of the Monpa people have worshipped *Diphung* Mountain since time immemorial. The people of Khaso, Lachang and Phudung continue to worship the *Diphung* Mountain and the deity known as *Ata Shypchang*. They believe that as *Ata Shypchang* resides in this mountain. However, they do not know when or how their ancestors first began worshiping of this mountain and the deity.[9]

V. Findings

5.1. Cultural identity

Despite the influence of Tibetan Buddhism, the *Lha Soishi* ritual is an important part of traditional Bon religious practices of the Monpa people. They continue to preserve and practice the rituals in its traditional form reflect their cultural identity.

5.2. Environmental relation

Lha Soishi ritual highlights the Monpa people's harmonious relationship with nature, in which mountain and other natural elements are regarded as sacred. The *Lha Soishi* ritual strengthens social bonds through the collective participation of the people of three villages. Unlike the Buddhist influenced Loser festival, this ritual reflects a deeply rooted animistic belief system. The study also reveals that the Monpa people practice both the Bon and Buddhist religious traditions simultaneously.

VI. Conclusion

The worship of *Diphung* Mountain is highly important to the local people. They seek the blessing of the deity *Ata Shypchang* and believe that the deity will protect them and bring prosperity and well being of their community. The *Lha Soishi* ritual is performed annually on 18th December with the cooperation and participation of the people from the three villages of Khaso, Lhachang and Phudung. However, findings of this study which focuses on *Lha Soishi* ritual in these three villages should not be generalised to all the Monpa communities without further research.

References

1.Vide interview with shri Sherbu, Lachang village, on 12.09.2026.
2. Vide interview with shri. Pem Thenley, Phudung village, on 12.09.2026.
3. Vide interview with Sang Khandu, Khaso village, on 11.09.2026.
4. Vide interview with Mrs.Karmu, Khaso village, on 11.09.2026.
5. Vide interview with Mrs. Sang Droma, Khaso village, on 11.09.2026.
6. Vide interview with Mrs. Kungma, khasovillage , on 13.09.2026.
7. Vide interview with Mrs. Pema Lhadron, Phudung village, on 13.09.2026.
8. Vide interview with Mrs. Tserin Pema, Lachang village, on 13.09.2026.
9. Vide interview with Mrs.Dawa Chotton, Rama Camp, on 13.09.2026.

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