

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





of the spirit or through family lineage. They get the knowledge and power in dreams but they undergo further initiation under teachers for intensification of their ability.

6. **Ban-jhaankri:** The *Ban-jhaankri* (mythical wild forest spirit) is believed to be a being of small stature covered in hair and live in caves in the forest. This spirit is usually believed to abduct children; usually boys (sometimes even girls) who he thinks have the potential to be great shamans in the future. The abducted children are believed to be taken to his cave for honing their skills for at least six months and pass their initiation so that they become powerful when they returned home after the training. There are instances of individuals who claim to have returned after being abducted and released by the Ban-jhaankri. The equivalent terms for shaman among the other ethnic Lhotsham groups are: *Bijuwa* among Rais and *Phedengba* among Limbu/Subba ethnic groups.
7. **Jomo** is a female medium possessed by female deity called [Ama] Jomo, the powerful mountain deity commonly worshipped by the community of Merak and Sakteng in Trashigang and other parts of Bhutan. Like other mediums, this also diagnoses problems and proposes remedies by getting into trance.

Usually the shamans perform two categories of rituals in their trance. They are annual *shagpa* (propitiating) ritual and healing ritual. A number of shamans, possessed by a deity not speaking the local language need the help of an assistant called *choe shampa*. The annual shagpa consist of making propitiation rituals dedicated to their deities, and it is believed that if shagpa is not performed then their deities would be just as happy to send misfortune or obstacles to the shaman. Some shamans are also known to perform the function of yearly collective village-rituals for the well-being and prosperity of the village community especially in case of collective misfortune like crop failure. It thus appears that these healers have a more general function of protecting their community from misfortunes of all kinds.

The healing ritual is basically performed for the sick and at the request of others. Many Bhutanese believe that diseases and sicknesses are caused due to an imbalance in the different 'channels' which compose the body, and that they are often caused by one of the numerous revengeful spirits which are associated with certain symptoms. Therefore, patients seek the help of a shaman to find out which spirit is upset with them and then provide a cure for the patient by appeasing the spirit.

Unlike the *tsip*, *gomchen* and *drungtsho*, they do not choose to learn their lessons for practices, but instead they do this under the inspiration of the deity or deities possessing them. The diagnosing and/or healing performances of the shaman, in a state of possession by their deity or deities, generally include identification of the agent of the individual patient's illness, bringing back the "life force or vitality" (*srog* or *bla* in Dzongkha; and *yong* in Tshangla), and fight with evil spirits. Shamans usually do not resort to any physical therapeutic procedure and do not administer remedies.

4.2.4. Non-Shamanistic Ritual Healers belonging to Oral Tradition

La kukni (retrieving the lost soul): The term "la" (bla) in Dzongkha is referred to the "life force" which is believed to be taken away by one of the eight classes of demi-gods, causing illness to the person. It is *la kukni* in Dzongkha while the speakers of Tshangla dialect call it *yong raley*.

The belief in deities and spirits is very strong in Bhutanese society. It is believed that for every stone or tree, there is an owner or commander. When the owner (spirit) is not appeased accordingly, they get annoyed and cause harm not only to human beings but also to the animals and to the environment at large. Further, it is believed that if the places where local spirits reside are dirtied and damaged