

Buddhism in Gandaki Province: Exploring Buddhist Culture and Literature within the Gurung Community

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Abstract

This article presents a comprehensive study that begins with an examination of the province's demographic and Buddhist cultural heritages, followed by an exploration of the Gurung community's origins, their Buddhist customs, culture, literature, and historical ties to the land. The Gurung community is recognized as the indigenous group that has inhabited this region since early history. According to the oral history of Gurung Kerlo, they migrated southward from the frigid northern Himalayas in search of a warmer climate, ultimately settling in Kohl Sothar, located in the southern part of the Annapurna Himalayas. Here, they developed an indigenous culture rooted in ancestor worship and influenced by Bon traditions. The arrival of Buddhism in Tibet further enriched this culture through ancient Buddhist Nyingma tantra and mantras, leading to the emergence of the Buddhist Lama tradition within Gurung society. This study highlights traditional Buddhist texts such as Choka Choe, utilized in Gurung life passage rituals, as well as the death rituals of the byang-gter traditions and the contemporary hdon chog text. The methodology for transliterating ritual texts in Nepali and participation in the ritual process reveals that the primary cause of obsolescence is the limited transmission of Buddhist knowledge from lineage masters. Consequently, the new generation of Gurung Lamas is connected to the new learning center and adopting ritual practice in modernized hdon chog procedures.

Keywords: Gandaki Provinces, Kohl Sothar, Choka Choe, Byang Gter, Hdon Chog, Obsolescence, Changes.

Introduction

Gandaki Province is one of Nepal's seven provinces, situated in the central part of the country. This province boasts a diverse geography, ranging from the snowy mountains of the Himalayan peaks and the high-altitude desert of Upper Mustang to the lowland jungles and plains of the Terai. The northern side of this region refers to the border of Nepal, primarily including Mustang, Manang, and Gorkha. In the lower middle part, the districts, namely Parbat, Myagdi, Syangja, Kaski, Lamjung, Tanahun, and Gorkha, are located in the mid-hilly region, and Nawalpur is in the southern plain area. In ancient times, Nepal extended to the Gandaki region in the west. It is stated in the Changunarayan inscription that Licchavi King Manadeva conquered the Mallapuri kingdom after crossing the Gandaki River (Vajracarya 24). Gandaki region was under Licchavi kingdom (Shrestha 2). But the Mallapuri kingdom is still unidentified. This region was one of the most powerful states among the Chaubishi Rajya before unification. This state was named Gandak Kshetra in 1957 AD, comprising Lumbini Districts, Syangja District, Pokhara District, and Gorkha District (Nepal District Administration Reform Report 2013).

The demographic structure of this province mainly includes Thakali, Panchgaule, Baragaule, Loba, Ghale, and Manage, which reside in the northern part. The lower middle part is inhabited primarily by Gurung, Magar, Brahmin, Kshetri, and other subcaste communities. Majhi and Kumal are found along the riverbanks, and Tharu inhabits the southern plain region. The Gurung people have been settled in the southern parts of the Himalaya range spanning between Mt. Dhawalagiri, Mt. Annapurna, and Mt. Himalchuli from the very early time. These areas demarcate the northern high-altitude lands and lower tropical forest mountains. It is, therefore, the Gandaki region known as the homeland of Gurung. The secondary center of Gurung concentration is in the Eastern part of Nepal. This community is sub-divided into western central and eastern sections, or classified as Highlander and lowlanders. Agriculture and animal husbandry, such as herds of sheep and goats raised in pastures above the villages and herdsmen residing year-round in nomadic sheds, were the hereditary professions of the Gurung. The Gurung are of Tibeto-Burman origin and call themselves *Tamu* in their mother language. The meaning of *Tamu* is also unclear, though it might have a relation with the Tartar, a central Asian race (Gurung, Jagman 132).

The Gandaki region, known as the homeland, is a contact zone between Hinduism and Buddhism, and both of these have overlaid an ancient shamanistic religion of

Gurung culture. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, before the consolidation of Khas principalities, the Gurung state existed as a locally powerful lineage that assumed Tibetan titles (Ragsdale 44). The Gurungs played a major role in the unification of Nepal, and they were granted Kajis, Mukhiyas, and chief of the fort (*Kot*) to follow Hindu manners. The secondary influence of Hindus in the Gurung can be assumed from the time they were recruited in the British Indian force. But the Gurungs in their own country are Buddhists, though they will not admit it in India. To this day, the priests in their homes are *Lama* and *Khebri*, but when serving in our regiments, they submit to the Brahmins and employ them for all priestly functions (Vansittart 47).

Regarding Buddhist cultures and heritages, Gurung is a major Buddhist population in the lower middle part of this province. In the northern region, most of the population is Buddhist. Mustang and Manang hold more historical and demographic significance than other areas. Numerous caves from the primitive ages, the Lo-Gekar (Ghara) monastery that was built earlier the Buddhism reached Tibet, Charang monastery, and many more in the upper Mustang and the Kyupar monastery, Chaira monastery along the Kali Gandaki River in the lower Mustang (Rai 25). Milarepa cave, the Yak Ru monastery, and the Pisang monastery are major historical places of the Manang side. Milarepa caves are found in many places in northern Nepal. Milarepa is closely related to the Gurung priest, and their roles in society were fixed by (*Mhila*) Milarepa. Milarepa was born in 1038 AD at a place called Kya-nga-Tsa in the district of Gung-tang, near the frontier of Nepal (Bell 80). In the lower middle region, numerous remarkable monasteries can be found in the Gurung villages, and some of them are the Dadakharka Monastery and Ghandruk Monastery, which were built about 250 years ago. In the Pokhara valley, the World Peace Pagoda stands as a marvellous site with a tragic history behind its construction. Similarly, the Matepani Monastery, established by the Manang community, Bauddha Arghu Sadan, is a monastery serving the Gurung community.

Statement of the Problem

In this paper, the questions related to Buddhism in the Gandaki Province exploring Gurung culture and literature are as follows

1. What is the current status of Buddhism and Buddhist heritages in the Gandaki province?
2. What is the historicity of Buddhism in the Gurung community?

3. What are the Gurung Buddhist ritual texts and their connection with cultural significance?
4. Why is this in the obsolesce phase, and what is the new transformation process?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this paper are to highlight the Buddhist cultural heritage of this province and the Gurung Buddhist culture and ritual texts that are connected with the local Bon culture. This research also aims to investigate the causes of obsolescence and identify a new transformative process to sustain Buddhist practice.

Research Methodology

In the research methodology, the descriptive method is employed through participation in the ritual and festival as a field research approach. As a primary source of data, the ritual texts Choka Choe are transliterated into Nepali, and the MLA 9th edition has been used to obtain a clear picture of the causes behind the declining practice of traditional rituals and their transformation process.

Discussion and Analysis

The oral history of Gurung *Kerlo* mentioned twelve Maha Buddha and Maha Gurus in the context of religious and social customs *Pe Tã Lhu Tã* when they were first settled in Mustang during the first century, later, in the following centuries, they moved to the *Khol Sothar* the southern part of Mt. Annapurna crossed the high Himalayas around the 5th Century AD following the path to seek a warm place where they established their first settlement and governed with a kingdom system. The Gurung (*Tamu*) are Mongolian stock who migrated from the northern part; therefore, Gurung culture is closer to Tibetan (Pignede 16). They found their first kingdom and developed their language, religion, and culture there (Thakali 3).

While Emperor Srong Tsan Gampo was expanding Tibet, the Lichhavi kings governed Nepal. During this period, the powerful kingdom of Gungthang extended throughout the Himalayan region, including Kerung, Nubri, Manang, Mustang, and Dolpo, and reaching as far as Lake Manasarovar (Dhungel 59). The connection between the Gunthang kingdom and the Tamu kingdoms has caused the growth of Lama Buddhism among the Tamu community. As a result, rituals are now performed in line with Buddhist teachings, which has also contributed to the expansion of the

Lama clan within the Gurung community (Gurung, *Tamuwanko etihāsik* 17).

The Gurung priests *Lama, Pachyu, and Khebri*, were the three children of the same parents. After the competition at Mt. Kailash, they took on the responsibility of working in society (Mumford 54). The *Pachyu and Khebri* used to praise the Buddhist master (Urgeni Paima Jhyonjini guru) while they uttered the oral myths. The word *Urgeni Paima Jhyonjini guru* is the Gurung form of Padmasambhava. Similarly, the *Khebri* priest used to spell *Om Mani Padme Hūm* the famous mantras of Mahayana, and wear the (*rHi nGa*) crown of Panch Buddha on their head during religious performances. The most important impact of Buddhism on traditional Gurung culture is that the *Pachyu and Khebri* borrowed the concept of (*Thva Changiya Singa*) (Tib: *bDe Wa Chän Gyi Shing Khams*) (Skt: *Sukhawati Bhuwana*) the paradise of happiness. Similarly, the Lama priest adopted the Gurung rituals from *Pachyu and Khebri* (Gurung, *Tamuwanko etihāsik* 135).

Gurung Buddhist Ritual Texts

The ritual texts *Choka Choe* of the Gurung Buddhist Lama, which are written in Ume script, are categorized into two groups. The first is used for the life sacraments, *Tehye Choe*, and the second for death sacraments, *Paye Choe*.

Gurung Ritual Texts for Life Sacraments

The Gurung Lamas have been reciting and teaching Gurung Buddhist texts for thousands of years. These texts contain knowledge, wisdom, and historical records documented by their ancestors, indicating that the descendants of the Gurung Lamas have been literate and educated from an early period. The texts are handwritten in the Ume script and can be found in every Lama's home within the Gurung villages. The Ume script is a canonical script of the Gurung community, and it was the first script that the Gurung people learned (Gurung, *Thamdabai Ta* 39). The life cycle sacraments are Child Conception, Birth, Naming, Long life (*Tshebār*) (Tib: *tshewang*), Cloth giving for girls, Marriage ceremony, Worship for wealth, prosperity, fortune, and other related rites. The contents of this ritual text *Choka Choe*, in both Gurung and Tibetan languages, are transliterated into Nepali as follows.

1. *Thāso Wābe Chhoe*: This text refers to a specific ritual or purification process to eradicate all evil fortunes.
2. *Tanā Phöse Chhoe*: This text refers to a ritual related to purification or offerings involving the fire of elements.

3. *Thi Shu Wābe Chhoe*: This text is used for the purification of misfortunes.
4. *Kehpsi Chhoe*: This text is associated with a purification or protective ritual.
5. *Mhi Chhoe*: This text is related to the Tibetan master Milarepa, who traveled to the northern parts of Nepal and meditated in various caves that are associated with the Gurung Lama.
6. *Kohlā Chhoe*: This text is related to the Gurung vernacular ritual and belief that developed in *Kohlā Söthar*, the Gurungs' first settlement area after crossing the northern Himalayan.
7. *Tsha Khu Hjo Khu Chhoe*: This text is related to longevity and prosperity.
8. *Näge Chhoe*: This text is related to a specific ritual invoking the serpent deity (Nag) often worshiped related to Land and protection.

a. Gurung Ritual Texts for Death Sacrament

Generally, the death rituals of the Gurung can be divided into two parts. The first is the death-related rituals, and the second is the ancestral rites performed in the deceased's name (*Paye or Arghü*). These *Paye* are further categorized into four types: (*Rhi Paye, Rhö Paye, Si Paye, and Chyhu Paye*). These death rituals are completed over three nights, and short rituals are completed in one night. The scriptures mixed with Gurung and Tibetan recited during such death rituals are as follows

1. *Chabā Che ñi Fibā Choe*: This text refers to a ritual to separate the dead spirit from the lower realm.
2. *rimrāche Mönlam*: This text is a prayer or ritual related to a vow or offering of Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava)
3. *Šinjyo Mönlam*: This text refers to a particular form of prayer.
4. *Chenrezig Mönlam*: This text is a type of prayer or a vow or offering of Chengresi a deity of Compassion.
5. *Reu Tälā Mönlam*: This text is another prayer or ritual for the offering.
6. *Mhärme Mönlam*: It is a text for light offering.
7. *bSāng Serkyem*: This text is a ritual offering (Dhup) for the purification of the mind and atmosphere.

8. *Yidam Serkyem*: This text refers to a type of sacred ritual of the tutelary deity (Tib: *Yidam*) (Skt: *Istadevatā*) the Lama. This is the main ritual procedure of the Lama, which varies between them according to their tutelary deity.
9. *Torje Furbā Sergem*: Torje Furba is one of the (Tib: Yidam, Dorje Phurba) tutelary deities among other deities.
10. *Pālden Lama Sergem*: This text contains a ritual or offering associated with the Palden a lineage teacher of Gurung Lamas.
11. *Ng্যালwā Choe*: This text refers to the ritual to protect the dead spirit from Hell.
12. *Nhamsyo Khuwa Chhojē*: This text is related to bringing back the dead spirit for the ritual performance and offering food.
13. *Ng্যালbi Choe*: This text is recited to protect the dead spirit from falling to hell.
14. *Dhōwa Kundol*: This text is also a ritual performance for liberation.
15. *Ši Thō Choe*: This text is a ritual to acknowledge peaceful and wrathful deities to guide the deceased spirit toward liberation. It is the final ritual in which the Lama burns the name of the deceased, symbolizing the severing of their connection to the cycle of samsara.

Gurung Buddhist Practices

The Gurung Buddhist practices are based on the texts recited by the Gurung Lamas. Death rituals are more commonly practiced and hold greater significance than life sacraments. Therefore, this study focuses on discussing the traditional practices of the Gurung Lamas and their newly adapted methods of death rituals.

a. Traditional Practices

The lineage of the Gurung traditional Lamas can be traced back to the ancient householder *Ngagpa* tradition from Tibet, establishing their connection to the Nyingma tradition. These Lamas were ordained in Nar valley Manang and brought with them Mahakala as their protective deity and ritual text *Choka Choe* for ritual performance. In the death rituals, they practice the procedure of the Guru Padmasambhava known as *Jhyangter* (Skt: *Uttarnidh*), which encompasses 108

puja procedures with different (*Hidam*) tutelary deities. In the death rituals (*Paye*) performed by Gurung Lamas, they carry out various actions conducted together with the *Pachyu*, such as making flag (*Āla*), exhibiting relics (*Hritebā*), effigy making (*Pla Robā*) Evils removing (*Thāso Wāba*) offering to the spirit (*Chyukhusi*), Ladies participation, (*Rhi Chami Krasar*), Maternal relatives' participation (*Āshyō*). These practices are firmly established in the Gurung Lama tradition. The Lama recites prayers from the heart (*Khōje*), which is different from the usual script. When Lama recites, the *Pachyu* and *Kehbri* hear the same thing.

The Lamas from Lamjung and Gorkha follow the tutelary deity *Vajrakilaya* (*Dorje Furba*), Lamas from Syangja practice *Jyamalsinji*, and Lamas from Parbat practice *Chittasadhana* (*Thudup*). During the ritual performance, nine-layer, four-dimensional mandalas with *Nāra Shi-Tho* pictures were built in front of the Lamas' prayer hall. In this context, *Narā* refers to hell, *Šhi* refers to peace, and *Tho* refers to anger. Furthermore, the ritual includes placing the heads of a tiger, human, jackal, and vulture, among others, along with 108 leaves and four *Thankās* in the four directions. The lamas will place the *Thankās* of Lord Buddha on the east side, turning their face forward, and the *Thankās* of Mahakala will be placed on the west side. The *Thankās* of *Padmasambhava* (Guru Rinpoche) will be placed on the north side. This death ritual (*Paye*) will be completed in three days. The first day involves preparing everything for starting (*Paye Chubā*), and the second day involves a detailed ritual performance (*Paye Pābā*). On this day, the relic will be placed inside the vessel (*Kilkhōr*), and the deceased name will be written on a paper sheet and put on the effigy (*Pla*). The third day is the ending (*Paye Libā*).

On this day, the paper sheet where the name of the deceased is written will be burned. This process is a symbolic representation of burning the deceased's name (*nghōbar khrōbā*). In the end, the Lama will recite a special prayer for the deceased's soul, and the ashes from the *nghōbār* burnt are placed inside the small stupas (*Chhā-Chhā*) as a symbolic purity. In this stepwise procedure, the ritual works are completed. Finally, the Lama conducts the puja to dispel negative influences (*grahā dashā*), offer prayers for prosperity, longevity, blessings for wealth and health, and perform rituals for overall well-being. For this, the Lama will recite prayers from the sacred texts (*Paye Choe*) (Gurung, Lopenmukh 41).

b. New Practices

The traditional methods practiced by the Gurung Lama have been improved

and adopted into new practices following the needs of today, transforming the death rites into a more contemporary form. This new method has been incorporated into the (Tib: *bdun phrag byanpar*) procedure. *bdun phrag byanpar* refers to the seventh-day death ritual (*Saptaha*). *bdun* means seven, and *phrag* means the days of the ritual. *byan* means purification, and *par* means the image or photo (Das 884). If one seeks the philosophical meaning of this, it is related to the teachings and practices of lord Buddha. According to Buddhist philosophy, after the death of a human being, the mind or consciousness separates from the physical body. The mind *cittā* takes about 49 days to find another place, and this transitional period (Skt: *Antarābhav*) is referred to as the intermediate state (Gaffney and Harvey 295). The lama prepares the ritual circle or space (Mandala) using essential materials for the prayer or ceremony. The way the Mandala is constructed may vary depending on the ritual being performed. These deities are represented in the form of symbols on the *Thankās*, and the Lama will hang them according to the ritual. In general, Amitabha Buddha is usually represented in the mandala. As part of the ritual, the Lama makes rice cakes (Tib: *Tormā*) in the form of the symbols of these deities. Afterward, the lama prepares Dharmapala Torma in front of the image of Mahakala, a protective deity.

In front of the Dharmapala, the lama sets up seven types of offerings in seven bowls. Each bowl contains water as part of the prayer offerings. The ritual begins with the eight auspicious recitations (Skt: *Astamangalā*) to purify and bless the surroundings, followed by the lighting of incense and the offering of prayers. There are two main types of death rituals (Paye). The first one is the procedure of offering the Amitabha Buddha, and the second one is the (Tib: *Kon Chhyog Chi Du*) procedure. The offering of the Amitabha Buddha procedure is related to the (Tib: *hdon Chog*) procedure. *Hdon* refers to the eternal, infinitive Amitabha, and *Chog* refers to the offering procedures. Similarly, the offering of the Guru Padmasambhava is the *Kon Chhyog chi Du* procedure, whereas the *Konchhyog* means Buddha Ratna *Chi* means group and *Du* means collection (Lama, *hdon chog vi*). This procedure is followed in one or three-night offerings on death rituals. The first *Hdon Chog* method is performed according to the *bdun phrag byanpar* method in the death rituals (*Paye*).

The method of performing the rituals varies according to different types of Puja practices. When the *bdun phrag byanpar* procedure of the *hdon Chog* method is followed, a small piece of paper with the name of the deceased written on it is placed as a paper flag. This paper, along with the name written on it, is later placed on a small paper slip and attached with the Shi Tho mantra on the backside. However,

the traditional Lama makes an effigy instead of the name written piece of paper. In the ritual, the practice starts with triple refuge, followed by mental preparation (*chittotpād*), placement of the offerings (*Sthāna Adhithānā*), and prayer of gratitude and devotion (*Pasanna Sādhana*). Afterward, rituals of the deity Mahākālā (*Mahākālā Puja*), *Shitho Puja*, and *Ganāchakra Puja* are performed. The senior Lama burns the image or photo of the deceased by reciting the *Bardo Thotal* texts. At the end of the ritual, light offerings are made by prayer for forgiveness and confession. Thus, the rituals performed through scriptural guidelines vary in their practices, but the methods are mostly similar, and Gurung cultural elements have not been performed in this new practice. At the end of the ceremony, the maternal uncle (Mawali) purifies and blesses the mourned family by giving Tika and donating to the maternal uncle, daughters-in-law, and relatives (Gurung, *Puratan Gurung* 44).

Gurung Buddhist Festivals

The Gurung community has diverse indigenous rituals and cultures that are not purely Buddhist but include elements of nature-based shamanistic and Bon traditions. Therefore, only the cultural practices and festivals related to Buddhist tradition are discussed here.

a. Tamu Lhosar

Tamu Lhosar is a great festival for the Gurung community. The word *Lhosar* means the changing of the year. *Lho* means year, and *Sar* means to change. According to Tibetan tradition, Lhosar is generally found in three types: *Tolā or Tamu*, *Sonam*, and *Gyālpo Lhosar*. The Tamu Lhosar falls on the same date as the Tolā Lhosar of Tibet, while the Sonam Lhosar occurs in the month of Magh and is known as peasant Lhosar. The Gyālpo Lhosar is celebrated as the King's Lhosar and is observed on the first day of the bright fortnight of the month of Falgun. On the 15th day of Poush, the Gurung people celebrate Tamu Lhosar with great enjoyment every year. On this day, the youth group in the village gathers together and celebrates with group enjoyment and a picnic (*Syo Kai*), and various programs are organized in the urban areas to celebrate the occasion. Tamu astrology is based on the Chinese and Tibetan lunar calendars. The calendar follows a Twelve-year cycle, with each year represented by the name of twelve different animals. *Lho Mewa* and *Pārga* are the main systems of astrology. *Mewa* consists of nine types. Each *Mewa and Lho* has its elements, and based on these, a person's characteristics can be determined. *Parga*, also known as *Puk* in the Tibetan language, is a type of horoscope (Gurung, Jagman 23).

b. Baisakh Purnima and Fai Lu Puja

Baisakh Purnima is one of the important festivals of the Gurung Buddhist community. Previously, the Gurung community performed a ritual to offer prayers to their ancestral spirits (*Fai Lu*), and the local youth enjoyed dancing, such as the *Sorathi and Ghātu* dances, on this day. Local deities are worshipped with offerings of live chickens and fish, symbolizing the giving of life. Now, this day is celebrated as the birth anniversary of Lord Buddha, and it is observed with various ceremonies in the monasteries with great enthusiasm and reverence.

c. Jesth Sukla Dasami (Dasahara)

This festival is observed on the tenth lunar day of the month Jesth. Gurung people have a custom to plant new grass in the fields on this day. On this day, a prayer is offered to seek forgiveness for any unintentional killing of living beings throughout the year. This day can also be observed as (*Shanti Diwas*) day of peace. It is also celebrated as the birthday of Guru Padmasambhava. In the Gurung community, on this day, the Paikilama clan worships taking soil from their fields to offer prayers to their ancestral deities (*Fai-Lü*).

d. Sildo Naldo Puja

In the months of Chaitra and Kartik, the Gurung community worships their village boundary (*Sildo Naldo or Sime Bhumi*). The worship involves offering rice (*Si*) and Water (*Naa*), which signifies the offerings of food and drinks. During this Puja, they also perform rituals in the nearby forests, jungles, rivers, streams, ponds, and mountains (Thakali 170).

Conclusion, Findings and Recommendation

The Gandaki Province is one of the special provinces of Nepal in terms of natural phenomena, biodiversity, ethnography, and tourism. This province is a central hub for tourism. Geographical diversity, its natural beauty, and Buddhist and ethnic cultural heritages are the key attractions of this region. The majority of people are Gurung and Magar; therefore, the government has declared the second official language to be the Gurung and Magar languages in this province. The Gurungs are the indigenous people of Nepal.

Since the origins of Gurung are matched with various folk tales and the histories of Manang and Mustang, they are considered to be initially found in Mustang in

the 1st century AD and later moved to the *Khol Sothar*, the southern slope of Mt. Annapurna, in search of a warmer habitat from the north where they further developed the Gurung language, culture, and religion there. In the 5th century AD, Gurung had their Kingdom. After the rise of Emperor Srong Tsan Gampo in Tibet, the Gurung kingdoms connected with Buddhism.

After being in contact with Buddhism in the Gurung community, the Gurung Lama simultaneously acted with the earlier Gurung priests, *Pachyu and Kehpri*. They acted out their rituals by fulfilling each other. In the ancient Gurung culture, there was no concept of worshipping various deities and the concept of heaven and liberation. So, they learned the *Sukhawati* mantra from the Gurung Lamas and integrated the Om Mani Padme Hum mantra for liberation from sin before the final rites of the deceased. On the other hand, the Gurung Lama also learned the Tamu ritual practices (*Karma Kanda*) from the *Pachyu and Kehpri* and adopted Buddhist teachings into their traditions and culture. Similarly, the life and death sacrament texts of Gurung Lamas are not easy to read in general because various Gurung rituals are extended in their texts, and Buddhist mantras are also translated into the Gurung language, which can be assumed as a malfunctioning of Buddhist sutras and mantras.

In addition, when the migration trend extended toward the southeast and west from the earliest place, the Gurung Lama's visit declined to their lineage home. As a result, they gradually broke the trend of their ordination. Similarly, the Gurung rituals are added to their text. The Gurung Lama's death ritual is generally performed in the *byang gter* method based on the Nyingma tradition of Tibet. In the Nyingma tradition, rituals are conducted without animal sacrifice. In contrast, Gurung traditional lama commonly practices animal sacrifice influenced by Bon priest Pachyu and Khebri, which are found gradually declining.

At the same time, with the revival of Buddhism in the society and the arrival of Tibetan refugees around the Gurung society in 1959, a noticeable impact on the Gurung community has been observed. This led to Buddhist awareness within the Gurung community and a rise in the number of Lamas receiving monastic education from the monasteries. As more Lamas are trained in monastic education, the focus has shifted from ritual practice to teaching philosophy. Gradually, the traditional Gurung Lama's practice of animal sacrifice is rejected by society, which contradicts the principle of Buddhist teachings. Additionally, in the Gurung community, death rituals are now performed more shortly, and simply using the *dhon Chog* method. This method reduces time and freed to the burdensome aspect of the old customs which

has been more effective and impactful now in the Gurung society. As a result, the traditional practices of Gurung Lamas are disappearing now, and in the process of transforming into new practices.

This study highlights the growing importance of identity among indigenous communities and minority groups. The Gurung people, who have a rich legacy and a strong sense of identity, are now blending their unique practices with Buddhism. Gurung lamas are actively working to reform any distortions in their traditional rituals, ensuring that these practices are consistent with Buddhist teachings. This initiative to refine and enhance their rituals signifies the evolution of Gurung Buddhism.

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