



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

without making invocation prayers, the encroacher would fall sick and by loosing one's "vitality", he or she would start to act insane. This sickness is attributed to the spell of evil spirits. So a remedial action called "*la kukni* or *yong-raley* (in Tshangla dialect) must be conducted to appease the possessor with some offerings. This "*la kuk*" or "*Yong-raley*" is a special ritual that summons or reinstates the loss of feared life force.

During the ritual, the *la kukmi* would collect varieties of twigs especially of *khenpa shing* (*Artemisia*; *merangma shing* in Tshangla dialect) from the precise direction indicated by the astrologer or a palmist. Based on the word and timing, he/she would shake the twigs over the patients head as he/she whistles with certain tunes. It is either white spider (*yong baling mo*) or black spider (*yong chang lu*) falling on the patient's head that is identified as the lost soul. If it is the black spider, it is considered difficult for the patient and will take time for the patient to recover. But if it is the white spider falling from the twigs, the lost soul is considered to be recovered.

Phajo/Bonpo: *Phajo* is a shaman who performs propitiation according to Bon tradition while a *bonpo* is he who believes and practices Bon religion. Although there are phajos in Bhutan they are not bonpos, because Phajos receive and practice the teachings of the Buddha from Buddhist Lamas and are not dedicated to practising Bon as a religion.

4.3. HEALING PRACTICES & LOCAL HERBS

There are various indigenous methods to treat diseases by using locally available herbs. The practioners or healers usually do not have any sorts of formal training, but rather, a few claims to gain these skills in their dream state. Some of them are said to have learnt the skills orally from a master. Then with practice and experience, they learn to locate the diseases by feeling the nerves of the body with their fingers.

Some of the following plants and methods are considered to be more effective for treating ailments ranging from common cold to chronic diseases such as sinusitis, arthritis, rheumatism, liver problems and diseases related to digestive and nervous system.

Jaundice:

- *Peru Lara* in Lhotshampa language – is a kind of creeper. Drinking the juice of this vine or chewing it is known to cure jaundice.

So, the phajos deal with certain classes of local spirits that harm people. They do not go into trance but recite specific prayers to drive away evils that cause harm. Besides being carried out as healing ritual, it is also carried out as part of bi-annual or annual ritual performance to propitiate deity in order to bring harmony to the community. Performing rituals by a phajo is particularly common in central and western Bhutan and the practice varies from place to place. They make their ritual altar/shrine with grains such as wheat or buckwheat being set up in layers on which they place ritual cakes. The rituals usually start with burning branches and twigs as incense (*sang*). Then, accompanied by the rythm of drums, they chant prayers inviting deities. Not everyone can be a phajo. The practice is usually a family heritage and taught to a child from the early years, except in some rare cases.

Doenchoe (*gdon mchod*) literally means propitiating or expelling evil force/spirit. It is an emergency healing process. It is practiced when one gets ill suddenly. The leftover food in the house is collected and then together with *sur* (smoke created by a mixture of butter and wheat flour), and offered to the evil spirit instructing with pleasing words not to harm and leave the place. Anyone can do *doenchoe* anywhere when required but there are few who are specialized in it. There is no particular process to practice this healing [for more details see Chapter –I, the Oral Expressions].

Nose bleed:

- The seeds of *kappa* (in Dzongkha) and *mowan* (in Tshangla dialect) (bot. *gossypium* sp.) are used to stop nose bleed and also heals nose disorders.

Fever:

- The seeds of *chassee* (Sow. *mkhal ma zho sha nag po*; Bot. *Erythriana aroborescens*; *kharsing* in Tshangla dialect) are used as agent for reducing fever.

