

romantic adventures, when a boy sets his mind on the girl who appears to be the most beautiful in his eyes. Nevertheless, getting into an intimate relationship has to be suspended until he finds an opportunity to meet her in person. Therefore, he sets out on a lone nocturnal walk to find the place where she lives.

This custom has deeper meanings if looked at carefully. The custom was formerly accepted as part of personal growth, and may still be viewed in this way in some parts of the country. There are two methods of night wandering: agreed wandering and blind wandering. While agreed wandering is relatively easier as there is already an intimate relationship between the two partners, blind wandering is difficult and sometimes dangerous. One may not know whom one might encounter — the dog, the father or the mother once at the house, or pits or hobgoblins while on the way. If one tried to climb into the house through a window, there was the possibility of falling back onto the ground or encountering trouble once inside the premises. Yet, these difficulties were readily accepted as worth the risk by many. The night wanderer has to carefully plot his plan for getting into the house through either door or window or from the roof. Once he gets into the house, he has to copy the cat's way of seeing in the dark, walk along in absolute silence and get to his destination without disturbing anyone. Then his visit has to be accepted by the girl, or otherwise the household will

suddenly become awake. If he is permitted to stay for the night, he makes sure to leave the house before the first crow of the rooster.

The night visit is not driven just by physical urges; its planning and implementation also show signs of self-identity and maturing into manhood and a new sense of responsibility. Such an adventure often takes the lone walker through thick forests and narrow tracks along steep slopes but with minimal mishaps, as it is believed that there is a god of love who watches over the safety of the lover. Such risks are taken mostly by the already accepted lover.

The right to accept or to reject the relationship rests entirely with the woman. Thus, it becomes a basis for marriage for simple families, as for men and women who met through pre-marriage love; the outcome usually resulted in a good married life. The boy's father must watch where his son usually goes while the parents of the girl must also be aware of who comes to their daughter's bed. They intervene in the relationship if they consider it not entirely feasible on socio-economic grounds or if the blood relationship seems too close.

Quite often, the custom has been criticised as leading to births out of wedlock and men not returning as promised to take responsibility for their actions. Today, this custom is slowly, and rightly, becoming obsolete.

### 3.3. RITES AND RITUALS

Buddhism permeates daily life in Bhutan, and various rites and rituals are carried out in order to invoke deities and to remove hindrances. Though held countrywide, these rites and rituals vary from place to place in both type and grandeur. In ritual ceremonies and rites, there is strong influence from Bon, indigenous and pre-Buddhist religious cultures of Bhutan, as discussed below. The ethnic Nepalese residing mostly in southern Bhutan also have their own Hindu rituals. The Buddhist religious rites can be grouped into three broad categories, based on the purpose for which they are held: religious rites for the living, religious rites for the dead, and religious rites for achievement and success. Yet the following classification is not based on purpose of the religious rites but on the nature of the performance.

#### 3.3.1. Bon Tradition

##### 3.3.1.1. Shamanistic Tradition

A number of people in Bhutan still follow the Bon

tradition and seek the services of shamans to conduct rituals for them. Shamans are known by various names, such as *pawo*, *pam*, *neljorma*, *jomo*, *jab*, *bonpo*, *jhakri*, and *terda*, on account of both ritual and locality, as the type of shaman varies from community to community. A shaman acts as a medium between humans and the spirit world, for the purpose of healing patients, diagnosing the causes of sickness and mishaps or accidents, and for making predictions on health and wellbeing. These diagnoses and predictions play a vital role in the psychological wellbeing of the believers.

##### 3.3.1.2. Cairn Worshipping

Stones and pebbles are piled up to form cairns at mountain passes and on either side of the pathways in honour of local deities of the pass. Any person crossing the pass or passing by the track picks up a stone and adds it to the existing pile as a symbolic offering to the deities seeking their protection. In the course of time, more





stones are added to make the pile grow bigger. Some travellers place leaves, flowers, small branches, incense and food as their offering.

Sometimes a cairn marks the spot from where one could get a view of the citadel of a deity. It is said that in the past, the cairns served as land boundary markers between places falling under two or more jurisdictions.

### 3.3.1.3. Invocation of Bon Deities

Bon tradition of worship and festive events are still popular in different districts. Here are some examples: The district of Ha observes the *bongko* or *boenko* that takes place once in three years. Likewise, Bala bongko is observed in Bjena Gewog of Wangdi Phodrang and the lhabon is practised in the communities of Mangde district.

Similarly, *Gazang lhasoe* is an invocation ritual performed in Martsala while *ahoe* is performed in Kheng region and *cha* in honour of the Guru zhe in Menbi community in Lhuentse. Likewise, *kharpbu* is held in the villages of Tsamang in Mongar to invoke Guru zhe, while it is performed in honour of the Ode Gongjen in Zhemgang. Similarly, *yaklha* is celebrated annually in Ura on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month of the lunar calendar in honour of the Ode Gongjen, respected in Bumthang as the god of livestock, *norlha*. Additionally, there are other rituals commonly known as lhasoe performed in most villages across Bhutan, which are dedicated to various spirits and deities of the respective locality. These rituals and festivals are performed so that the villages get timely rainfall and good harvests, to ensure that the health of both people and animals remains sound, and to avert any other natural calamities.



Although no animal sacrifices are made in most of these rituals, some require meat elements. *Ap chungdu lhasoe* in Ha requires a yak for annual sacrifice although it is a Buddhist form of invocation to a member of the Buddhist pantheon.

### 3.3.2. Buddhist Tradition

Buddhism is founded on the teachings of Gautama Buddha some 2500 years ago. No religious rites were taught at the early advent of Buddhism. At that time, the practice was known as *dolug*, tradition of the sutra. The tradition of rituals is said to have emerged during the visit of Guru Padmasambhava to Tibet in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, through the secret tantric teachings known as *sangngag*.

#### 3.3.2.1. Invocation Rituals

A popular invocation ritual amongst Bhutanese in their daily life is *serkem*. It is an offering of wine or black tea