KIKEE DOMA BHUTIA

Mythic History, Belief Narratives
and Vernacular Buddhism
among the Lhopos of Sikkim

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List of original publications

Article I
Bhutia, Kikee Doma 2019. I Exist Therefore You Exist; We Exist Therefore They Exist: Narratives of Mutuality Between Deities (*Yul Lha Gzhi Bdag*) and Lhopo (Bhutia) Villagers in Sikkim. *Folklore*: *Electronic Journal of Folklore* 75: 191–205.

Article II
Bhutia, Kikee Doma 2021. A World Where Many Worlds Fit: Understanding Cosmopolitics through Narratives of Possessions and Spirit Invocation among the Lhopo (Bhutia) in Sikkim. *Narrative Culture* 8 (2): 263–280.

Article III
Bhutia, Kikee Doma 2021. Death by Poisoning: Cautionary Narratives and Inter-Ethnic Accusation in Contemporary Sikkim. *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* 15(1): 65–84.

Article IV
Bhutia, Kikee Doma. Interpretive Shifts, Discourse on Possession, and Reified Institutional Truths of Claims of Reincarnation in Contemporary Sikkim. *Kyoto Publishing/ Bulletin of Tibetology*: Sikkim (forthcoming).

Notes on documentation

For non-English words in the text, I have used Denjongki Lhokay's phonetic translation instead of the Wylie transliteration to avoid Tibetanizing the meaning of terms and vernacular discourse. Where Tibetan words have come into common usage in English conversation or English-language literature (e.g., lama, rinpoche, tulku, pawo, Sowa Rigpa), I have used the common phonetic spelling and included the Wylie transliteration in the Glossary. Similarly, for Tibetan names, I have used common phonetic spellings.

Some of my informants chose anonymity, whereas some were keen to be included by name in their narratives. Therefore, I chose main informants such as Ajo Namgay Bhutia, Ajo Dugyal Bhutia, Lama Zigmi Bhutia, Lama Tenpa Bhutia. Anyone mentioned in the text otherwise is a pseudonym based on their request for anonymity.

Overall, this thesis follows the documentation method recommended by the *MLA Handbook Ninth Edition*, formerly known as the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.

1. Introduction

In the eastern belt of the Great Himalaya rests the once independent Buddhist Himalayan kingdom known as Sikkim. Today it is the 22nd state of the Indian Union, into which it was merged on 16th May 1975. The people of Sikkim are broadly divided into three communities known as Bhutia (endonym: Bhutiya, Bhotia, Bhote, Denjongpo, Lhopo), Lepcha (endonym: Rong, Rongkup), and Nepalese. This thesis is a detailed ethnography conducted among the Lhopo, also known as the 'people from the south'[1]. They are generally categorised as the Tibetan immigrants who migrated to Sikkim from Kham Minyak from the thirteenth century onwards and established a Buddhist kingdom in 1642[2]. But this category is often contested on the grounds that firstly, not all Lhopo communities are aristocratic and elite Buddhist practitioners. There are many Lhopo villages across Sikkim, secluded from the direct rule of the state that seldom took part in 'state formation'. Secondly, there is some controversy related to how the word Tibetan is used as a metonym to identify Himalayan ethnic groups separated across different parts of the Himalayan regions. Many argue that the Lhopos lived in the region before the establishment of the Kingdom and the coming of Tibetan migrants who instituted the Kingdom, although later everyone was grouped together under Sikkimese identity.

In similar discourses, the Lhopo communities are categorised as Tibetan by the other ethnic majority communities as well as Lepchas further sparking the debate on identity and statehood within the region. My thesis focuses on people from such remote villages of Sikkim, who practice their distinct 'vernacular religion' (Primiano 1975) and remain removed from participating actively in political commotions. Within the span of five years (2016–2021), I managed to interview Lhopos from all walks of life including monks, ritual specialists, tradition bearers, village elders, youth working as government servants (doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, lecturers, nurses, etc.) as well as school students. Apart from talking with Lhopos, I managed to participate in events and interview people from other communities as well for similar purposes. To understand the Lhopo community and their belief, one must investigate belief among other ethnic communities residing in the region equally. The different ethnic communities and their proximity to each other remains a vital aspect in providing a holistic understanding of religious belief narratives and practices of the Lhopos of Sikkim.

The primary materials on the Lhopo communities draw much on mythical historical narratives from migration to state formation based on religious texts such as *namthar* (biographies) of the saints who came to Sikkim looking for the *beyul* (hidden land). Often when interacting with informants I was told to consult a learned monk of such an institute or university to know more about the history

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[1] With the intent to maintain consistency and bearing in mind the fact that the Lhopo usually prefer to call themselves Lhopo rather than Bhutia, I also address them as Lhopo.

[2] The date is disputed (Mullard 2011).

of the Lhopo, as they know the texts. In anthropological and historical research, the Lhopo have been represented as an aristocratic Tibetan Buddhist population that transformed the sacred geography from animist to Buddhist, thus converting the indigenous people (Lepcha) of Sikkim to Buddhism. Such misrepresentation is present in earlier works focused exclusively on the Lepcha (Foning 1987; Gorer 1938; Gowloog 1995; Morris 1938; Nakane 1966; Siiger 1967); whereas many Lhopo informants narrated to me and discuss elaborately how many of the Lhopos who resided in the western part of Sikkim and later moved to Gangtok, the present capital, are Tibetan migrants. Others who resided in remote regions were partly from the Haa Valley of Bhutan and must have been in the region before the migration. In recent decades, anthropological and historical studies have focused on research among the Lhopo communities, although they draw much information from scriptures and texts (Mullard 2005a). In contrast to these text-based works, Anna Balikci in her *Lamas, Shamans, and Ancestors: Village Religion in Sikkim* (2008), focuses on the ethnographic details of the rural religion in a place called Tingchim, where I grew up. Her research focuses primarily upon the Lhopo community, who are at the margins of Sikkim state politics. However, today, even in Tingchim, it is necessary to consider the amalgamation of the different practices that have taken root with the introduction of Christianity, a growing Muslim majority in Mangan (a city that Tingchim people depend on for daily household necessities), and an increasing number of intermarriages in the village. Initially dependent on agriculture, today Tingchim village seldom depends on agriculture, instead at least one family member is a government servant (the number is increasing due to a new scheme introduced by the Sikkim Democratic Front [SDF], formerly in government, aided by the current ruling Sikkim Krantikari Morcha [SKM] government, called 'One Family One Job', which aimed to provide one member of each family a position as a government employee).[3] Today, most villagers depend on the monthly salary of these family members, with most of the land rented to interested Nepalese tenants who live on the outskirts of the village. For my research, I began to investigate these recent developments starting in Tingchim village and found a complex social setting made of multiple influences from these newly introduced lifestyles. Further, I expand the investigation to villages such as Lachung, Chungthang, Tashiding, and Pemayangtse, where the Lhopo community is the majority, coexisting with the other communities that remain at the periphery.

Within such multi-ethnic settings, belief in non-human entities that reside in the mountains, lakes, rivers, glaciers, caves, trees, streams, and houses, overseeing local territories, is shared among all. Similarly, among the Lhopo, these non-human entities are called *yul lha gzhib bdag*[4]. They are considered members of the family, ancestors, and the protectors of the local people who reside in local territories. It is believed that Sikkim was initially a land infested by these 'untamed' non-human

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[3]   Bhutia, S. P. 2020. *One family one job – the scheme that hurts or heals Sikkim's unemployment issues*. Sikkim Chronicle.

[4]   See Bhutia 2019; Buffetrille 1996; Karmay 1998; Phuntsho 2013; Punzi 2013.

entities. With the introduction of Buddhism, the land was 'tamed', and non-human entities were converted to deities that protect the interests of the people as *dzindah* (benefactors).

Growing up in Tingchim village, my mother shared with me the stories of multiple deities and non-human entities surrounding us. The village is blessed with Tingchim lake, and every village kid was warned against going to the lake before sunrise or after sunset, and to refrain from making loud noises or screaming in the vicinity, which might offend or disturb the deity Aju Zom Tsering living there. The results could be sickness that required elaborate rituals to cure. Aju Zom Tsering is believed to be a man dressed like Tarzan (with only leaves around his waist), with long hair, one eye and a crippled leg. He owns a couple of ducks that appear in the middle of the lake sometimes (which many villagers claim to have seen), a king cobra (which occasionally appears on top of the rocks around the lake), a mango tree, and seven-headed horses (one of which my aunt confirmed she saw). If someone in the village suffers from pain related to the eyes or knees or has a severe headache that cannot be calmed by aspirin taken from the village Primary Health Centres, a propitiatiation the deity of the lake is required. When one of my cousins was sick, she claimed that she saw Aju Zom Tsering taking a bath in the middle of the lake and that she threw stones at him, which made her sick. Such narratives are spread all over the village. These non-human entities are benevolent and at times malevolent. They require constant care, approval, propitiation, and offerings. Therefore, my mother was always explaining at length to me about certain places, trees, rocks, streams in the village where I was not allowed to speak loudly, scream, throw trash, spit, or urinate. She also particularly warned me about our neighbour: "Do not pick flowers or fruit from the garden or the field from there [pointing towards the field]. They have a *pue sdé* ['monkey deity'/ 'demon'], very notorious, so be careful." I was too young and naïve to believe in it entirely. But one day, when I was fifteen years old, I went to swim in the nearby stream and needed to cross my neighbour's field. When I was returning, I saw a young cucumber, ready to be picked. I looked left and right, picked it, and ran. From their house to mine, I gobbled it down chunk by chunk in haste. By the time I arrived home, my hands were surprisingly locked to my chest. I tried multiple times to move them, but they were stuck. Not knowing what had befallen me, I started to cry. My mother arrived home and I confessed to her that I had eaten a cucumber from the neighbor's field. I was reprimanded and my mother took me to the neighbor's house and explained what had happened. After that, the father of the house held my hand, spat on it, and very quickly my hands were free.

Picture 1. Doringpo, the guardian deity who resides in this rock in Tingchim Village, January 2017. Photo by Ganden Bhutia.

In another reflective story, I often suffered from migraine headaches. One day, when I was home for vacation from university, I felt a crippling headache in the morning that prevented me from waking up. Anguished by my condition, my parents panicked and requested divination from the village ritual specialist. He proclaimed that I was inflicted by my uncle who had passed away three years ago due to a brain tumor and cancer. Upon hearing that, one of the aunties who came to see me said, "I knew it was him. It is the same kind of headache that her uncle used to get as well." After offerings and ritual performance, I was cured.

In Sikkim, different kinds of non-human entity surround the people. Some are *yeshey ki lha* (enlightened deities) and others are *jigten ghi lha* (worldly spirits). I have elaborated on such differences in the article "I Exist Therefore You Exist; We Exist Therefore They Exist" (Bhutia 2019: 195). In the above cases, there are two types of non-human entity belonging to one category, *jigten ghi lha* (worldly spirits). Generally, during my fieldwork, I found that different informants used the term deity and spirit as synonymous to explain different kinds of non-human entity. Sometimes this depends upon how we are addressing the non-human entity. For example, if we are afflicted by the spirits then it is *sdé* (malevolent), and at times when we share stories from the past then it is *lha* (godly/benevolent). For the purposes of consistency, I choose to write non-human entities as they are invisible, not human, and have supernatural attributes. In the above narratives,

the first introduces us to a village deity called *pue sdé* (monkey deity), the protector of the Lhopo residing in the village and propitiated only by the villagers. But there is also *bandar deuta* (monkey deity) who functions in the same way among the Rais (Nepalese community) as well. The only difference being that the *pue sdé* is likely to afflict people only within the Lhopo community, whereas *bandar deuta* could possibly inflict a Lhopos as well. Here, we see that the non-human entities could easily pass through the ethnic boundaries. The second narrative focuses on the *shindré* (spirit of the dead), mainly of the family members or relatives of the victim. The spirits of the dead are often considered within the lowest of the non-human entities as they do not have bodies, although they can inflict sickness by making their own relatives suffer. The objective of this is to get attention so that some sort of peace offering is made to help them overcome *shindré* status.

In the initial years of study, community narratives of experiences with the non-human entities were crucial in determining my field and study interest. Therefore, having been exposed to non-human entities provided me with a chance to explore the everyday life and lived reality of the Lhopo community to which I belong. Therefore, in this thesis, I present how Lhopo communities interact and live together with the non-human entities that surround them. It discusses the mythic histories and vernacular narratives of the Lhopo and show how other ethnic communities that are enmeshed in Sikkim provide complex and mixed religious beliefs, practices, traditions, and culture. Religion and culture both have that "common uniting element" (Oommen 2009: 4) that generates "group cohesion" (van Beek 1985: 265), therefore it is necessary to examine these different religions and beliefs, and the formation of religious identity in Sikkim, in order to understand Lhopo identity as a whole.

The central research question revisits the pre-existing debate on the mutual relationship between human and non-human entities using data collected during multiple ethnographic excursions among the Lhopo community. These beliefs are shared as warning legends supported by the mythic historical details that have passed down and spread within and across communities. The thesis examines local interpretations of various belief narratives and experiences, verbalised simultaneously and in numerous variations of a culture's diverging intentions and practices. These contradictions are expressed in different manifestations and examined in the published articles. This thesis has been partly inspired by the work conducted in an article by Margaret Lyngdoh, who studies genre in belief studies by presenting materials as seen from the perspectives of multiple communities caught in the confluence of change and transition (2016: 13). This thesis too examines the social, political, and economic lives of the residents and attempts to make sense of the lived and vernacular realities surrounding religious practices, identity issues, and belief narratives.

In addition to an ethnographic description, this thesis presents theoretical reflections on three mutually entangled "meshworks" (Ingold 2006: 13), which helps develop the research question and objective. Ingold's meshwork is a metaphor that characterises the trails along which life is lived, including histories, stories,

and trajectories, all of which are full of loose ends and are constantly moving. The meshwork starts from the premise that every living being is a line or, better, a bundle of lines (Ingold 2016: 10) that joins the lives present in its surroundings. He argues that the knots formed in the process are not inclusive or encompassing, not wrapped up in themselves but entangled with things, while their ends are on the loose, rooting for other lines to join with (2016: 11). The meshwork metaphor helps to explain how individuals and knowledges are "entanglements that emerge through encounters with others" (Ingold 2011). I propose to revive the meshwork metaphor to describe the research practices that are more responsive to the unique pattern of relations and interdependence that I encountered during the research. The thesis outlines:

- In the Lhopo context, belief and belief narratives concerning the existence of non-human entities play a crucial role in their everyday practices and ritual performances. These beliefs can be seen as a response to the increasing influx of people with differing beliefs, a conflation of religious practices, culture, loss of tradition, and confusion in the face of increasing globalisation. The everyday life of a Lhopo villager in Sikkim is full of propitiating, offering, and not offending the *yul lha gzhi bdag* of the land. It is a mutual relationship and kinship network in which recognition of non-human entities has long been a key force in constituting Lhopo social relations within and around the different communities that surround them. To understand the traditional beliefs of the Lhopo, it is necessary to present the interconnection and how they interact with the members of other communities as well as with non-human entities, who inhabit and contribute to the construction and preservation of social norms and traditions.

- The role of the ritual specialists or the mediators who make interactions, negotiations, and transactions possible between the non-human entities and the villagers is crucial to my theoretical reflections. Interaction with so-called non-human entities contributes to the health, survival, and growth of communities during crisis, illness, and turmoil. Indeed, this form of ritualisation always "implicates 'others'" (Baumann 1992: 97–98), whether they are emblematic of the village, state, the non-human entities, or the very different members of the same societies. Drawing from the empirical data collected during my fieldwork, this thesis explores the issues of politics, control, and authority as acted out in rural settings to discuss the power dynamic between the powerfully charged terrains inhabited by the vernacular, institutional, and supernatural worlds. The thesis shows the continuous cosmic war displayed in this field. I explore this concept further in my discussion of the article titled "Understanding Vernacular Cosmopolitics".

- In terms of methodology, "thick description" (Geertz 1973: 7) is used to discuss both the narratives and their contextual subjectivities. Fortunately, as a local scholar, I find myself equipped with an abundance of valuable vernacular texts such as histories (*gyalrap*), biographies of the main protagonists

(*namthar*), guidebooks to sacred and animated landscapes (*ney-yig*), and rituals held in celebration of the hidden land (*ney-sol*). In addition to this, my position as a member of the community helps me overcome language barriers, permitting me to interact with a pool of local experts who specialise in such traditional knowledge. Moreover, my research substantiates the transformation that is performed in the vernacular discourse related to belief and belief narratives (which I discuss in section 6.3.). By comparing multiple accounts of the oral traditions and local ritual practices, ritual performances, personal biographical narratives, memorates, and religious folklife, I show how interpretations of the oral narratives by monks or ritual specialists transform these narratives. At the same time, vernacular storytelling reflects and re-presents institutional religion.

2. *Beyul Drémojong* –
"The hidden land of fruitful valley or rice":
Sacred landscape and the vernacular perspective

The Lhopo community recognises Sikkim as a sacred landscape called *Beyul Drémojong*. A rather rough approximation of this in English might be 'hidden land of the fruitful valley and rice', although arriving at this translation is not straightforward. Gyurmey Bhutia, 35 years old, a Bhutia language teacher at the local school, who graduated from the Higher Buddhist Institute at Gangtok claimed that "people usually confuse *dré* with rice; *dré* means rice but it is also *shong*, meaning some sort of orchard or abundance. Therefore, *drémojong* means an orchard full of fruit or a prosperous place where everything grows" (Interviewed on 8th January 2017). This alternative etymology suggests the integral conflict that arises with the introduction of rice in Sikkim. The Nepalese community proposes that if *Beyul Drémojong* means 'the hidden valley of rice' then it is evidence that Nepalese resided in the Himalaya since the conception of the *Beyul Drémojong* itself. This explanation is based on the historians' claim that rice cultivation was introduced to Sikkim by the Nepalese. My informant, Dawa Lepcha, confirmed to me that he had heard Nepalese people claiming it often. Understanding the conception and adaptation of the notion of *Beyul* is not possible without considering and completely situating Sikkim within the wider regional framework that includes Tibet, Bhutan, and Nepal due to its historically fluctuating territories. The mythic narratives, sacred landscape, ritual linkages, etc., pay little heed to present-day political boundaries, a lack of study that includes Sikkim's sacred, mythical repertoire and how these myths are lived out in everyday life today.

The interpretations of *Beyul* are multifarious. The recent academic publication titled *Hidden Lands in Himalayan Myth and History: Transformation of sbas yul through Time* edited by Frances Garret, Elizabeth McDougal, Geoffrey Samuel (2021) presents the multifaceted discussion surrounding *Beyuls* (*sbas yul*) across the Himalaya. Some say *Beyul* literally means the hidden land, *bey* means hidden and *yul* means land. Some say it is a 'paradise', attained only by pure and untainted beings, while some say it is a heaven of bliss where suffering is non-existent. The 'hidden lands of the Himalaya' became more widespread and attained global visibility through one of the popular fiction-nonfiction novels by James Hilton called *Lost Horizon* (1935), in which the search for Shangri-La, a paradise on earth, is explored.

The first substantial Western discussion of the *Beyul* appeared in the early 20th century with Jacques Bacot's account published in 1912 of the hidden land of Padma bkod identified in Arunachal Pradesh in Northeast India (Pearce 2021: 258). However, there are many accounts of the existence of *beyuls* across the Himalaya and Tibet (Diemberger 1997; Ehrhard 2021; Hall 2021; Heckman 2021; Pearce 2021; Reinhard 1978; Samuel 1993; Skog 2010). The notion of

Beyul is open for discussion. According to Sardar-Afkhami (2001: 6), *Beyul* has its origins in Indian tantric literature pertaining to the identification of holy or sacred sites that act as gateways between the ordinary realm and the pure realm. *Beyul* also exemplifies prophecies of a vast interconnected valley sealed away by Guru Rinpoché[5] in the 8th century, set apart from the mundane world as a worldly paradise for the practice of Buddhism. It might later be opened by charismatic *tertons* (treasure 'revealers'), when religion will come under threat in Tibet (Childs 1999: 127–129). Therefore, *beyul* has a mystical, spiritual, religious, and political association. The idea of *Beyul* draws much of its popular history from mythic beliefs and the religious scriptures called *ter ma*[6] (Buddhist religious texts), which have been translated and circulated for generations.

The origin of *Beyul* stems from prophecies and religious scriptures and continues to provide a mythical charter for the Sikkimese state even after its takeover by India in 1975. The sacred landscape of *Beyul* in Sikkim and the Lhopo's spiritual values have been subjects of research extending to the disciplines of history, religious studies, and anthropology (Balikci 2008; Mullard 2003, 2011; Scheid 2014). *Beyuls*, in both Tibetan and in Western accounts, are 'peaceful hidden lands of refuge for spiritual practitioners', providing refuge to people who are forced to flee during times of war and social unrest. Based on texts concealed by Guru Rinpoché it is possible to conclude that such places are considered to have been predicted by religious figures such as the Guru. It is said that *Beyuls* are scattered across the geographical terrain of the Himalaya and will be 'opened' by one or more visionary *tertons* (treasure revealers) in the anticipated future.

In several *namthar* (biographies of lamas/monks), especially of Guru Rinpoché, *Beyul Drémojong* is the epicenter, navel, and mother of all hidden lands. According to Terton Ratnalingpa's guidebook, Sikkim is recognised as the most important of all the sacred places of pilgrimage and practice, visited and blessed since time immemorial by great Buddhas and Bodhisattvas[7] like Avalokiteshvara (Chenrezi), Tārā (Jetsun Dolma) in addition to the celestial King Indra as well as several incarnated Devīs (goddesses) and finally by Khen-Lob-Cho-Sum i.e.,

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[5]   Guru Rinpoché is also known as Guru Padmasambhava, Lopon Rinpoché, Ugyen Rinpoché, Padma Vajra, Padmakara, Padma Thötreng Tsal, Senge Dragdrog, Loden Chogsey, Shakya Senge, etc. He is considered to have pioneered the spread of Tibetan Buddhism across the Himalaya, including Sikkim. In this thesis, I use Guru Rinpoché to avoid confusion. See *Guru Rinpoche: His Life and Times* by Ngawang Zangpo (2002).

[6]   In the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism, the tradition of concealment and revelation of teachings and materials of religious value through the mystical power of enlightened beings is prevalent. This tradition of mystical discovery is known in Tibetan as *Ter* (treasures), *Terma* (treasured ones), or *Terchö* (dharma treasures or treasured teachings).

[7]   Bodhisattvas are beings who choose to stay in the world as an act of compassion to help other beings.

Picture 2. Guru Rinpoché statue in Namchi, South Sikkim, 22nd March 2017. Photo by Nawang Lachungpa.

Guru Rinpoché, Shantarakshita and Chogyal Trisong Deutsen, followed by their Dharmapālas[8] and tutelary deities. All such visits ultimately culminated in making this land sacred because they blessed the land, hid sacred treasures, and appointed protectors and caretakers. It is also believed that anyone who practices in this blessed land would achieve instant sacred accomplishments. The mountains, lakes, hills, peaks, rocks, trees, and lands are sacred and consecrated thus those who practice with pure devotion are said to attain spiritual perfection within no time. The *Beyuls* have political and economic dimensions alongside spiritual ones.

An unpublished book *The History of Sikkim,* (1908)*,* compiled by Thutob Namgyal, the Ninth King of Sikkim and Queen Yeshe Drolma, tells us that the land was initially blessed by Chenrezi (Bodhisattva of Compassion)*,* and Indra (god of all gods), followed in the eighth century by Guru Rinpoché who "exorcised the land of all evil spirits, and rid it of all obstacles that would tend to obstruct or disturb the course of devotional practices" (Namgyal 1908: 10). "Out of all such hidden sacred lands, Sikkim (*Beyul Drémojong*) may be considered a physical space said to be the most sacred and sanctified, the King of all sacred places equalling Paradise itself" (ibid.). In congruence with this *Beyul Drémojong* is understood to be a pure hidden realm, prophesied by Guru Rinpoché who, on his way to Tibet, discovered Sikkim and hid *ters* (treasures), saying that the place was to be discovered in a time of need for people who practice Buddhism.

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8   *Dharmapāla*: an ambivalent deity turned into the protector of Buddhist dharma; guardians of institutionalised tradition.

My emphasis in the study primarily deals with tracing the idea of sacred landscape, place-lore, and the concept of the *Beyul* as it exists today in different traditions. I shall examine how it has changed with the passage of time as seen throughout the narratives of, particularly Lhopo locals. Estonian folklorist, Ergo-Hart Västrik has noted that folkloristic interest in place-lore correlates with recent shifts in the humanities that have changed the research focus to include human relationships with the environment. This 'human' aspect has appealed to local communities and municipalities in Estonia, which have recognised the value of place-lore in regional identity building as well as in nature and heritage tourism (Västrik 2012: 26–27). The sacred place and the related narrative traditions exist in different parts of the world and have generally much in common (Bradley 2000: 14–32). In folklore scholarship, the concepts of place-lore and sacred landscape are fertile fields of study. It is argued that "place-lore is mainly narrative lore, which is strongly bound to some toponym, site or landscape object, and which includes (place) legends, place-bound beliefs, descriptions of practices, historical lore, memories, etc." (Remmel 2014: 67) The establishment of the sacred place is a political and powerful process involving conflicts and conquests (Stump 2008). Although different cultures interpret the word 'sacred' differently, sacred places around the world generally involve strict behavioural restrictions, a sense of separateness (Hubert 1997: 12), as well as strong emotion-oriented and place-bound characteristics (Levi, Kocher 2013: 913). They are sites reflecting humanity's various forms of interaction with superhuman entities (Stump 2008).

The ownership, possession, and appropriation of sacred objects, symbols, and rituals can be highly contested among different parties. These sites also contain elements from different time periods that are in constant formation as new memory places are created (Remmel, Valk 2014: 387). According to Jacob N. Kinnard, "there is nothing inherently sacred about any place or space or physical object; human agents give them power and maintain that power" (2014: 2). These considerations seem to resonate with the data available on *Beyul* as a place hidden and discovered, founded, and constructed over time and, it has been claimed, owned, and operated by the people for their specific interest – such as the Tibetan migrants who once settled in Sikkim and now by Lhopos reframing their identity as well as by other ethnic minorities who use the concept for tourist and commercial purposes. In Sikkim and within the conception of *Beyul* lies a deep embedded storied folklore that draws its repositories from the mythic histories and the stories of Guru Rinpoché travelogues and advent of the many treasure revealers after him. They helped to reveal the hidden texts and helped to establish and maintain the regional identity distinct to the region.

The notion of sacred places is found in mainstream faiths and in indigenous beliefs, as well as in non-religious contexts (Bremer 2006). The mountains and lakes in the Himalayan lifeworld and ontologies have been deeply explored in other literature (de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956; Buffetrille 1994; Blondeau and Steinkellner 1996; Huber 1999; Ramble 1999; Pommaret 2014). In Sikkim as well more specifically, the term *ney* (sacred site/place) is used extensively to define the landscape (Gulia 2005; Ramakrishnan 2008; Subba 2005). Recent

scholarship on Sikkim has delved into the politicised history and the economic trajectory of its landscape (Balikci 2008: 23; see also Arora 2006a, Mullard 2005b). The institutionally established narratives related to Lhatsun Namkha Jigme Chenpo, the key member of a group of three Buddhist lamas who identified and presided over the coronation of Phuntsog Namgyal as the first King of Sikkim in 1642, converted the sacred landscape of the indigenous Lepcha community into Buddhist sacred sites by celebrating Sikkim as *Beyul,* meaning sacred hidden land in *Nesol*, Namgyal's text of Buddhist rituals. This accommodated Lepcha sacred landscape features in Buddhist rituals, making it easier for Lepchas to relate to the landscape as part of their conversion to Buddhism (Acharya and Ormsby 2017). The construction of an "indigenous Buddhist Sikkim" (Arora 2006b: 54) has also contributed to the 'invisibilising' both of earlier animistic Lepcha association, and later Nepali connections with Sikkim's landscape. Because Sikkim lies between Bhutan to the east and Nepal to the west, it is called "the intermediate land (*bar yul*)" (Dokhampa 2003a: 76). However, what remains consistent among these varied understandings is its geographical location, which is in the lap of Mount Khangchendzönga[9]. People honour the deity who resides in the mountain, propitiate it as a *lha* (god/deity), provide sanctuary for spirits, view the landscape as a living expression of certain gods, and protect a sanctified historic site (Dudley, Higgins-Zogib, and Mansourian 2009). The Lhopo people have a strong attachment to the natural and cultural landscapes in the region. They believe in the natural environment as the abode of non-human entities that inhabit mountains, caves, and forests. Multiple interpretations constructed for a certain place suggest that a landscape could reveal ideology and values by translating "philosophy into tangible features" (Meinig 1979: 42). In other words, physical and cultural features, as well as the embedded values and philosophy, constitute a landscape together.

The idea of *Beyul* in contemporary belief narratives among the Lhopo takes a lot of inspiration from literary tradition as well as from the local and vernacular understanding of it. The romantic imagination of a place, in this case, explores the belief surrounding the narratives of how *Beyul* is a hidden pure land, protected and sealed by Guru Rinpoché to be opened by the treasure revealers when Buddhism faces distress and troubles in other places (Tibet). Many times, during fieldwork I was told how lucky I was to be born in *Beyul*, the blessed land. This reflects the contested and political nature of a place where *Beyul* was established for the Lhopo to migrate easily and settle in a peaceful and bountiful region of the Himalaya. Many folk songs and folktales derive their inspiration from a person (*pawo or pamu*)[10] being born in the sacred land Beyul Drémojong and living a blissful life.

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[9] Mount Khangchendzönga or Mount Ghangchendzönga means The Great Snowy Repository of Five Treasures, from Tibetan *gangs*: snow, *chen*: great, *mdzod*: treasure, *lnga*: five. These five treasures are known to be salt, gold and turquoise, Buddhist scriptures, arms or weapons, and medicines and seeds.

[10] Pawo and pamu in this context is referred to any male or female born in Sikkim – *Beyul Drémojong.*

Picture 3. Mount Khangchendzönga (8586m) viewed from West Sikkim, 18th November 2018. Photo by Nawang Lachungpa.

In continuation of this argument, I give an example: my informant, Sonam Gyatso Bhutia (60 years old), worked at the Ecclesiastical Department of the Government of Sikkim for over three decades where his job was to help maintain sacred landscapes by providing funds to ritual practitioners. These specialists represent different communities across Sikkim, understood the existence of *Beyul* on three levels according to the religious texts of *Denjong Ney yig* (a guidebook to the sacred place of the hidden land)[11]:

1. The outer level – the physical landscape and the environment can be witnessed and experienced by all as a material place of blessing.

2. The inner level – deep perception of the sacredness of the place achieved through meditation and spiritual practices.

3. The secret level – the transformation of the physical to that of the celestial, achieved by accomplished spiritual masters who can physically pass through the physical to another worldly dimension which is itself transposed onto the physical environment that ordinary people experience. The first spiritual description of this land was made in various ritual texts among which is *Denjong Ney yig*. Guru Rinpoché also hid religious texts known as *ters* at various places across Sikkim and locked the door to this Hidden Land (Wangchuk, Zulca

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[11] Tibetan source: Rig 'dzin rgod Idem (1337-1408). Rig 'dzin rgod Idem can gyj gnas yig. See also Boord, M. J. (2003). *A Pilgrim's Guide to the Hidden Land of Sikkim Proclaimed as a Treasure by Rig 'dzin rgod kyi ldem 'phru can.*

2007: 83). The sacred texts mention that these treasures were hidden in one hundred and eight secret caves to render this land productive, healthy, and harmonious, as well as to facilitate the spread of Buddhism.

This idea of the *Beyul* as the 'outer', 'inner', and 'secret' turns out to be one of the popular explanations attached to the advent of the *Beyul* across the Himalaya. Giacomella Orofino has characterised the three levels as follows:

> An external one where one can be perceived by ordinary sensory experience and allows the vision of a peaceful and fertile valley but does not confer any spiritual power. The internal one can be enjoyed only by the yogin, who can receive a vision of the inner secret land, a strengthening of his spiritual powers as well as the possibility of finding secret treasures, hidden sacred texts, and every kind of tangible goods, all of which will make the initiation journey easier. The secret level can be perceived only by those who have reached a high level of spiritual fulfillment, and who can enter a condition of intense mystic ecstasy and gain access to highly esoteric teachings. (Orofino 1991: 242)

With a combination of the evidence seen in the texts and institutional affiliations, *Beyul* has gained traction among the communities, especially the Lhopos. The sacred landscape surrounding Sikkim is therefore protected and preserved based on historical texts due to strong empowering descriptions of the natural and cultural significance of the sacred landscape. This was confirmed when Sikkim was included as the first 'mixed' – natural and cultural – heritage site under UNESCO in 2016. But this idea falls short when dealing with most other communities that reside together. Even later, after recognition from UNESCO, there was controversy because Lepcha and Nepalese narratives had not been considered even though the Khangchendzönga National Park falls in areas where these communities are the majority. Other communities claimed that the sacredness of the land is valid but the stories that make it sacred are only one-dimensional Lhopo stories; therefore, multiple distinct narratives about the same sacred landscape with varied cultural or religious heroes at play were neglected in the UNESCO recognition of the Lhopo version of the sacred landscape. Even though *Beyul Drémojong* is an accepted terminology to describe Sikkim, it is mainly confined to the Lhopo. The Lepcha have their own narratives of Máyel Lyáng which are like *Beyul* yet different, while Nepalese seem to be in the process of pushing narratives of sacred landscape in a different direction entirely.[12] These multiple narratives about the sacredness of land therefore possess an in-depth assertion of what landscape means to the Sikkimese. It is an agent of identity, history, spirituality as well as an act as a caretaker and protector of the Sikkimese society devoid of communal and ethnic difference. For instances, when the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), on 29th August 2019, placed an order which

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[12]   When I visited Khecheopalri lake in 2018 for pilgrimage and fieldwork, I was told that the lake is sacred because Lord Shiva – the Hindu God – is the one who came there and that there is no difference between Guru Rinpoché and Shiva.

says the government has "decided to open 137 mountain peaks located in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakand and Sikkim to foreigners desirous of obtaining Mountaineering visas for climbing or trekking" (Goswami 2019: 2). The lists include 24 peaks in Sikkim. The Sikkimese were quick to react. The convenor of the Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee (SIBLAC), Mr Tseten Tashi said:

> By opening the peak, you are opposing the 2001 ban. In Sikkim, we have peaks, caves, rocks, lakes, stupas and hotspiring that are considered most sacred. The Khangchendzonga is our God and the abode of Gods. You can't climb the holy mountains. There must have been a miscommunication between the central and the state governments and it is the responsibility of both to address the issue… This is not just a religious concern but also about national security. We are guarding the border area – it is our 'dharma' – and that is how people in other states are secured today. By letting access to people in our mountain peaks, you are putting us at risk. (Goswami 2019).

The petition was filed and signed by a great many local and international supporters and within a week the order was withdrawn. During these times I met Rewaj Chettri (27 years old), an entrepreneur. When I asked him what he thought about such orders, he said:

> There are a few emotions and beliefs attached to mountains such as Khangchend-zönga or any other sacred places in Sikkim. The mountain, at least from Sikkim, has never been summitted. These places are very mighty. It has been a guardian deity for such a long time, if a government or anyone else allows such thing then it is disrespectful to a lot of people regardless of their ethnic or communal background. Sikkim at large, believes in the deities residing in these places. I come from the Nepali community; to see the history, I am the fifth generation living in South Sikkim. Doing my own research, I found out that I lived in the same place for the longest time, but it was a part of Nepal, although today it is Sikkim, so it doesn't mean that the land is no longer sacred. I know it is very good for business, particularly for me as I run a travel business. Mountaineering would attract lots of international tourists and high-level customers but whether *Beyul* or *Mayel Lyang*, it is sacred and it has kept us protected, so it is better not to be consumed by greed and not to disturb and anger the deities who are providing us protection and sort of haven. At present despite ethnic differences, many diverse groups believe in the sacredness, and it doesn't matter what it is called, in the end it means the same thing anyways. (Interviewed in Novemeber 2019)

When I interviewed a high-ranking monk from Pemaongchi monastery and asked him about the concept of *Beyul Drémojong* he said that the whole of Sikkim is sacred land. The navel of this sacred land is Tashiding monastery[13] in the western part of Sikkim. He further explained that "it is like how a whole human body can

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[13]   Further reading on the significance of Tashiding monastery and Bumchu Festival among the Lhopo can be found in the works of Dokhampa (2003b) and Vandenhelsken (2006).

be considered a *Beyul*, but the most important is the heart – so is Tashiding for Sikkim because geographically it is believed to be the centre of the *Beyul*. Tashiding is the cardinal point, the centre from which the blood is pumped into the other places." According to him, Sikkim is *Beyul Drémojong* and *Beyul Drémojong* is Sikkim, and he told me, "You should feel lucky that you were born in *Beyul Drémojong* and feel proud that you are blessed." Speaking with other elders in other parts of Sikkim, I was told that: "*Beyul* is a hidden land, and it is still hidden. Those with extraordinary power and the one who is free of all sin and guilt will be able to attain that place." Many believe that the road to this hidden land is somewhere in Tashiding and that only a select few wills make it there, which leads to the inference that the *Beyul* need not only be understood as a physical/geographical landscape but could also be understood to be a spiritual realm.

These different concepts of *Beyul* vary according to people and community. I once had the opportunity to meet a man who participated in a hunger strike against the big hydropower project dams which were to be established in Sikkim. He told me,

> Our land is *Beyul Drémojong*, we cannot let this land be destroyed by dams and be blasted. The guardian deities will become furious and all of us will pay the price. The protest, therefore, was on the grounds of protecting the environment and forest, because the 'mainland' Indian won't understand the significance of the land as the abode of deities and of a concept like *Beyul.* (Interviewed in January 2018)

Picture 4. Tashiding Monastery in West Sikkim during the Bumchu festival, 22nd March 2018. Photo by Kikee Doma Bhutia.

I remember, in the year 2000, there was a major earthquake in Gujarat, India, and many were buried under debris. We watched it on the news on TV. At that point, for me, apart from Sikkim, all other places were alien. I asked my mother whether Gujarat was indeed in India, and if so, why had we not felt any tremor in Sikkim since Sikkim is also a part of India. She answered that since we are living in Guru Rinpoché's blessed *Beyul Drémojong,* no disaster, no natural calamities could befall us. The land is sealed and protected by deities. Of course, I believed her. However, on 18th Sept 2012, Sikkim experienced a devastating earthquake causing over 500 casualties. I went back to my mother with the earthquake question as, clearly, I thought, she had been wrong. But she replied that among those many casualties very few were Sikkimese. Most of those who died were 'mainland' Indians who worked in the hydropower projects and dams. She ended her answer by saying that these immigrants are polluting the land and with all these hydropower projects the people are taking treasures from our land that were hidden by Guru Rinpoché, and therefore the deities have become furious at us resulting in the land becoming vulnerable to earthquakes. My purpose in sharing this vignette is to illustrate the importance of belief and its position amongst the Sikkimese people. The belief in the *Beyul Drémojong* is so strong that every disaster large or small or even every celebration, revolves around it. The belief is that the land is blessed by Guru Rinpoché and that we must annually make offerings to the guardian deities installed by him to maintain relationships of devotion and reverence with them and in return receive their protection, which I am exploring in my thesis.

Today, the vernacular perspectives of *Beyul* are a trans-Himalayan pheno-menon, appropriated and resurrected in the narratives among different com-munities living across the region. In Sikkim, and especially among the younger generation in Sikkim, *Beyul Drémojong* is a term that invokes contradictory feelings. Within a society where intermarriage is common, various myths are exchanged and exist together. *Beyul Drémojong* is sometimes used in ways to attract tourists by creating an idea of mystery and nostalgia. However, belief in Sikkim, such as in the sacred land, the hidden land, the *Beyul Drémojong*, is emotionally attached to the identity of the Lhopo community and helps them find peace and connection with the landscape surrounding them. These are not only the sacred sites or preserved sanctuaries, but they are also the abode of non-human entities that bless, take care of, and protect the community. Today the meaning of *Beyul Drémojong* has transformed and acquired new associations. The remnants of the old associations are filled with nostalgia and presented superficially through the names of hotels, bars, and travel agencies, as with the Sikkimese flag on the windscreen of a car, as with names of companies, and used in promotional videos to attract tourists. Therefore, the Sikkimese sacred landscape and vernacular perspective of *Beyul* is constantly changing, contested, and continually negotiated in the need to overcome the social tension and economic disparity prevalent within communities that live together.

3. Situating Sikkim as a location: From mythic histories to contemporary belief narratives

"History and myths are often seen as opposing modes of explanation" (Heehs 1994: 1), both with their distinctive epistemological and ontological grounding. The former tends to be associated with science, facts, and chronology, indeed with logos. The latter, in turn, is often linked with fiction and fantasy and is too often rated as substandard in scholarly terms or seen as the realm of peoples without writing (Levi-Strauss 1978: 34–43). A definition of myth offered by Finnish folklorist Lauri Honko is as follows:

> Myth, a story of the gods, a religious account of the beginning of the world, the creation, fundamental events, the exemplary deeds of the gods because of which the world, nature, and culture were created together with all the parts thereof and given their order, which still obtains. A myth expresses and confirms society's religious values and norms, it provides patterns of behavior to be imitated, testifies to the efficacy of ritual with its practical ends, and establishes the sanctity of cult. (…) (Honko 1984: 49).

This might be true in the eastern Himalaya, and certainly is in the state of Sikkim, where myths might have been written down over the centuries to add legitimacy and serve the purpose of re-enforcing political narratives and institutions. The written texts are the domain of the lamas (monks), who are traditionally the most respected people in society. The myth here functions as a tool to build a sense of nation and community. The advent of Guru Rinpoché is a national myth and Guru Rinpoché himself is a cultural hero. The narratives of his conquest and the life that he lived have become a vision for the future constructed around what this mythical hero achieved. Therefore, to believe in myths essentialises the understanding of the religious approach to history and historical facts, which I call 'mythic histories.' Mythic histories confirm the feeling of belonging and attachment to the figure and belief established by Guru Rinpoché for the development of identity and belonging.

It is the vast mythical repertoire and historical narratives that take social precedence in understanding the past, explaining the present, and predicting the future. Inhabitants often understand and explain their descent, social formation, sacred landscapes, and ritual practices through mythic histories. Dell Hymes has pointed out that the myth as a genre can vary greatly depending on the culture and it is therefore important to define it proceeding from the culture being studied (Hymes 1971: 51). To be effective in organising and mobilising opinion, the myth must resonate (Schöpflin 1997: 25). In Sikkim, among the Lhopo, myth is a concept with Western origins that they would rather translate as *lha drung* or 'stories of persons with divine powers defeating demons and performing miraculous deeds.'

This vernacular genre coexists with *tham-gyad*, which would mean 'stories of ordinary people experiencing the presence of invisible, divine powers.'

Corresponding to the Buddhist era of Tempo Ngadar – Bardar – Chidar (the three phases related to the institutionalisation of Dharma), and in order to accept myths as 'living history' or 'mythic histories' and to explore the mythic narratives (and the views people have about them), vernacular belief systems, and the ritual practices in and around Sikkim, I present three prominent sets of chronologically arranged *lha drung*:

- The early phase (until the 13th century) – including the advent of Guru Rinpoché (the Second Buddha) in the 8th century
- The middle phase (13th–17th century) – the 'boon of progeny' and the blood brotherhood treaty
- The modern phase (17th Century–1975) – the fall of the Buddhist Kingdom to merger with the Indian Union.

3.1. The early phase (until the 13th century) – including the advent of Guru Rinpoché (the Second Buddha) in the 8th century

Belief narratives relating to this phase predominantly revolve around Guru Rinpoché's visit to Sikkim on his way to Tibet and the later works of the different sacred Treasure Revealers (*tertons*) (Ehrhard 1996b). In the earliest example of a full-length biography of Guru Rinpoché, *Sanglingma* (Doney 2014), he is represented as a 'treasure' (*ter*) discovered by the famous 'treasure revealer' (*terton*) Nyang ral Nyima 'od zer (1136–1204 or 1124–1192; Hirshberg 2016). The later translation by Erik Pema Kunsang, *The Lotus-Born: The Life Story of Padmasambhava*, 1993, says that Guru Rinpoché was emanated by Buddha Amitābha and first appeared in the land of Uddiyāna, which at the time was ruled by the generous but childless King Indrabodhi.[14] Whilst returning on a ship from a mission to recover a wish-fulfilling jewel, the king and his retinue passed an island on which grew a magnificent lotus flower. Sitting upon this lotus-flower was a boy of eight years of age, whose body was adorned with the major and minor marks.

> The king asked the boy:
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> Little boy child, who is your father and who is your mother? What is your caste and what is your country? What food do you live on and what is your purpose here?

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[14] This story is also narrated by my informants. To avoid repetition, I use the secondary data available.

The boy replied:

> My father is the wisdom of spontaneous awareness. My mother is the ever-excellent lady, the space of all things. I belong to the caste of indivisible space and awareness. I have taken the unborn *dharmadhatu*[15] as my homeland. I sustain myself by consuming the concepts of duality. My purpose is the act of killing disturbing emotions.

The king was suitably impressed by this meeting and decided to adopt the boy, making him a prince, and giving him the name Padma Vajra (*padma* means lotus, *vajra* means diamond) (Kunsang 1993: 23). This is the commonly shared narrative of the magical discovery of Guru Rinpoché that I have recorded from informants in Sikkim. The *lha drung*, as in themes of Guru Rinpoché's magical conquest and miracles, and his role converting, subduing, and pacifying the local worldly deities, especially in the Himalaya and his status as a mythical and cultural hero, is remembered among Himalayan communities today (Diemberger 2007). In winter 2019, I interviewed Lama Tenpa Gyatso in Pemayangtse Monastery, who said, "Guru Rinpoché came to Sikkim in the eighth century and subjugated all the untamed spirits who were causing havoc in the land and turned them into the *Cho srung 'ma* [Dharma protector], who protect and provide for us today." *The History of Sikkim* tells us about the visit of Guru Rinpoché in the eighth century and how he "exorcised the land of all evil spirits and rid it of all obstacles that would tend to obstruct or disturb the course of devotional practices" (Namgyal 1908: 10). The advent of Guru Rinpoché across the Himalaya and the spread of the Vajrayāna Buddhism is crucial and shared across Ladakh, Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh, and Sikkim (Balikci 2008; Mullard 2011; Pearce 2021; Phuntsho 2013; Ramble and Jinpa 2005). This is a different more historical version of Guru Rinpoché, in which he was invited to Tibet by King Trisong Detsen, who wanted to establish Buddhism in Tibet by building 108 chortens[16]. For that, the king sent an invitation to the Indian popular master to assist him in achieving his goal. I also interviewed Azang Chedup, the 69-year-old head monk at Ngadag Monastery in Namchi, southern Sikkim. He said that Guru Rinpoché was invited to Tibet initially to subdue a non-human entity causing havoc during the construction of the monastery:

> In a place called Samye, in Tibet, the King Trisong Detsen (*Khri-srong ldeu-btsan*) wanted to build one of the biggest Buddhist monasteries. When the King started construction, you know during those days there were no paved roads like here today. Therefore, his subjects often voluntarily came to work for the construction, and they started to collect soil and stones from different parts of Tibet. They consecrated the site for the monastery, which the King himself started by laying the

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[15] *dharmadhatu* refers to the spiritual realm of dharma, and here also to buddha nature.

[16] A chorten or stupa is an important religious monument in Buddhism. It symbolises the presence of the divine, or Buddha himself. It holds precious Buddhist relics and gems. Sometimes, it is also used to preserve the bodily remains of Rinpochés.

foundation stone. But whatever labour people did during the day, by night every-thing was ruined. I mean, after an entire day of strenuous work collecting soil and stones and gathering it to the place where the monastery was supposed to be built. Next day, to their surprise, when they came back home, they found that whatever they had done the previous day had been undone. All the soil and stones that they have collected had returned to their respective places.[17] Everyone was stunned, no one could fathom why. They would again do the same thing and the same things repeated. Nothing could progress with the construction. These events led to the King inviting a *pamu* [ritual specialist] who performed a *mõh* [divination]. She pleaded with the King: "Dear King, I can see spirits at work here, but these spirits are very stubborn, and they need strict discipline. There is only one person who can do that. In *Gyagar* [India] a tantric master called Guru Rinpoché or Urgen Rinpoché resides. If we could invite him, only he possesses the power to subdue these spirits with wrathful and strict means.

After that, the King and his ministers went to India. Upon meeting Guru Rinpoché, they pleaded, "Dear Ugyen Rinpoché, we are trying to build and establish a monastery for Buddhist practitioners in Samye but in the process, we are suffering from some *bharchey* [obstacle]. We are unable to progress with our work. We want to request Lobey Rinpoché to visit us and help overcome the spirits."

Because of this, Guru Rinpoché visited Tibet. (Interviewed on 19th January 2017)

On the journey, therefore, Guru Rinpoché encountered the hidden land of Sikkim, where he found many hostile deities and spirits that attempted to obstruct his journey and distract him. However, Guru Rinpoché managed to subdue some of them and destroyed others with his power. His mythos is tied up with ritual efficacy (Cantwell, Mayer 2008), which is commonly 'lived' even today in the region. This arrival of Guru Rinpoché in Sikkim marks the first period of Buddhism in Sikkim (Bhattacharya 2010), which later came to co-exist, complete, and mingle with existent animistic and shamanistic beliefs and practices (Balikci 2008). Today, the advent of Guru Rinpoché is considered a testament of the mythic histories that are invoked during ritual performance, marriage, annual offerings, state occasions and in the sacred landscape.

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[17] This is a widely spread narrative motif (D2192. *Work of day magically overthrown at night*). It appears in the folklore of Europe, Asia, Polynesia, and Africa (Thompson 1955–1958). In India it has been documented in Kashmir, Meghalaya, and Goa (Thompson, Balys 1958).

3.2. The middle phase (13th–17th century) – the 'boon of progeny' and the blood brotherhood treaty

The middle phase begins with the establishment of the blood-brotherhood treaty between the Lhopo and the Lepcha, who became a single entity (*Denjong lhomen nadam*), and the consolidation of Sikkim as a Kingdom.

Lopen Tenpa Gyatso, a monk at Pemayangtse monastery, narrated a story to me about the meeting of the Gyad Bumsa and Thekong Tek, who ultimately signed the blood brotherhood treaty after Thekong tek conferred a 'boon of progeny'[18] on Gyad Bumsa:

> The Sikkim Chogyal[19] traces its origin to the Minyag Angdong, descendants of the great King of Tibet Trisong Detsen. The 25th king of this origin, called Zhyalnga Guru Tashi, went on a pilgrimage to Lhasa with his five sons, Gyad Bumsa, Guru Seshing, Jho Tendong, Jho Khartsog and Pakshi Kujyo. In Lhasa, King Guru Tashi met Jho Rinpoche, who directed him and his sons to travel towards the south (Sikkim). On their way, King Guru Tashi and his sons passed by the Kingdom of Sakya. Upon arrival, they saw that the King of Sakya was distraught because of some evil spirits who were obstructing their work building the Sakya monastery. The workers were unable to erect the pillars of the monastery. Seeing this, the eldest son of the King Guru Tashi offered to help, and single-handedly erected all the pillars of the monastery, which would normally require the strength of a lakh[20] of well-built men. Therefore, he obtained the name Gyad Bumsa (meaning man with the strength of a hundred thousand men). Awestruck by such strength and charm, the Sakya King offered the hand of his daughter, Jumo Guru, to Gyad Bumsa in marriage. After that, the couple joined the family and ultimately settled in the Kham Minyak region, which is just above the Chumbi Valley, bordering Dréjong (Sikkim). Gyad Bumsa and his wife remained an unhappy couple because they didn't have any children even after many years of marriage. Gyad Bumsa, therefore, consulted many doctors and shamans and one of them mentioned that there was a renowned healer to the south in a place called *Beyul Drémojong* with the power to offer the boon of progeny. Following the suggestions and consultation, Bumsa then travelled south arriving at [what is now] Sikkim. Upon meeting the Lepcha healer named Thekong Tek and his wife Nukong Ngal, and receiving the boon of progeny, he returned to his kingdom. Within a couple of years, his wife became pregnant and delivered a child, and two more after that. Exhilarated, Bumsa prepared extravagant gifts and offerings to take back and give as tribute to the great healer. In a place named Kabi Lungchok, they reunited again. During this

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[18] Boon of progeny means Thekong tek blessed Gyad Bumsa with an heir by offering and worshipping local deities. After returning to Chumbi, Gyad Bumsa was blessed with three sons (Namgyal 1908: 14)

[19] The Tibetan title of Sikkim's king, Chogyal, implies that the king is the temporal ruler and upholder of the Buddha-dharma, that he rules according to religion (Balikci 2008: 378). The word is a compound of Tibetan *chos* ('dharma') and *rgyal po* ('king').

[20] On the Indian subcontinent the largest numbers are expressed through an Indian numbering system in which terms such as lakh (100,000) and crore (10,000,000) are commonly used.

meeting, the Lepcha healer requested Gyad Bumsa to enter an eternal blood-brotherhood with him. It is believed that he was a powerful healer and saw in the prophecies that Gyad Bumsa's descendants were going to rule Sikkim. Therefore, to maintain a good and peaceful relationship in future, the Lepcha healer asked for a favour in which the Bhutia kings were to consider Lepchas brothers and therefore consider their prospects too. For the first time all the deities of the region were invoked and feasted over the blood-brotherhood treaty according to which Lepchas and Bhutias swore loyalty. Upon such a vast feast, the Lepcha healer then announced that "One day, Gyad Bumsa, your descendants will become the rulers of this land and during that time you have to promise that you will take care of my descendants, and therefore the boon of prosperity and a flourishing nation will see the light of day." This treaty is known as the Treaty of Blood Brotherhood; even the deities and the Dharma Protectors of the land were witnesses to this and therefore it is a sacred bond between the Lepcha and Bhutia.

Picture 5. The altar at Kabi Lungtshog where the blood brotherhood treaty between Gyad Bumsa and Thekong Tek was signed, North Sikkim, 18th January 2018. Photo by Kikee Doma Bhutia.

Currently the community commemorates the significance of the Treaty of Blood Brotherhood and all the deities that were subdued by Guru Rinpoché, who were witnesses to the fulfillment of the boon of progeny and the pact between the communities, especially Mount Khangchendzönga, who is still today invoked and venerated as the 'witness god' or the 'main deity of Denjong' during the annual Pang-Lhabsol[21] ceremony in Sikkim.

3.3. The modern phase (17ᵗʰ Century–1975) – the fall of the Buddhist Kingdom to merger with the Indian Union

The modern phase saw the culmination and acknowledgment of the different tribal groups under the central leadership of the Denjong Chogyal in 1642. It is believed that the state formation of the Himalayan Buddhist Kingdom of Sikkim, established by the three Tibetan monks who came from three different directions, was already prophesied before the 17ᵗʰ century. On this, Lama Tenpa Gyatso said to me that,

> During the Sikkimese year of Mi-Khi (the fire-dog year), Lhatsun Chenpo had a dream in which he saw a white goose coming from the direction of Sikkim. He also saw that the place was blessed and tranquil, resulting in him composing a sacred *neysol* (a prayer to propitiate the local deities of Sikkim). When he awoke from the dream, along with his disciple, he moved towards the south and entered from the northern pass, arriving at Yuksom via Dzongri. He then performed miracles in the land, waking the spirits, making offerings to them, acknowledging them, and subduing them. Traces of this are visible in places like Dzongri, Yangzodrag, Phamorong, Lhari Nying phug, etc.

> Kathog Kunthu Zangpo and Ngadag Sempa Chenpo are the second and third saints who arrived in Sikkim from the western and southern passes. All of them met at Norbugang, Yuksom, western Sikkim. Upon intense interpretation of the prophecies and secret knowledge of the oracular text and prophecies, it was decided that a man named Pintso who was from Gang to the east and was supposed to be a descendant of Gyad Bumsa, would become Denjong Chogyal [King of Sikkim]. He would then have to uphold the sacred traditions of Guru Rinpoché and rule the land as the spiritual and temporal king.

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[21] Pang Lhabsol: 'offering to the witness god'. National ritual of the land which used to be performed by the Pemayangtse lamas at the Palace chapel in Gangtok in honour of Khangchendzönga and all the deities of the land. In 2015 a movie, *Pang Lhabsol: The National Ritual of Sikkim*, was produced by the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology.

For further information, see also Pang Lhabsol, Souvenir 1989, Sikkim Tribal Youth Association.

Lopen Tenpa Gyatso continued, saying that,

> The three ordinary monks, known now as the three patron saints who are Lhatsun Chenpo, Kathog Rigzin Chenpo and Nadak Sempa Chenpo came from three different directions around 17th century and met at a place called Norbugang in Yuksam, which means 'meeting place' in the western part of Sikkim. The story is not as straight as it was presented, you know. The three saints when they met, they first had an argument about who should be enthroned as king. All three of them, while arguing with each other, almost got blinded by the sense of power. But thankfully, one of them realised and remembered the prophecy of Guru Rinpoché where he mentioned that there would be a fourth saint from the east. So, then they started to look east, and they found Phuntshog Namgyal, the descendant of Gyad Bumsa milking his cows in a farm. And that's how the King was crowned.

The story of the three patron saints is a widely shared story of Sikkim becoming a kingdom. In Yuksom today, the area is a recognised and protected tourist spot. I heard the same story in different versions from other informants, including Aba Zigmi, head monk of Lachung Monastery in northern Sikkim; Azang Chedup, head monk of Ngadag Monastery in Namchi; and from Lopen from the Sikkim Institute of Higher Nyingma Studies (SHEDA), Gangtok. All of them are monks and share this knowledge as a part of their education.

An academic work by Saul Mullard, *Opening of the Hidden Land*, also included a similar story about the formation of the kingdom, summarised as follows:

> As prophesied the Tibetan lama Lhatsun Namka Jigmi, who received a vision in 1644, set off for the hidden land (*sbas yul*) of Sikkim, where he meets two other Tibetan lamas who had simultaneously entered from other directions. In fulfilment of the prophecy, the three lamas find the layman destined to rule the hidden land, *Phun thsogs rnam rgyal*. With his coronation, the state of Sikkim/*Beyul Demojong* was born in 1642 [although the coronation date is still contested]. (Mullard 2011: 43–46)

There are multiple versions of this narrative with little alteration. For example, some said that the three monks initially fought among themselves to become King, then, somehow, they remembered the prophecies of the Guru Rinpoché about the fourth man. Some said Phuntshog Namgyal was a docile cattle herder and that he didn't want to become King.

Eventually the first King was consecrated and the first unifying bond between the different communities that resided in Sikkim was made. It is called the Tripartite Treaty of the Lho-Mon-Tsong and was made between the Bhutia, the Lepcha and the Limbu. The Kingdom was then divided into 12 Dzongs (districts) and was ruled for over 300 years, until 1975, by the Chogyal. These rulers have usually been characterised as benevolent and their reigns have taken in several vicissitudes in social, political, and religious life. Their list is as follows:

1. Phungtshog Namgyal 1642–1670
2. Tensung Namgyal 1670–1700
3. Chagdor Namgyal 1700–1717
4. Gyurmed Namgyal 1717–1733
5. Namgyal Phuntshog 1733–1780
6. Tenzing Namgyal 1780–1793
7. Tsugphud Namgyal 1793–1863
8. Sidekeong Namgyal 1863–1874
9. Sir Thutob Namgyal 1874–1914
10. Sidekeong Tulku 11th February 1914–5th December 1914
11. Sir Tashi Namgyal 1914–1963
12. Palden Thondup Namgyal 1963–1975.
13. On the death of Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal in 1982, his eldest surviving son and the heir apparent Crown Prince Wangchuk Namgyal was enthroned as the 13th Denjong Chogyal as per Sikkimese religious tradition. This event was subsequently recognised by about ten members of the then Sikkim legislative assembly, from different political parties, although by then Sikkim was already a part of the Indian Republic.

Ruled for more than three hundred years by twelve kings, the multiple factors in play at the merger of Sikkim with India in May 1975 ultimately led to Sikkim's downfall. The problems within Sikkim have been geopolitics, external and internal ethnic differences, and political and cultural issues. During British rule, and with Indian influence in the 18th century, Sikkim's demographic profile changed. Historically, Sikkim was de facto a protectorate of British India after the 1861 Treaty of Tumlong (McKay 2010); the 1950 treaty with India continued Sikkim's protectorate status until 1975 (Singh 1988: 191–197). Increasing pro-democracy and pro-reform voices fought against the so-called feudal monarchy of Kazi Lendup Dorji, president of the Sikkim National Congress (SNC), and Krishna Chandra Pradhan-led Janata Congress, who were aligned with the Indian government and supported the merger and overthrow of the Chogyals. On top of that, the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1959, the Sino-Indian war on Sikkim's border in 1962–1963, and the breakdown of internal law and order, can all be cited as reasons for the 1975 referendum, which culminated in the annexation of Sikkim to India in 1975 (Arora 2006b: 64). After the merger, even though the Himalayan Buddhist kingdom was dismantled, Buddhism as a religious practice and authority remained strong. These imprints in today's political institutions are visible in the form of the Sangha seat in the state Legislative Assembly and Ecclesiastical Affairs Department, which looks after the affairs of the religious institutions within the state, meaning Sikkim does not follow secularism (Arora 2006c; Vandenhelsken 2003). These institutions help ritual specialists who still act as 'mediators' between the human world and non-human entities.

4. Reflection on how mythic histories influence contemporary belief narratives

Even though in Tibetology and in Buddhist studies there have been several attempts at writing and recording historical records, there is still difficulty in making a clear distinction between well-established myths, legends, and historical facts. In this context, the above-presented *lha drung* narratives help in establishing the emblematic discourse that I consider mythic histories. Matthew Kapstein argues that a myth gains traction "whenever it functions in the discourse of a community to ground action that is itself felt to bring about the success of that community, or of its individual members. ...The truth of myth, then, is essentially tied to a community's history" (Kapstein 2002: 143). In the earlier phase, all attention was on Guru Rinpoché as a crucial and enigmatic figure in the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet and the wider Himalaya. His life story parallels Buddha's in his miraculous birth, precocious childhood, renunciation of worldly life, attainment of spiritual (religious) accomplishment, and the benefit he brought to other beings with his teachings, although with distinctly tantric elements, tantric practice, violence, charnel ground initiations and teachings from *ḍākinīs*, consort practice, and subjugating demons. In the second phase, the *lha drung* shifts to kings and princes. Gyad Bumsa became the central figure, searching and meeting residents of the hidden land, establishing a fertile relationship for further collaboration. In the third phase, kings and princes are replaced by Buddhist saints who then use the earlier mythic histories to establish the Kingdom of Sikkim and gain the community's support. The genre of stories, such as the *lha drung* of a divinity, defeating demons, and performing miracles coexists with *tham-gyad* in which ordinary people experience the presence of the divine powers and help them overcome hurdles in the process. On many occasions, past events and actions of the Kings or the downfall of the kingdom are indirectly and directly subjected to the rise of the mythic narratives. The mythic histories are invoked to express belief as well as disbelief in the events and situations that occur in the everyday lives of the Sikkimese people. The belief in guardian deities and non-human entities is strongly supported by Guru Rinpoché's influence in turning the land into a sacred space. Ritual specialists are unique within the community, unquestioned in terms of their long-standing tradition of mediating with non-human entities. Many people still speak of the miscommunication and secrecy that led to the kingdom's collapse. Some say that Lendup Dorji Kazi (the first Chief Minister of Sikkim) sold Sikkim to India, and the downfall of the Kingdom was a consequence of a curse on the royal family because of the breach between the brothers.

5. Lhopo cosmology

Lhopo cosmology in Sikkim is that of mixed and considered 'fusion' among the plural communities that exists in proximity. Lhopo cosmology has different vernacular manifestations, showing the influences of the different ethnic, religious and social interactions. Over a period, the historical foundation of Tibetan Buddhism in the eighth century, starting with Guru Rinpoché, has gained precedence due to the establishment of Sikkim as a Kingdom and the spread of Buddhism in the Himalaya. Today one can easily detect the influence and co-existence of older animistic beliefs with the newly established Buddhist monasteries. Based on this, let us consider the sentiments of Thinley Bhutia (73 years old), a village elder who proclaimed that Sikkim's origin as *Beyul Drémojong* is related to how Guru Rinpoché found the land, subdued its malevolent deities, turned them into guardians and thereby made it into a peaceful abode for the Lhopo and all other people. Thinley Bhutia, however, argued that the land existed early on and that it needed to be found and tamed. Additionaly, the malevolent non-human entities in the form of spirits were converted to deities from the Buddhist pantheon and therefore offerings are currently made to them, i.e., these deities are propitiated for good health, prosperity, good harvest, and fertility. When narrating the origin narratives of Lhopos in Sikkim Thinley Bhutia said that Lhopos were in Sikkimese land even before Buddhism and even from the conception of the land itself. He added that many of the Lhopos who had settled in the northern part of Sikkim immigrated from the Haa Valley of Bhutan. With the introdcution of Buddhism, he emphasised, not only was the land tamed but also the people living separately in Sikkim were brought together.

Quite often these entities explicitly undergo an epistemological change and are thereafter referred to as *yul lha gzhi bdag*, 'territorial gods' (Ramble 1996: 142; Bhutia 2019; Pommaret 1996; Punzi 2013). Today these non-human entities are typically inculcated into cosmological belief by being invoked in several ways: via ritual, such as incense burning, flying prayer flags, circumambulation, or recognition of the reincarnated Rinpochés, pronouncing the living Buddha via structures such as temples, monasteries, chortens (stupas), walls, and prayer wheels; and/or via restrictions on human use, such as limitations or prohibitions on hunting, animal sacrifice and logging. These rituals establish and acknowledge a cycle of interdependence and reciprocity that includes humans, plants and animals, and the larger forces beyond control. Although the villagers are aware of their inability to control these forces, they recognise that they can influence these forces through their behaviour and attitudes.

The ongoing arguments among community members surfaced for example when Tibetan immigrants came to Sikkim and assimilated the existing pre-Buddhist practices of the Lepcha into their Buddhist practice, making the establishment of their kingdom easier. In short, the non-human entities of the land were propitiated by the Lepcha and thus converted to Buddhist deities. This case of sacred landscape transformation differs in Tibet and Sikkim. In Tibet, the *yul lha*

gzhi bdag are non-human entities residing in the land but are not owned by humans. The non-human entities in Sikkim, on the other hand, had pre-existing divine and mutual relationships that they shared with the people. Thus, the transformation of the Sikkimese people especially Lepchas was first led by transforming the deities of the land into Buddhist fold by offering to them and invoking them in Buddhist rituals and texts. In this context, while discussing with Gyurmey Bhutia, freshly graduated from Buddhist University at Gangtok, denies arguments that Lepchas were the only ones who were residing in the land and emphasises how,

> The land cannot be magically created as the Lepchas say it was. How can anyone create land? It already existed but it needed to be found and opened, just as Guru Rinpoché did. Did Guru Rinpoché make this land? The answer is no, but he found this land, hid it, and prophesied that some learned monks and visionaries will come and open it. Therefore, that's how a land is found. Just like America was found by Columbus. The only difference is Guru Rinpoché is a Vajrasattva, a man of magical prowess, and he tamed all the spirits of the land. This makes this land blessed, and whoever is born here, like you and me, we are much closer to *dewachen ghi singkham* (the land of eternal happiness and bliss). Even Guru Rinpoché lives in *dewachen ghi singkham*. (Interviewed on 8th January 2017)

During this interview, he also added that the recent emphasis on ideas such as Lepchas being the original inhabitants, Limbus (Tsongs) as the oldest inhabitants, developed due to the central-government incentives and better opportunities in employment and education.

Pre-Buddhist non-human entities are then divided into a class of divinities within the Buddhist fold and are often attributed with distinctive traits, for example the kinds of benefit they bring and the types of harm they can be expected to inflict. According to Geoffrey Samuel (1993), the universe in which we live is seen as capable of multiple interpretations that are not necessarily exclusive. Rationality is not, as it tends to be in contemporary Western society, the single dominant mode of legitimate discourse. The common feature of all these influences is the belief that the phenomenal world is inhabited by spirit powers and deities that are organised into a single "ritual cosmos" (Samuel 1993: 157).

Thus the Lhopo cosmology predominantly comprises influences from Tibetan Buddhist cosmology in which the worldview is represented by a symbolic cosmos within a mandala.[22] Outlining the rudimentary features that distinguish Buddhism in Sikkim as practicsed by the Lhopo, two main systems can be identified: the Abhidharma system (4th or 5th century) expounded from the Indian text the *Abhidharmakosha* (Treasure House of Knowledge) by Vasubandhu (Brauen 1997; Sadakata 1997), and the Kalachakra system (Wheel of Time) translated into Tibetan in 1027 (Brauen 1997; Gyatso 2004). To the Sikkimese, the existence of

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[22] Although a three-dimensional structure, mandalas can be two-dimensional paintings on cloth, as well as the famous temporary sand mandalas created for specific rituals. This is sometimes symbolised through intricate hand gestures called *mudras*; in addition, practitioners believe that a mandala can also be generated mentally.

two seemingly conflicting cosmological systems is not problematic, but rather organic as the Sikkimese believe that as neither is meant to be a complete representation of the universe, they can coexist within the multiple universes within which non-human entities seem to interact and from which they interfere with humans.

In the contemporary context, there are new dimensions to this belief in which an older constellation of spirits (deities, demons, ghosts) coexists with a newer Buddhist matrix of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. A conflicting dialogue persists in Sikkimese Lhopo cosmological culture now in which the old pantheon of non-human entities, considered malevolent and therefore needing placation, still co-exists with people. These malevolent deities are sometimes demonised within the Buddhist insitutions and sometimes marginalised. Although these conflicts are more mundane and pragmatic (such as fertility, fecundity, health, longevity, success, etc.), they are not completely ignored by the people. With Tibetan Buddhism, some of these deities find new roles to play and, in some cases, are completely demonised but still not abandoned. This tends to emphasise soteriological concerns such as karma, cyclic existence (samsara) and its termination in nirvana. Instead of blood sacrifices, as in pre-Buddhist practice, Buddhists employ offerings in the form of effigies, and use flour and milk in place of blood. Multiple assimilations are manifest in religious practice that exist in parallel with each other. Coping with a worldview that exists between conflicting belief systems, buddhist and pre-buddhist, takes place on a vernacular level and represents an ongoing negotiation between different religious orders and influences.

To gain a better grasp of the Lhopo worldview and cosmology one must understand other communities that co-exist within the region and how they influence one another. Even though the Lhopo are predominantly followers of Tibetan (Vajrayāna) Buddhism, there are Lhopos who make offerings to Hindu gods and goddesses, and a minority of Christian Lhopos, who are currently increasing in number. This variation exists not only among the Lhopo but even demographically – broadly – among the Lepcha (Rongkup) and Nepalese. This encounter, in addition to competing animist beliefs, Hinduism, Islam, other indigenous Limbu and Rai religious beliefs, not to mention science, bring new dimensions to Lhopo belief. In this regard, Lhopo doesn't only signify one community with one belief and practice, rather Lhopo is an amalgamation of different groups that practice different beliefs.

6. Theoretical & methodological framework

Within Sikkim the changing meanings of sacred landscape, ritual practice, and the problem of symbiotic mediation traces its history from the pre-Buddhist and Buddhist cosmos to a mixed multiple cosmos. Sikkimese history as narratives and as account of facts is the product of mixed analytically distinguishable but mutually entailed constituents. Ethnography is the microscopic study of the flow of social discourse and everyday life. Geertz asserts that culture is the web of significance in which man is suspended, which man him/herself has spun (Geertz 1973: 1). To analyse these webs through description and interpretation, rather than seeking to define cultural phenomena, I explore belief narratives. To do so, I conducted fieldwork in four different phases. Leonard N. Primiano writes (1995) in theorising vernacular folk life that:

> Folklore as a scholarly discipline is not only about doing ethnography, and ethnography is not only about work in the field. Although our discipline is based in fieldwork, there is, after all, more to doing fieldwork than just doing it. (Primiano 37).

When I arrived in Tallinn Airport on 17th August 2016, I had worked on my research proposal and I had an ambitious plan to work on place-lore and mapping the sacred landscape, which included Guru Rinpoché's travel map from Ladhak to Arunachal as well as Bhutan. The plan soon faltered as I realised the geographical difficulties of mapping regionally based stories. On 7th November 2017, at the Estonian National Museum where *Dhokbu the Keeper* (the first Sikkimese film)[23] premiered, I realised what I was supposed to work on – deities. During my second phase of fieldwork in the summer of 2017, I started in West Sikkim and organised interviews with the monks from Pemayangtse monastery in order to gather narratives about the deities who were subdued by Guru Rinpoché himself, who has now been transformed into one of the main deities of Sikkim. The fieldwork was carried out through communicative interaction mediated by language, meaning that whatever objectivity we can hope to attain must be founded in intersubjectivity. The dissertation's point of departure is the socio-cultural and political order of Sikkimese villages. The ethnographic research was carried out between 2016 and 2021 periodically in the following villages:

1. North – Lachung, Lachen, Chungthang, Tingchim, Phodong, Swayem, Phensang, Kabi, and Namok,
2. East – Pakyong,
3. West – Tashiding, Yuksom, Kacheodpalri, Pelling, and Pemayangtse,
4. South – Namchi.

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[23] *Dhokbu the Keeper* is the first Sikkimese (Lepcha & English Language) feature film, directed by Dawa Lepcha shot during 2015-2016. It was first premiered at Vajra Cinema Hall, Gangtok on 31st March 2017 and later had its first international premier at Estonian National Museum, Tartu, Estonia on 7th November 2017.
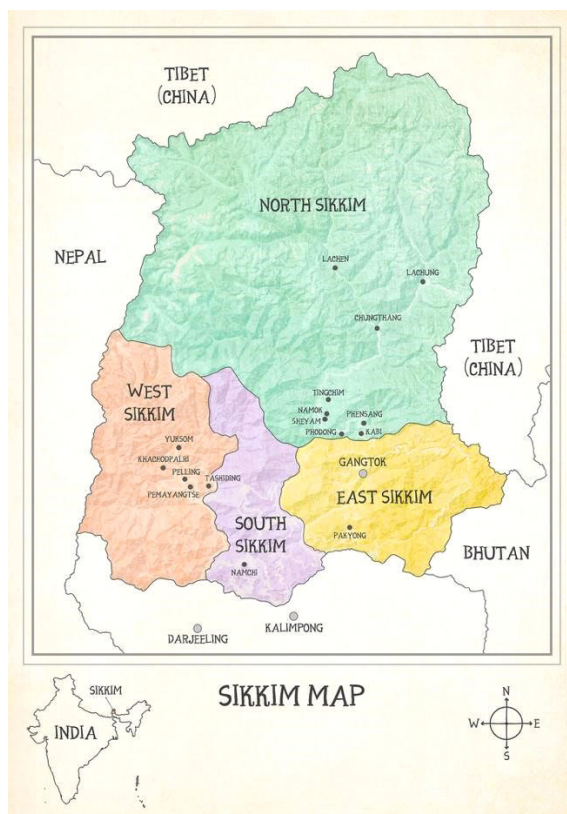
Picture 6. Map of the ethnographic research area. The villages marked were visited periodically between 2016 – 2021. Map curated by Marge Nelk.

To clarify, I visited all these places multiple times and spoke with different people aged from 10 to 92: community elders of different ethnicities, women and men, ritual specialists, Buddhist monks, friends, and relatives. I hoped to explore the mysterious or supernatural experiences that are often invoked to manifest, preserve, or reinvigorate community identity. As a folklorist I focus on the reflective process that has been incorporated to show how an individual and a community verbalise and communicate their understanding of the multiple interpretations of beliefs. Such verbalised narratives of the personal experiences influence the ways that the world is perceived by narrators themselves and by surrounding people.

This research, reported in this dissertation, has been conducted in various cultural contexts. However, a striking similarity is found when it comes to methodology, since all the articles are based on ethnographic fieldwork with participant observation, informal conversations (communication) and interviews. The research focuses on the social contexts of supernatural beliefs. I use belief narratives as textual and ritual representation of the manifestation, and construction of collective and individual identities (Honko 1986; Valk 2006, 2018). These narratives

have shaped the processes of construction in history, something that now has an increasingly significant cultural-historical dimension. Supernatural entities, local regional deities, spirits, etc., are influential agents in situations where belief is a way of seeing how non-human entities are manifested in everyday life, and how they influence the life of the community. Some of the materials include interviews and the use of other sources of data collection such as communication on social media.

6.1. Using participant observation and interview methods to facilitate data collection

M. N. Srinivas writes on his methodological engagement during his fieldwork among his own community that, "My study would enable me to better understand my personal culture and social roots" (1976: 5). Hence at the core of fieldwork is the presence of the researcher and her/his active participation in events. Using participant observation here therefore become a means by which feeling and empathy for the research field and its issues can be achieved (Hauser-Scháublin 2003). Participant-observation includes two inherent contradictory behavioural patterns, specifically being an 'absorbed participant' and keeping 'objective distance'. Therefore, I concede that this methodology is insufficient to collect the required data. During fieldwork the researcher continually encounters new kinds of challenge and new ways and mechanisms with which to tackle these problems, therefore I employ tools such as meta-communicative cues (non-verbal cues) [Briggs 1986], performances and facial expressions as means that add more substance to participant observation.

My data collection was two-fold: First, I collected and interviewed the main informants, the key ritual specialists, tradition bearers (predominantly men and women above 60 years of age), monks and village elders. This was undertaken using various interview techniques. I spent long hours conversing with the interviewees at their homes going through the research objectives, making videos, and taking photos. The data collected during this process was mainly historical narratives, personal experience narratives, and oral stories that had been passed down through generations within a given community as well as within the informants' families. These systematically recorded interviews with a few select informants were then transcribed and analysed in the comfort of the library at the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, University of Tartu, complemented with multiple follow up sessions via informal communication channels through social media and other online networks.

For the second segment of my data collection, I participated in events and observed the social dynamics, and numerous processes involved, talking to random people on what I witnessed. I had multiple opportunities to participate in events such as a person possessed by different spirits/deities, a sick person seeking the help of ritual experts for healing, annual ritual offerings to household deities, funerary rites, and wedding ceremonies. During these encounters, I often used

non-verbal cues as the key tools to pick and choose the research foci to pursue when interviewing key informants. In this data, I attempted to link the personal experience of key individuals, both women and men, to the complex belief system of which they are part in order to examine manifestations of the many belief narratives. I interviewed individuals who claimed to have experienced illnesses and obstacles due to spirits and deities; to have witnessed and participated in rituals pertaining to this belief tradition; or to have lived in communities where belief in non-human entities is considered part of everyday life. These individuals, who have experienced tradition in different manners are united through their consent to share their stories for academic purposes. Most importantly, the main investigations consist of unstructured informal discussions, gossip and small talk which took place during informal home visits, roadside gossip, and during lunches and dinners. Picking up meta communicative cues (Briggs 1986) from verbal statements is the core of my participation and observation as well as interview questionnaires. I would often pick up overheard conversations on a car ride or in ritual spaces. Anything interesting would be questioned further if people were approachable and, in most cases, people were cooperative when I bombarded them with questions.

When I embarked upon my field trip, my mentor advised me that "good field-work consists of active participation in village gossip", that's where the real material lies, and today sitting in Tartu, contacting people in Sikkim, asking them "so what's cooking?" I cannot agree more. During my field trip and analysis of my ethnographic data, I realised that there is a need to find new polyphonic means of representation when conducting fieldwork, which often depends on under-standing the field and the people one deals with.

6.2. Formulating a partially native theory

Most of the initial academic visibility of Sikkim came from the research carried out by European anthropologists, historians, and explorers from the earliest period of British colonial rule, such as Gorer 1938; Hooker 1854; Morris 1938; Risley 1894; Siiger 1967; White 1971, in whose works importance was given to categorising people and their ways of life in the Kingdom.

These writings involved the colonisers as explorers, missionaries and ethno-logists who created a space for transnational ideology and commodity exchanges that served their agendas. The paradigm shift, which explores concepts such as 'native', 'indigenous' or 'insiders' is considered a colonial legacy. Later, in the hope of patronising and supporting eminent Sikkimese figures, Indian govern-ment officials and journalists wrote about the 'accession' of Sikkim to India (Datta-Ray 1984; Sindhu 2018). Soon, scholars started exploring issues pertaining to the merger: the downfall of the kingdom, Himalayan geopolitics, borderland politics (Hiltz 2003; McKay 1997; Mullard 2011). In recent times, academic preoccu-pation has moved from holistic Sikkimese studies to the study of ethno-political conflict and environmental concern focusing mainly on one community (Arora

2007; Bentley 2007, 2008; Bhasin 2002; Chettri 2017; Gergan 2018; Kazi 2009; Little 2007; Nakane 1966; Pradhan 2020; Vandenhelsken 2009, 2020a, 2020b and many more). This has seen a surge in researchers and academic scholars from the dominant ethnic group researching their own society, and native researchers from minority ethnic groups studying their own groups (Messerschmidt 1981a, 1981b).

In the present scenario, there are traces of native scholars belonging to their own community working to overcome and rectify the many misrepresentations of their cultures found in earlier monographs written by colonial administrators. There is a shift towards presenting a 'correct' version of their culture, exposing past 'wrong' representations. They take upon themselves the white man's burden of cleansing the tarnished picture of their history and culture, but the process is questionable due to references to the earlier works to support recurring arguments. Along with this, the native might fall into the trap of dealing with "their own cultures from a position of intimate affinity" (Narayan 1993: 671). What Narayan means by "intimate affinity" is a scholar in the role of community member sharing a close relationship with her/his informants. In this sense, the native perspective is no more than different aspects of similar knowledge already produced.

Prior to assuming my position at University of Tartu, I was interviewed by Ülo Valk, my supervisor, who asked me, "How will you be able to distance yourself and do research on your own community?" During my five years away from home, while familiarising myself with the folkloristic theories in Tartu I got several opportunities to travel, participating in and presenting papers at conferences. In these events, I was often the 'native' scholar, researching my own community. I was asked multiple times during question-and-answer sessions, "How do you distance yourself from your community?", or "What methodology do you use as a native scholar to study your own community?" My response was always that the distance of thousands of miles from home, and the education in folkloristics that I received at the university, provide me with a sense of alienation that allows me to dilute some of the ethnocentrism and become a kind of outsider. As a research scholar, I gained insight into negotiating analytical and distanced perspectives about the people to whom I belong and study. In the words of Anthony Jackson, "doing anthropology at home is of benefit when the researcher has prior knowledge experience of fieldwork abroad before turning homeward, since this aids the 'distanciation' process that is necessary if we are to see ourselves as others see us" (Jackson 1987: 14). This statement resonated with me as I found myself in a constant flux between my identity as a Sikkimese native and the newly acquired liminal status as an overseas research scholar.

If we were to delve more deeply into the discussion of the 'native researcher', we can find that there are both advantages and disadvantages to this position. Advantages can be ease of contact with informants, lack of linguistic problems, picking up on non-verbal and meta-communication cues, avoiding hidden stereotyping, access to certain cultural specifics especially the emotional dimensions, and understanding cultural subtleties (Aguilar 1981). Disadvantages could be

active participation in the everyday life of the phenomena and people being studied. Some other impediments may include difficulty analysing events, lack of distance when formulating research questions, interlocutors' assumptions regarding the researcher's willingness to adhere to the rules, and their tendency to apply pre-conceived notions (Aguilar 1981).

Contemporary scholars do not think of themselves as impartial outside observers, alien 'others' who study cultures from a safe and scientific distance, but rather as partners in communication, participants in the heteroglot dialogue of an indefinite number of voices and points of view.

In this context, I do not completely yield to the idea that "speaking from the inside and outside at the same time is logically impossible" (Kubica 2016: 85), rather any scholar whether an insider or an outsider can and shall speak from the inside and outside viewpoint, showing how the position of native and non-native are in constant fluctuation. Kirin Narayan deconstructed the very concept of 'native' anthropology and proposed "that at this historical moment we might more profitably view each anthropologist in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations" (Narayan 1993: 685). Native scholars learn to read the crowd, sometimes participating, sometimes spectating. In this light, I propose the term 'partially native'. Scholars who are partially native despite their affinity to the community play the role of an individual who belongs to the 'folk group' being studied and shares certain "informal and unofficial shared knowledge" (Sims and Stephens 2005 [1963]: 30). They are often viewed as and become an advocate of the community. Due to the many ethical questions in the humanities and multiple concerns related to community members' 'shared data and knowledge', partially native scholars constantly fluctuate between fear of being misunderstood by community members and becoming part of the community.

The partially native scholar enjoys the position of scholar in the field as a 'family member' (Starrs 2001: 74) and somehow still manages to remain outside the community as well. To support this argument, in one instance during my field trip in Lachung, I was supposed to document an annual ritual performed by villagers from Cho Chuba in the Chuba Valley. This ritual requires every male member of the family from the village to make offerings and take part in the rituals. No women from the village were allowed to join in. They told me how "One time in the past, a woman was invited just to help serve tea to the monks at the small *lhagang* (altar). But when they arrived back home, she was severely sick. The head monk soon realised that they had broken the rule and so had been punished. The villager and the lady's family had to make separate offers seeking forgiveness, and only afterwards was she cured." Initially, I wasn't allowed to join the procession, but later, they called me and said, "You are not a member of our community therefore you're being a woman and attending the event doesn't count. So, you can come tomorrow morning at 5. I can pick you up." To everyone's surprise, I didn't suffer. Being Lhopo and making similar practices were not enough for me to be a family member. Instead, belonging to a different village and geographically not falling under the area of the deity worship made me an

'outsider' in the process. On many occasions I wasn't allowed to discuss some topics, and everyone warned me against researching with certain people and in certain areas. In such cases, my position as a native was challenged and often fluid interpretations came to light. John Aguilar discusses how "the extent to which anyone is an authentic insider is questionable" and "…given the diversity within the cultural domains and across groups, even the most experienced native anthropologists cannot know everything about his or her own culture" (Aguilar 1981: 23).

Whether native or non-native, there is no one way of doing fieldwork. Therefore, one's position as an insider or outsider cannot be established fully in terms of ritual propitiation and research among people. There are multiple factors that could influence the fluctuating position of the researcher in the field. I mean as a partial scholar whose position in the field is challenged and renegotiated according to the given place and situation. In due course, a Canadian French anthropologist researching my village community (Tingchim) was an outsider until she got married to a Sikkimese Lhopo man. I asked one of the aunties from Tingchim village whether deities would inflict sickness upon the anthropologist who used to research among our community. She answered, "the deities will not harm her even if she does anything to offend them. Instead, they will harm Azang (the uncle, her research assistant) because he failed to educate her about our way of life. But now that she is married to a Lhopo man, even though he is not from our village, she has become a close community member, therefore, now, she could be harmed." In such instances, the non-native can become native through marriage and therefore prone to the gains and losses of the village. In research, if two scholars collect the same data, whether they belong to the same community or not, they will have different views of what has been witnessed and collected; therefore, I propose the position of the 'partially native scholar' according to which, despite belonging to the community a scholar becomes an agent of the liminal space and therefore has a different relationship with the community.

6.3. Conceptualising belief and belief narratives in folkloristics

In folkloristics, belief as a vernacular category is contested, negotiated, constructed, situated, often overlapping with other categories, and interrelated to other discourse genres such as legend, fairy tale, proverb, charm, anecdote, and myth. Work on belief has recognised it as an analytical tool insufficient to study the community's culture or belief in general, partly because "it is so broad as a category" (Mullen 2000: 119), or because it is elusive (Bowman, Valk 2014: 7). Belief, which encompasses thoughts, actions, and tradition, is an analytical category that can be found in folkloristics and other academic discourse, such as anthropology, philosophy, and psychology. Folkloristics includes a diverse set of concepts: "cognitively held precepts, propositional statements, ideologically determined practices, interpretations of experiences, worldview, habitus, the foundations of narrative, explanation for the behavior or story, a genre of folk expression unto itself, marginalized knowledge and knowledge's synonym more generally"

(Gatling 2020: 308). Today, academic discourse on belief as a systematic ideology has reallocated towards believability (Needham 1972: 40) as a supposition of veracity derives from the fact that the word belief encompasses different and competing sensibilities. Belief gains precision in academia as a social formation and discursive construction through language performance. Folklorists have studied belief in multiple expressive forms, usually conceptualising it as a vernacular genre that addresses and helps people understand other vernacular genres such as the supernatural, custom, ritual, legend, memorate, charm, omen, divination, folk religion, and faith healing (Mullen 2000: 119). When studying the vernacular expression of religion, it becomes clear that belief plays a key role.

Research on vernacular beliefs, unexplained supernatural experiences, and belief narratives, in a broader sense, has increasingly gained attention among folklorists such as Bowman, Valk 2014; Dégh 2001; Dégh and Vázsonyi 1971; Hiiemäe 2016; Hufford 1982a, 1982b; Mullen 2000, to name a few. The term 'folk belief', which once referred to a peasant or primitive group, has now shifted from a culturally homogeneous village to urban and digital communities. Similarly, the emphasis on 'folk' as "any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor" (Dundes 1965: 2) has raised questions such as who the group of people are. What are the factors invloved? Where does the group reside? (Ben-Amos 1972; Noyes 1995).

In this thesis, proceeding from the current academic discourse on belief, I use 'belief' as something that informs religious experience, while the telling of religious experience gradually reinforces and/or concretises belief. In the Sikkimese context, the vernacular term for both folkloric and Buddhist beliefs is *ded pa/de pa* or *yid che,* which informants often used synonymously. The *ded pa/de pa* was generally used by monks and ritual specialists. Upon asking them about its meaning, Geshe Gyatso said that *ded pa/de pa* could mean devotion/feeling faith, or the wish to believe and willingness to participate. He added *mi ded pa* would mean people's belief, and teachings that relates to individual believability.

When I asked Lama Tshulthim, a monk in Mirik monastery, what belief means in Buddhism, he said:

> Because I am a monk, I have *sangay ki ded pa/de pa*, which means 'belief in Lord Buddha' or 'belief in the enlightened one', but our parents, who live in the villages, have *yid che* towards the *gzhi bdag* (the local guardian deities), they have faith/hope in worldly deities. Because of their belief, they fear them, they propitiate them and make amendments in case of worldly troubles. (Interviewed in September 2020)

In this context, folkloric belief and Buddhist belief are intertwined and often relate to each other. The mythic histories of saints and miraculous deeds of Buddha or Guru Rinpoché are passed down from one generation to another forming a current corpus of oral narratives. These stories, enmeshed with individual experience are constitutive of the social norms and knowledge that lead to believability. This is not only confined to monks and religious people. According to Karma Takapa (36 years old), a Sikkimese filmmaker and actor,

> As a Buddhist, for me belief means to look at how the world around you function, how different people act upon such beliefs and how you perceive the world without tampering with it. Your action in your day-to-day life is informed and influenced by what you believe. (Interviewed in January 2022)

Within the Western folkloristic approach towards belief, belief (previously called superstition) became a focus of research because it was considered non-Christian, making it part of the domain of folklore and worth attention. The narratives field-workers collected may very well have been situated dialectically against or within more comprehensive folk Christian religious practices. The problem comes when we universalise the concept of belief derived from this body of specific narratives and cultural contexts. Scholars writing from the vantage point of religious studies have long recognised a Christian, often protestant, genealogy for their use in the term belief (Lopez 1998; Ruel 2008). Belief embodied by Christian credos and emphasis on faith was imagined as central to what it meant to be Christian and then problematically extrapolated to all other religious traditions – many of which had no parallel concept – to the extent that scholars took belief as a universal feature of all religious life (Nye 2008: 105–108).

The idea that belief and religion go hand in hand, that religion must affirm something, that religion concerns cognitive commitments, and that belief exists primarily as a state of mind, not as a constituting activity in the world, are legacies of colonialists, although they are also found in encounters with other cultures (Asad 1993: 47). Belief and belief narratives are explored not as a state of mind, but a result of the relationship between people (cf. Latour 2010: 2). In Sikkim, belief and believed stories share "historically embedded conventions that allow something to become meaningful for a specific group at a specific time" (McCutcheon 2015: 46).

In 2018, I embarked upon my field trip across Sikkim, keeping in mind the fear of deities and being cautious about the places I visited, houses I stayed in, and food I ate. I began by questioning my informants about whether they believed in the presence of guardian of deities and whether they were equally cautious. Nawang Lachungpa, (38 years old from Lachung village) and Karma Zangpo (36 years old) agreed that they do not believe in the deities despite feeling that they were obliged to. Zangpo said:

> I do not generally believe that deities exist, but when my mother gets sick, she goes to a ritual specialist. Usually, the specialist suggests making an offering to the *lu* who resides in the rock near there (pointing towards a field with a huge rock). She makes an offering as suggested, and within a day, magically, the illness is cured. Therefore, witnessing such events makes me question my disbelief. (Interviewed in March 2018)

Both Zangpo and Nawang are the current youth of the community, upon whose shoulder the responsibilities to appease the local deities' rests. Their act of disbelief and doubt doesn't stop them from perfoming rituals; therefore, they negotiate their belief in their daily lives to fulfill their social obligations. David Hufford's

study of the 'tradition of disbelief' argues that "both individuals who believe and disbelieve are still 'believers' with the object of their belief just being distinct" (Hufford 1982a). In this sense, belief as a term can paradoxically express doubt and confidence (Pouillon 2016: 458), i.e., forms of 'disbelief' in narratives themselves could be analysed as still being forms of belief in the narrative process. In Sikkim, I found people who profess belief and disbelief together. The forms of disbelief that they nurture is often tested during trials such as illnesses and alternative medical treatment.

In the spring of 2018, I attended a semester at the Religion Studies Department of the University of Toronto. During my time there I became acquainted with a Sikkimese woman, I call Ani, who had married a Punjabi Indian and is now settled in Toronto. She shared with me her belief experience narrative:

> You know, since I moved here, I never suffered from any severe illness. I know we believe back home deities will always follow us and take care of us, but I never acknowledge it until one day.
>
> I got very sick, and nothing helped. My husband took me to the best of doctors, but nothing worked. When I contacted my family back home, my brother suggested that we should seek help from a ritual specialist. The next day, he consulted our village ritual specialist. The divination mentioned that due to negligence in making offerings, the house deity was angry. Therefore, I sent some money back home, and my brother made an offering, and soon after I felt better as if nothing ailed me. I know that moving away from home, we become sceptical about many things back home, but the deities, I genuinely believe that they exist, and they need our support, offering, and attention when it's due. Otherwise, even geographical distance is not a hurdle if they intend to cause harm. (Ani, Toronto 2018)

I agree that "folklorists well know that beliefs are rarely predictive of behaviour. Individuals routinely ignore the beliefs their groups purportedly hold." (Gatling 2020: 310) But in the case of Sikkim, belief is an acted and lived reality. It is not only based on 'mental state' but very much on everyday displays of fear and emotion, and in everyday crises. During my field trip, 'belief' and 'belief-related terms' (such as I believe, we believe, disbelief, belief system, belief world, believer *bishwas/biswashi/de pa/ded pa/yi-chhe*) appeared numerous times. Most of my informants, on multiple occasions, verbalised the importance of belief in performing rituals, propitiations, offering, and believing in deities themselves. The supernatural world is then invoked and made alive through stories shared as accurate. Such stories are then woven together with oral, textual, and local knowledge. One common example that shows how belief is inculcated into narratives during fieldwork interviews is as follows:

> Once upon a time, there lived Sonam with his sick mother in northern Sikkim. Every Sunday, he would go to Gangtok to sell vegetables at the Sunday *haat* (market). One morning, when Sonam was getting ready to go to town, his mother said, "My dear son, when you go to Gangtok can you please go to the monastery and bring me the teeth of the Rinpoché? I am sure with such a *norpu* ['treasure/precious thing'], I will feel better. However, Sonam

forgot to go to the monastery, and when he arrived home, his mother asked, but he had nothing to show. Next week, similarly, his mother made the same request, and Sonam forgot to visit the monastery. Next week, when Sonam forgot again, he did not want to disappoint his mother. He saw a dead dog at the roadside, took out its molar, and gave that to his mother, saying it was the *norpu* she had asked for. Sonam's mother was pleased and rushed to the altar room and kept it there. Every morning then, she started to make an offering to the tooth. Suddenly, one day, the tooth from the altar was burning brightly and turned golden. Seeing this, Sonam and his mother realised that it was a true *norpu*. Later, my informant added, "it is because of her belief that even the useless tooth of the dead dog turned into a *norpu*. Such is the power of faith if believed. Deities are everywhere, living side by side. We must have more faith, and our belief will bear fruit" (Interviewed in June 2018).

This story was shared by multiple informants, often repeatedly, in different variations during my field trip across Sikkim. It was shared to emphasise the importance of belief, and that it exists. This story is used as an authentication or some sort of 'mantra'[24] to reinforce and be hopeful about the power of belief. In this story of religious folklife, belief plays a significant role. It is not only in belief that the tooth became precious but also in the fact that because such stories are passed down from one generation to another belief becomes a form of authority dictating one's identity. Usually, the traces of external interference and collective communal decisions determine whether an informant 'believes' in something or not, or is unsure about it, or changes her or his mind in different situations. This research participates in and answers the dichotomy of belief narrative as a fluid and as a situated modality. It examines how belief is expressed, performed, and lived out in everyday life (everyday culture cannot be neatly compartmentalised into the theoretical vessels of academic discourse). Belief according to folkloristic discourse has become a categorical tool to discuss people's lives, and interpret their actions and religious practices, while memorate, personal experiences and vernacular expressivity determine the role of belief as it is performed and lived.

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[24] Mantra is a religious thought, prayer, sacred utterance. Usually repeated as prayer during meditation.

7. The articles in brief and the main ideas

Article I. I Exist Therefore You Exist; We Exist Therefore They Exist: Narratives of Mutuality Between Deities (*Yul Lha Gzhi Bdag*) and Lhopo (Bhutia) Villagers in Sikkim

This article focuses on the dynamic relationship between non-human entities and humans among the Lhopo in Sikkim. It explores the presences, personalities, and lives of non-human entities, whom the Lhopo call *yul lha gzhi bdag* (protective and guardian deities) and discusses the various meanings and manifestations of the mundane routines and lifeworlds of Lhopo villagers as they variously engage with, and depend on, the supernatural world that surrounds them by studying their rituals, practices, beliefs, and narratives. I show that the characteristics of the *yul lha gzhi bdag*, which stem from the narratives of how Guru Rinpoché subdued them in around the 8th century when he visited Sikkim on his way to Tibet, are still prevalent. This also seems the case in Bhutan and Tibet as it is believed that *yul lha gzhi bdag* were present in the land well before the arrival of Guru Rinpoché, but, on Guru Rinpoché's command, they changed character and transformed into guardians and protectors of the land.

This is the first article in my thesis and is influenced and inspired by Anna Balikci's *Lamas, Shamans and Ancestors: Village Religion in Sikkim* (2008), an ethnographic investigation conducted among the Lhopo villagers of Tingchim village. I consider this article a continuation of her work. I interrogate the similarities and address the new developments and changes that have occurred over these past years. Balikci's book on Tingchim village and her interactions with ritual specialists serves as a ready handbook for the younger generations, including myself, and led me to understand the relationship between ritual specialist and non-human entities as the foci of rituals, characters in myths and other belief narratives, cultural symbols, etc.

The primary goal of this article is not to contest or elaborate on the existing meaning and definition of *yul lha gzhi bdag* or non-human entities. Rather, I discuss expressions of the increasing strain caused by the social processes of modernity and globalisation, changing relations with the land, religious conversion, and competing forms of education and medical knowledge. These manifestations in turn provide examples of what happens to these set definitions and understandings when they are expressed in new discursive contexts and in different situations.

Based on primary fieldwork carried out in Tingchim, I show through multiple examples how relations between the human and the non-human are shaped by reciprocity in everyday life. The mutuality between the inhabitants of the village and the deities are explained by my interlocutors to be an expression of fear as well as a form of kinship relations. This means that deities fear being 'forgotten' and so actively participate in the life of the community in exchange for veneration and worship. In this context, fear shapes narratives and attitudes in the cosmology of the inhabitants of Tingchim village. The non-human entities, i.e., the guardian

deities associated with place or family that inhabit the belief worlds of the Lhopo, are considered extensions of families. Kinship is shared and acknowledged with these guardian deities, who are family members. Narratives shared about these guardian deities are passed down from one generation to another as they take on a form of legacy that is transmitted from one generation to another. These territorial guardian deities are ambivalent. Their changing roles are defined by the situation in which they find themselves. They interact and interfere in the daily lives of the community. These interactions occur through the mediation of ritual specialists, thus, the status a deity has is contingent on how successfully they contribute to the prosperity of a given community or family.

Article II. A World Where Many Worlds Fit: Understanding Cosmopolitics through Narratives of Possessions and Spirit Invocation among the Lhopo (Bhutia) in Sikkim

This article investigates beliefs about the existence of spirits and stories about them as a true and unprecedented part of commonly shared social knowledge among the Lhopo of Sikkim. In this article I elaborate on the role of mutuality discussed through a specific event that took place in 2018. The article illuminates how two diverse cosmologies are interwoven in a complicated way. Two narratives make up the event that I discuss. The first documents a failed suicide attempted in 2018 while the second follows a biographical experience account that reveals the complex intertwining and relational bond between the human and the non-human worlds. Such events are set between the world of non-human entities among the indigenous Buddhist Lhopo and institutional authority such as Buddhist monasteries and monks. The ritual specialists and monks are mediums who interact with the deities and spirits. Therefore, it may be concluded that power and authority of both the mediums and supernatural agents are not fixed, but changeable. Supernatural 'power', such as the agent that brings about change both real and imagined, is fluid because the positions of those who wield it is not absolute. When such a supernaturally charged world inhabited by different beings interacts with humans, the balance between them fluctuates and is thus constantly shifting. I call this non-absolute power dynamic 'vernacular cosmopolitics'. This article discusses events in the narratives and the problematic nature of conflict within the spirit world. It deciphers the worlds that belong to the institutionalised realms and the lowly or worldly, where different entities exert power and presence through humans and seek attention and vengeance by inflicting sickness.

There is a plethora of non-human entities in mutual existence who help and cooperate with each other, as required, thus creating a supernatural order and cosmic tension. Such narratives of the hierarchy between worlds, where the divide is not 'constitutional' but complicatedly structured – the social world as part and parcel of a cosmic realm including the other world – are, therefore, constitutive of what I call cosmopolitics, in which one understands clearly that everyday village politics can only be understood with the help of the cosmic intervention of the

other-worldly. By focusing on narratives of lived events it is possible to examine the connection and the centrality of power, both in the supernatural and mundane worlds, and how these compete and overlap. In both presented case studies, this article shows how the worlds of spirits and humans are entangled, and how non-human entities are continually invoked and interfere in the everyday lives of Sikkimese.

The social world of humans is intertwined with the spirits. This reciprocal relationship is conducted through mediators such as ritual specialists who play a vital role by linking these worlds and maintaining order. However, it is also to be noted that no matter how strong the deities are and the ancestry from which a person inherits knowledge, one should and will only be recognised or function as a fully-fledged ritual healer once one is accepted by the villagers collectively as such. In Sikkim's present context, these exchanges are further problematised due to differing beliefs and understandings of the sacred landscape.

Article III. Death by Poisoning: Cautionary Narratives and Inter-Ethnic Accusation in Contemporary Sikkim

In this article I present rumour as a folk narrative genre that is invoked in specific cases to make sense of the unexplainable death of relatives. Some of the core arguments indicated in this article focus on dramatised narratives of how different verbal accusations, shared ideas, fear, and communicative relationships play out among the plural communities in Sikkim. The article throws light on social change and tension, demonisation, gossip, social stigmatisation, scapegoating and witchcraft beliefs in the Lhopo community. Through multiple narratives it presents how traditional cautionary tales related to *dhuk* (poison, poisoning), *dhuk zam* (poisoners, poison keepers) and *dhuk lha* (poison deity, poison owner) are 'weaponised' and used as tools to fuel real-world accusations. The article depicts the invocation of such accusations triggered by the fear of the 'Other'. Such demonisation and othering are examples of inclusion and of the bridging of the gap to the fastest growing section of the population, i.e. the immigrant population. Othering is here seen as a process and outcome of inclusion and binds together in one story. Rumour heightens the social mechanisms of marginalisation and othering targeted at specific populations for specific purposes. This article pertains to the social position and authority of the ritual specialist in Sikkim as determined, not through ritual efficacy or skill but through the support that a given religious institution provides. A ritual specialist who is recognised by an insti-tutional authority is often accepted easily in the community and gains the authority to perform and preside over rituals, festivals, ceremonies, etc., in the village. Other ritual specialists who are not acknowledged and who do not gain such institutional acceptance are often ostracised and considered attention-seeking and as solely wanting to gain wealth and social status. This point is dealt with in the article's Conclusion, where I discuss the similarity between ritual spe-cialists' positions within the community and the position of guardian deities, both of which depend upon community acceptance.

Article IV. Interpretive Shifts, Discourse on Possession, and Reified Institutional Truths of Claims of Reincarnation in Contemporary Sikkim

This article concentrates on the debate and pervasive criticism surrounding young women who claim *khandroma* status, meaning that they claim to be the reincarnation and emanation of Buddhist deities. By seeking and invoking *khandroma* status, these young girls are seeking some sort of social legitimacy within the community to which they belong. However, this is an emerging phenomenon as part of which vernacular mediums are possessed by high deities in Buddhism and call themselves *khandroma* ritual specialists. Significantly, such women are never accepted into the socially sanctioned institutions of female 'divine beings', and yet they continue to emerge, undergo possession, heal, and perform divinations. This point is expressive of how local, vernacular experiences of divine possession are not the sole domain or within the control of religious institutions. Because even without official support or recognition, these *khandroma* find a following in the community. Thus, *khandroma* provides a vernacular, dialogic, alternative to the male dominated narratives that are generally acknowledged by established Buddhist institutions. In the contemporary Lhopo belief world, a sense of scepticism and non-acceptance of the young women arises from their inability to fit within the set norms of prevalent traditions, such as the pre-Buddhist traditions as well as institutional Buddhism. With such intentions, the *khandromas* enter a sort of a liminality where their position in the community, between the handful of devotees who seek their advice and the larger village community who discard them as 'fake', 'acting' or 'seeking attention', is tenuous. In the broader context, this article shows how the role of the ritual specialist, which is often appreciated in the communities that believe in them, can be challenged and further problematised due to an intermingling of practices between traditions. This shows the forms of spiritual legitimacy that these young *khandromas* seek and exemplifies society's attempt to resist change in case it is drastic.

This article confirms that in many cases the self-professed *khandromas* are unable to find their place within the community for these reasons, but also because possession, and the spirits who usually possess the *khandromas*, are believed to be outside the norm (according to institutional practice). I show that such rules and regulations make *khandromas* a shifting challenge to reified institutional truths about discourse and doctrine. The *khandromas* are trying to escape the folds of pre-Buddhist tradition and gain acceptance in high Buddhism for better visibility and respect. Even though the pre-Buddhist faith is supposed to be unofficial, it is not un-institutional.

8. Final (re)considerations

The crux of this thesis is two academic purviews: Tibetology (Himalayan Studies) and folkloristics. The intersection of these scholarly fields enables me to contextualise Sikkim as a subject set in the geopolitically contested and controversial region from where I source my ethnographic data as well as the vernacular traditions that surround them. In this section, I will wrap up the theoretical framework and methodology from the two fields that proved primarily relevant for my thesis.

Firstly, today, Sikkim is a state in India with a population made up of many different ethnicities. Over the past few decades, Sikkim has witnessed drastic changes resulting from immigration, from its historical relations with British India, from fluctuating relationships with neighbouring countries and because of its contested merger with India. Set against such a backdrop, the social and political landscape seems fragmented and volatile, and several regional groups contest the mythical histories, cultural identity, and sacred landscape to support their claims of separate identity, legitimacy, status, visibility, and recognition in the political arena. I agree with Saul Mullard when he concludes in *Opening the Hidden Land: State Formation and the Construction of Sikkimese History* that "Sikkim is plagued by ethnic conflict, inequality and the competing assertions of rival ethnic groups as part of their desire to be recognized, their traditions and histories respected" (Mullard 2011: 198). During my research, most of the reference material that I had taken up either isolates the role of one community when discussing the other, or demonises the other; in this sense, my intention in this thesis has been to highlight and trace the continuity of Sikkim's mythic histories and show how they are evoked in contemporary belief narratives among the Lhopo.

Secondly, in many parts of the world, indigenous people perceive their knowledge to be part of their cultural identity, and political movements have incorporated this as an integral part of their discourses (Strang 1997). Sikkim is no exception to this. Multiple ethnic groups reside here, all of whom are seeking indigenous status. The core of their movements pertains to citizenship bills, customary rights, environmental concerns, political activism, and the cultural identity of each community. To elaborate on this, I engage with a flourishing body of literature on cosmopolitics by Isabella Stengers ("Cosmopolitical Proposal" 2005), which has not hitherto been extended to Sikkim or the eastern Himalaya. Marshall Sahlins, in his article "The Original Political Society", writes about a form of "inclusive cosmic polities" that was "…ordered and governed by divinities, ancestors, species-masters, and other such meta-persons endowed with life-and-death powers over the human population." (2017: 91) Sahlins mainly focused on early, or even the original, 'political society'. However, his view of the mundane political world and how it constitutes deities remains a crucial insight to understand the contemporary social and spiritual set-up among the Lhopo of Sikkim. The meaning of cosmopolitics in the Sikkimese context further enables us to understand the existing multiplicities of cosmic jurisdiction and the tension surrounding it, which is contested by humans and non-humans. Given that different

ritual specialists co-operate and often control different non-human entities, this cosmic contest reproduces itself in the ritual (institutional) and vernacular every-day lives of the villagers. The concept of cosmopolitics in the Sikkimese context is therefore best understood as continually fluctuating 'charged fields' where there is an ongoing battle between the human and non-human for authority. Within these charged fields the divide between the world is not 'constitutional' but is complexly amalgamated, i.e., the social world as organically integrated into the cosmic realm, including the other world. I refer to this as 'vernacular cosmo-politics'.

In this light, my articles strive to comprehend the intricate cosmological web that is Sikkim wherein non-human entities and humans (villagers) variously depend, interact, and compete for power, status, and influence. Even though in this thesis I focus on these cosmic politics and social conflicts within the Lhopo communities, I am adamant that beliefs among the different ethnic groups are multi-layered and complex. Initially I attempted to document Lhopo belief, but soon realised that understanding the Lhopo belief world is not possible without considering the other communities that surround them. Therefore, this article consists of ethnographic excursions conducted not only among the Lhopo but also other communities such as the Lepcha, Nepalese, Tibetan, and Indian mainlanders.

Lastly, as a partially native scholar and member of the Lhopo community, I have spent the last few years learning, relearning, and unlearning in my inter-actions during fieldwork experiences, and consequent interpretation of the ethno-graphic data. I have been entrusted to take part in some of the most secretive rituals that I would otherwise not have had access to. While this proves valuable in data collection, a primary problematic issue may be the complex entanglement of my position as community member and researcher. One of the ways I over-came this was to engage with it. While I acknowledge the reflexive nature of the fieldwork process, I also consider it a window on the multiple perspectives that serve to enrich the critical dimensions that this thesis finally offers. To put it succinctly, this work is an attempt to bring to the forefront the diverse practices and lived realities of the Lhopo communities. During my field trips, my infor-mants often expected me to become an advocate of the community. I was often perplexed and even considered excluding some of the controversial stories and narratives which present the community in a bad light. However, my study at the University of Tartu as well as geographical distance provided me with a space to be true to the evidence, helping me develop the position of the partially native that I aspired to embody from the beginning.

Glossary of the recurrent terms

Azang (*a zhang*): maternal uncle

Beyul (*sbas yul*): sacred hidden lands

Bharchey: obstacles, hurdles

Bishwas/Bishwashi (Nepali): belief, believers

Chogyal (*chos rgyal*): title of the Sikkimese kings. From Tibetan *chos*, meaning dharma and *rgyal po* meaning king or one who rules according to religion

Cho srung ma (*Cho srung ma*): protector of the Buddhist scriptures

Dewachen ghi shingkham: in Buddhist belief, when a person dies, they usually go to a paradise-like place where suffering is non-existent, and everything is in abundance

Dhepo (*sde po*): belief/faith

Dré: rice

Drémojong (*'Bras mo ljongs*): Sikkim

Dzindah: benefactor

Gyalrap (*rgyal rabs*): history

Gyagar: India

Haat: market (usually open once a week; villagers can sell their handmade and home-grown produce such as vegetables, handicrafts, meat, etc.)

Jigten ghi lha (*'jig rten gyi lha*): worldly god/deity

Jhakri/ Jhãkri (Nepali): ritual specialists usually of Nepalese origin.

Khandro (*mkha' 'gro*): female deities

Khangchendzönga (*Gangs chen mdzod lnga*): the third highest mountain in the world. In Sikkimese belief, the main deity subdued by Guru Rinpoché resides in the mountain

Lha (*lha*): god/deity

Lha drung (*lha drung*): stories about a person with divine powers defeating demons

Lhagang (*lha khang*): the altar room found in every Lhopo household or a prayer hall where smaller annual and monthly prayers and rituals are performed

Lu (*klu*): deities that reside in water; aquatic deities

Mõh (*mo*): divination performed by ritual specialists

Namthar (*rnam thar*): hagiographic, biographic, and critical readings of enlightened masters revealing the life stories and experiences of monks

Ney (*gnas*): holy place, sacred sites for pilgrimages

Nejum (*rnal 'byor ma*): ritual specialist (female) among the Lhopo

Ney yig (*gNas ryig*): guidebooks written about sacred/holy places in Sikkim

Ney sol (*gNas gsol*): sacred mantras and prayers to invoke the deities of the land (Sikkim), usually chanted during weddings, annual offering ceremonies, ritual offerings, etc.

Norpu (*no pu*): treasure/precious thing

Pang Lhabsol (*dPang lha gsol*): national ritual of Sikkim

Pawo (*dpa' bo*): ritual specialist (male) among the Lhopo

Pue sdé: monkey deity

Rinpoché (*rin po che*): literally translated as the 'precious one'. An honorific title for the reincarnation of lamas and eminent spiritual teachers

Sdé (*dü/bdud*): spirit with malevolent attributes

Shindré (*gshin 'dre*): spirit of a dead person

Tashiding (*Bkra shis sdings*): a pilgrimage monastery in west Sikkim

Ter (*ster*): treasures

Terma (*ster ma*): a spiritual treasure, sometimes objects such as images but usually teachings and texts attributed to Guru Rinpoché, who hid them to be later discovered or revealed in other ways by Buddhist practitioners called terton

Tertons (*ster ston*): a person who is a Buddhist practitioner and finds the treasure hidden by Guru Rinpoché and shares and distributes the knowledge among the community

Tham gyad (*tham gyad*): stories of ordinary people experiencing the presence of invisible, divine powers

Yeshey ki lha (*ye shes gyi lha*): enlightened gods/deities

Yiy cheh: faith/hope

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Summary in Estonian

Sikkimi lhopode müüdiline ajalugu,
usundilised jutud ja rahvapärane budism

Väitekiri käsitleb Sikkimis elevate lhopode (ehk bhutia) rahvausundit seoses ühiskondliku, poliitilise ja majandusliku tegelikkusega. Uurimuse üks keskseid mõisteid on „kosmopoliitika" (*cosmopolitics*) – see osutab keerukatele ja muutlikele võimusuhetele, mis valitsevad kogukonnaliikmete, nende elukeskkonna ja seda ühtviisi asustavate üleloomulike jõudude vahel. Need suhted on hierarhilised, kuivõrd suurem autoriteet on vanematel inimestel ja tähtsamatel vaimulikel, niisamuti teistel teadjameestel ja -naistel, kes korraldavad rituaale ja tegutsevad meediumitena. Viimaste seas võib eristada pühitsuse saanud ja mittepühitsetud teadjaid, kelle positsioon sotsiaalses hierarhias on erinev.

Väitekirjas on analüüsitud külaelanike, vaimulike ja rahvatarkade keerukaid suhteid ning suhtlemisviise üleloomulike jõududega. Selle sissejuhatus annab ülevaate Sikkimi sakraalsest maastikust ja kohapärimusest, milles on tähtsal kohal idee Sikkimist kui müütides kirjeldatud jumalikust territooriumust – kas „peidetud maast" või „viljakast orust". Seejärel käsitletakse Sikkimi ajalugu alates legendaarsest 8. sajandil elanud Guru Rimpochest ehk Padmasambhavast, kes kuulutas Tiibetis budismi, alistas müütilistes võitlustes kohalikke mäejumalaid ja külastas oma teekonnal ka Sikkimit. Mütoloogia on Sikkimis tihedalt põimitud ajalooga kuni 17. sajandil rajatud Sikkimi kuningriigi asutamiseni, mille lõpp saabus 1975. aastal, kui Sikkim inkorporeeriti osariigina India kossessisu. Järgnevalt on sissejuhatuses käsitletud lhopode sünkretistlikku kosmogooniat, milles kohalikud uskumused ja ettekujutused kosmosest põimuvad budistliku pärimusega. Olen põhjalikult selgitanud ka töö teoreetilisi ja metodoloogilisi aluseid. Et väitekiri põhineb välitöödel, sai oluliseks meetodiks osalev vaatlus, milles püüdsin siduda kohaliku kultuuri kandja ja analüütilise uurija vaatepunkte. Ühe alapeatüki olen pühendanud uskumuse ja usundilise jutu mõtestamisele folkloristikas. Niisamuti arutlen sissejuhatuses, kuidas üleloomulikud jõud suhestuvad argieluga ja selgitan kosmopoliitika (*cosmopolitics*) kontseptsiooni, mis osutab rahvapärastele ettekujutustele koguilmast, kus inimesed, vaimud ja jumalad moodustavad koostoimiva ühiskondliku koosluse, mida kujundavad lakkamatult muutuvad võimusuhted. Usundilist keskkonda mõjutavad ka ettekujutused sakraalsest maastikust ja sellega seotud rituaalidest, milles väljendub lhopode identiteet ning ühiskondlik staatus.

Väitekirja põhisisu moodustavad neli artiklit. Neist esimene analüüsib lhopo kaitsejumalatega (*yul lha gzhi bdag*) seotud pärimusi, milles joonistuvad välja jumalate iseloomud ja elukäigud. Selle uurimuse aluseks on välitöödel kogutud narratiivid ja seal tehtud tähelepanekud, mis illustreerivad külarahva ja jumalate omavahelisi suhteid, milles kesksel kohal on vastastikune sõltuvus. Käsitlen ka kaitsejumalate tähendusi ja ilminguid teistes Himaalaja kultuurides. Minu uuri-

musest rituaalide, uskumuste ja narratiivide kohta selgub, et lhopo külarahva argielu saab tähendusliku sisu suhetest neid ümbritseva üleloomuliku maailmaga. Selgitan, et see suhe pole ühepoolne, sest nii inimesed kui ka jumalad on üksteisest eksistentsiaalses sõltuvuses, vajades vastastikust kinnitust ja tuge. Seda kosmopoliitilist kooslust mõjutavad tänapäeval mitmed tegurid, nagu näiteks moderniseerumine ja globaliseerumine, muutuv suhe maaga, religioosne konversioon, uutmoodi haridus ja moodne meditsiin.

Teise artikli põhiteema on meediumlus ja vaimude väljakutsumine lhopode kosmopoliitilistes kujutelmades. Mitmed varasemad tööd, mis käsitlevad neid fenomene Tiibeti ja Himaalaja usundites, osutavad valdkonna komplitseeritusele ja piirkondlikele erinevustele. Oma artiklis lähenen teemale usundiliste juttude ja isikiklike kogemuslugude kaudu, mille keskmes on maise ilmaga läbi põimunud üleloomulik maailm ja jumalad, kes sekkuvad inimeste eludesse. Suhet kahe maailma vahel kontrollivad teadmamehed ja -naised (*pawo, nejum*), kes rituaalide kaudu pöörduvad jumalate ja vaimude poole ning osalevad võitluses haiguste ja õnnetustega. Ühtlasi tähendab see tegevus kogukonnas oma autoriteedi kehtestamist. Artikkel käsitleb Sikkimi kosmoloogiat, kus üleloomulikud olendid ja külarahvas on tihedas omavahelises suhtluses, millega kaasneb võitlus võimu, staatuse, autoriteedi ja mõjukuse üle. Olen analüüsinud narratiive kui tõlgendusraame, mis heidavad valgust ühiskondliku tegelikkuse seostele kosmilise ilmaga ning kahe maailma omavahelistele pingetele ja konfliktidele, mida reguleerib omamoodi kosmiline õigussüsteem. Piir nende kahe maailma vahel ei ole selgelt fikseeritud, vaid need sulanduvad teineteisesse, mida väljendabki kosmopoliitika idee. Artikkel tugineb Sikkimi külades tehtud välitöödele, mille kaudu uuriti rahvapäraseid ja institutsionaalseid uskumusi üleloomuliku maailma kohta, samuti võimusuhete dünaamikat külades ja sellega seotud autoriteediküsimusi ning kontrollimehhanisme.

Kolmas artikkel käsitleb tänapäeva Sikkimi rahvausundis levinud hirmujutte mürgitamisest ja nende seoseid etniliste rühmade vaheliste pingetega. Sikkimi rahvastiku suurema osa moodustavad hinduistidest nepaallased, kuid tugevad on ka budistlikud lhopo (Bhutia) ja leptša kogukonnad. Mürgitamissurma peetakse Sikkimis tavaliseks, kuid mõistagi äratavad kuuldused nende kohta hirmu ja kahtlustusi. Žanrilt kuuluvad mürgitamisjutud hoiatusmuistendite alla, kuid neid räägitakse üha enam selleks, et väljendada etniliste kogukondade vahelisi konflikte, kusjuures mõnikord jõutakse muistendite juurest ka reaalsete süüdistusteni. Artiklis analüüsitakse ka pärimust mürgijumalusest (*dhuk lha*), keda uskumuste järgi Sikkimi üksikutes peredes salaja austatakse. Kokkuvõttes näeme, kuidas traditsioonilisi rahvajutte rakendatakse ühiskonnas marginaliseeritud kogukondade demoniseerimiseks.

Neljandas artiklis vaadeldakse reinkarnatsiooniusku tänapäeva Sikkimis, sellega seotud tõlgenduslikke muutusi, seestumust ja institutsionaalselt kehtestatud usutõdesid. Meediumlus, seestumus ja transs on Himaalaja usundites laialt levinud ja kuulub ka Sikkimi traditsiooni. Üha süvenev immigratsioon ja etniliste ning usuliste kogukondade vahelised konfliktid puudutavad neidki uskumusi. Artiklis analüüsin vaidlusi ja teravat kriitikat, mis sageli puudutab noori naisi, kes

väidavad end olevat *khandroma*'d ehk inimesed, kelles kehastub mingi budistlik jumalus. Aastatel 2018–2020 kogutud materjal, mis koosneb vestlustest, intervjuudest ja kogemusjuttudest, annab tunnistust noorte naiste võitlusest ühiskondliku tunnustuse ja kogukonna heakskiidu saamise nimel. Artikkel heidab ka valgust hoiakutele, mille järgi üleloomulikud olendid kujutavad endast noorte naiste jaoks hädaohtu.

Üks väitekirja põhiteemasid on pinged ja konfliktid Sikkimi etnopoliitilisel maastikul, kus erinevad osapooled püüavad üksteisele vastanduda, kasutades identiteediloomes nii müüdipärimust kui maastikus paiknevaid pühakoht. Ka paljud varasemad uurimused lähtuvad samast põhimõttest ja keskenduvad vaid ühe rahvarühma pärimuskultuurile, mis on teistest selgelt eristatud ja sageli ka teistele vastandatud. Käesolevas uurimuses on seevastu Sikkimi kultuuri käsitletud jagatud ruumina, mida olen analüüsinud lhopode jutupärimuse vahendusel. See aines kõneleb jumalate ja inimeste omavahelistest suhetest ning jõuvahekordadest, mis avalduvad nii rahvajutus kui ühiskondlikus elus. See ja teine maailm ei vastandu Sikkimi rahvausus teineteisele, vaid on tihedalt läbi põimunud. Seetõttu ongi antud väitekirja üks märksõnu kosmopoliitika, mis ühendab inimeste ja jumalate maailma elavaks koosluseks, mille dünaamikat reguleerib võitlus võimu ja autoriteedi pärast.

Publications

Curriculum Vitae

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2011–2013:   MA, English Language and Literature, Northeastern
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Awards:
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Publications
Bhutia, Kikee Doma 2022.
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   Reality among the Lhopos of Sikkim. *Routledge Publications* (forthcoming).
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Publikatsioone

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