

Just as for ‘poison’ afflictions in general, poison-suckers are consulted by patients arriving with an already established diagnosis. Those people residing especially in the remote parts of the country are known to have strong belief and faith in the healer in their locality. That is why they prefer to contact the healers before consulting a medical doctor or health worker. There is a general belief that if there is poison in the body, modern medicine can react adversely with it. The poison-sucker checks the pulse of the patients to ascertain the diagnosis and suck the blood from the affected part of the patient’s body.

There are different methods of treatment. Healers cut the affected part of the body with a blade to extract the impure blood. Some healers use horn with a hole at the tip. The broader end of the horn is placed over the cut and blood is sucked out from the other end. Some healers claim to have spiritual power so that their *mantra* can cause miracles prior to the application of their method. If a few drops of blood come out while sucking, the poison is supposed to have been completely removed from the patient’s body which would help the patient recover from the sickness.

Tshachu and Menchu (Hot Spring and Hot Stone-bath) Therapy

Tshachu and *menchu* are quite popular in Bhutan. There are a number of them in various parts of the country. People dip their bodies in the tshachu and menchu because they believe that the medicinal properties of the

water can cure various ailments ranging from arthritis to body aches and sinuses. During winter we find a number of people visiting the popular tshachu. The five most well known tshachu are: the Gasa Tshachu (Gasa District), Koma Tshachu (Gon Shari), Chubu Tshachu (Punakha District), Dur Tshachu (Bumthang District), Duenmang Tshachu (Zhemgang District), and Gelephu Tshachu (Gelephu Drungkhag).

In menchu, water is heated by submerging red-hot stones into the bath in which the patients dip their bodies and stay as long as they can, adding more hot stones when the water gets cold. This is also a popular curative method and is used throughout the country.

4.2.2. Healing based on Textual Sources

Tsip/tsipa (astrologer) is known for their divination and healing rituals in the country. Literally known as “calculators”, the tsipas are supposed to have studied a wide range of treatises and practical manuals dealing with divinatory calculation, which is one of the five major Buddhist sciences. The vast majority of them are *gomchen* (lay religious practitioners), *gelong* (monks) or *getre* (defrocked monks).

Based on the request of the people in various circumstances, the *tsip* usually consults an astrological manual called *datho* (*zla tho*) and search for connections between one’s birth marks, the connectivity between various elements and so on and determine what and in which manner a ritual should be performed. For instance,



if a person is sick, the divinatory calculation (*tsi*) and divination (*mo*) provides indication concerning the cause of the illness generally in terms of evil spirits with the necessary remedy which is mostly ritual. The calculation never leads to any specific medical diagnosis, nor does it oppose medical treatment as such. However, it might indicate unsuitable dates or directions, in which case medical consultation or treatment have either to be delayed for a short while, or to be preceded by appropriate rituals. Besides carrying out divinatory calculation, they also perform rituals that would remedy sickness as indicated in their astrological divination.

4.2.3. Healers Diagnosing or Treating in a State of Trance

There are healers who treat patients by being in a state of trance called shamans, a medium that has existed in different regions of the country for centuries. They are known by different titles in different regions, yet all are comparable to shamans. Performing divination to diagnose and remove sickness, they play an important psychological and curative role in a rural society where believing in supernatural power is a part of life. They are briefly explained below:

1. **Pawo (dpa' bo)** is a male medium who get possessed by a local deity. Performing divination, their role is to diagnose problems and causes of illnesses spoken by the deity through the pawo in trance. They either drive away the harmful spirits that had taken possession of the sick person or spell out

what kind of rituals and prayers to be performed to convalesce the sick person. Known as nenjom (*rnal-'byor*) this practice can be found in the west, central and eastern regions of Bhutan.

2. **Pam/pamo (dpa' mo)** is a female medium who also get possessed by a local deity. Their functions are same as pawos and are common in the central and eastern regions of Bhutan.
3. **Nenjom (rnal 'byor ma)** is a female medium possessed by a local deity. Her functions are same as the two above. This tradition is associated with the western region of Bhutan.
4. **Terdag (gter bdag)** is a wrathful deity who was entrusted as guardian of the treasure by Guru Rinpoche. Hence Terdag gi Pawo is a medium possessed by Terdag. This is closer to the Tibetan oracles and diagnoses problems and comes up with remedies through long trances. This tradition is common in the north-eastern part of Lhuentse district.
5. **Jhankri/Dhami:** Jhankri/dhami is the term in Lhotsham language for the traditional ritual practitioners or healer believed to possess the ability to represent local deities or spirits. When required, they invoke the spirits and go into trance to get access to the healing knowledge to help the patients. They can conduct the ritual activities anywhere based on the situation. They can be male as well as female. Normally, becoming a shaman is by choice

