



Influence of Buddhism and Hinduism on Bonism among the Lahaul's tribe Lahaul-Spiti Dist., Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract: Religion plays a significant role in shaping the social and cultural life of the people in tribal region of Lahaul Valley in Himachal Pradesh. The Bon religious belief system, locally known *Lung Pe Choi*, is one of the oldest belief system practised in the tribal region. The study aims to explore the origin and evolution of Bon in the Lahaul Valley and its interaction with Buddhism and Hinduism. Adopting a qualitative structure, the study integrates descriptive and historical approaches, along with observational methods, to examine the key factors driving the transformation of Bon and its syncretic developments. Primary data was collected through interviews with Bon shamans, Buddhist monks, Hindu priests, scholars and villagers, while secondary data was gathered from historical texts, government records, and scholarly literature. Purposive sampling was used to select participants with in-depth knowledge of Bonism, Buddhism and Hinduism in the valley. The findings suggest that Bon in Lahaul was animistic in nature, deeply rooted in spirit worship and sacrificial rituals. With arrival of Buddhism from Tibet and the influence of Hinduism from southwestern Himalayas, many Bon rituals were gradually incorporated into Buddhist practices and Hindu ceremonial traditions. This led to a blending of religious elements, producing a unique syncretic tradition in the region that contributes to shape local belief system.

Key Words: Hinduism, Buddhism, Bon religious belief, Lung Pe Choi.

Introduction

The Bon religion can be seen in one form or another across the world. It is believed that the earliest form of religion was Bon itself. Bon is an ancient Tibetan word, also referred to as *bzla*, which means the chanting of mantras (,1980:8). These chants were performed by Bon po (follower of Bon is known as Bon po) and Bon priest known as shaman, to help individuals overcome illness or to avert calamities (Bansal, 1994:36). Bon is a native religion of Tibet and was originally a cult of nature worship. The beliefs and ideas of this religion revolve around good and evil spirits. Over time, these spirits took the form of deities, and people began to worship them. The belief in these spirits developed into a cult, which was practiced through specific rituals. These rituals were performed by Bon shaman, and it was believed that through these rituals, the Bon deities and spirit would be pleased and would not cause harm to people. The Bon shamans acted as a communicator between human and spirits or gods (Bansal, 1994:35). The Bon religion is largely considered a system of religious beliefs rather than a fully developed religion in the beginning, as its practices were not systematically organized. Around the 7th century, when the influence of Buddhism began to spread, Bon practices also started to become more organized. In the present time, this belief system has its own monasteries, literature, doctrines, monks, and rituals (Ekval: 1964:17). The founder of the Bon religious belief system is believed to be *Tonpa gShen rab*, who is thought to have been born in regions like Tajikistan or Iran. *gShen rab* occupies the same position as to Lord Buddha in Tibetan Buddhism. According to ancient tradition, Tibet initially established contact with Buddhism during the reign of King Srong brtsan sgam po around 650 A.D. In the 8th century, Guru Padmasambhava played a pivotal role in the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet

(Bansal:1994:111). It is said that Tonpa gShen rab once traveled toward Tibet in search of his seven horses, and during his journey, he got the opportunity to share his teachings with the people in Tibet. This is believed to be the beginning of Bon religious belief in Tibet. During that time, there was a king in Tibet named *Shang Shung*, who played a crucial role in preserving and promoting early Bon spiritual and animistic tradition (Karmay, 1975:181). The kingdom of *Shang Shung* rulers extended across several regions, including Puhrang, Gu ge, Ru thong, Cuh murti, Baltistan, Bru sha, Zansakar, Mar yul, Ladakh, Spiti, and Iha yul (Lahaul) (Bansal,1994:182). Although Shang Shung itself was a follower of Bon, the religion also spread widely to regions such as Lahaul-Spiti through trade, cultural exchange, and pilgrimage. In the Lahaul Valley, Guru Padmasambhava, who also introduced Buddhism in Tibet, played a significant role in bringing Buddhism to the tribal region of Lahaul in the 8th century A.D. A tantric master in Buddhist practice, Guru Padmasambhava employed tantric methods that closely resembled Bon practices. With the arrival of Buddhism, the people of the valley embraced its calmative and peaceful teachings. Simultaneously, the region also came under cultural influences from Hinduism, particularly from the southern regions (Bansal, 1994: 187). Situated between the northwestern Tibetan region and the Kullu region of the southwestern Himalayas, the Lahaul Valley reflects a confluence of Buddhist, Hindu, and Bon religious influences.

Literature Review

Tucci (1980:231), in his study *Religions of Tibet*, explores how Bon was originally a form of nature worship, centred around the belief in benevolent and malevolent spirits. This belief system was widespread across regions such as China, Mongolia, Turkestan, and the Tibetan Plateau. According to Ekval (1964:17), prior to the introduction of Buddhism in the Tibetan Plateau, Bon was not a unified or organized system of religious beliefs and practices. It gradually became more systematized following the arrival of Guru Padmasambhava in Tibet. In his book 'Buddhism and Lamanism of Tibet, Heritage' Waddel (1997:5-17) describe the history of Buddhism in Tibet and also mentions how the Bon religion came into contact with Buddhism. This book discuss how Bon religion underwent a change and how follower of Buddhism came to accept them. Karmay (1975:188–191) discusses Bon's persistence in Tibetan regions, emphasizing its unique ritualistic practices. However, his study lacks a detailed analysis of how Bon religious beliefs have been adapted by the people of the Lahaul Valley. Gulia (2007:15–18) notes that Buddhism and Hinduism are the predominant religions practiced by the people living in the Himalayan region. These ancient religious traditions have led to the establishment of hundreds of temples and monasteries across the Himalayas. However, Islam also constitutes an important religious presence in the region, with its own distinct places of worship. The study further explains that while Hindu and Buddhist communities often interact and share certain cultural and religious practices, there is limited interaction between these communities and Islamic cultural traditions. In his study, *Bon its encounter with Buddhism in Tibet* (1994:183), Bansal talks about how the pre-Buddhist religion, Bon, can still live together with other religions, mostly Hinduism and Buddhism. However, his analysis is mostly theoretical and doesn't go into much detail about actual cases.

Research gap

Although several studies have explored the religious landscape of the Lahaul Valley in Himachal Pradesh, few have focused on tracing the historical trajectory of the Bon religious belief system—from its origins in Tajikistan, through Tibet, and into the Indian territory of Lahaul. This study aims to examine how Bon religious practices have evolved and how they have interacted with and merged into Buddhism and Hinduism at the community level. While earlier research has primarily addressed the doctrinal assimilation among these three religious traditions, there remains a lack of comprehensive investigation into the practical and ritual integration of Bon religious practices with Buddhism and Hinduism. This study seeks to fill that gap by offering an in-depth analysis of the syncretic processes at work in the region.

Significance of the Study

Religion plays an important role in the lives of the people in the valley. This study is significant as it helps us to understand the origin of Bon, its evolution, and its merging with Buddhism and Hinduism throughout the Lahaul Valley. One can observe a unique blending of these three belief systems in the region. The findings will be valuable for scholars, policymakers, and local communities in preserving the unique cultural and religious identity of the region.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the Bon religious belief system as practiced in the Lahaul Valley.
2. To analyse the influence of Buddhism and Hinduism on the Bon religious tradition within the Lahaul Valley.

Methodology

The study is descriptive in nature and employs historical analysis to explore the origin and evolution of the Bon religious belief system and its interaction with Buddhism and Hinduism in the Lahaul Valley of Himachal Pradesh. Primary data were collected by using purposive sampling. A total of 40 participants were selected, including 5 Bon followers, 5 Buddhist, 5 local scholars, and 25 villagers from various parts of the valley. In-depth interviews were conducted with these participants to document oral histories, ritual practices, and monastery traditions. This qualitative data provided rich insights into the lived religious experiences and transformations within the community. Secondary data were obtained from historical texts, government records, and relevant scholarly articles to support and contextualize the findings.

Universe of the study:

The Lahaul Valley, situated in the tribal district of Lahaul-Spiti, is one of the least densely populated regions of Himachal Pradesh. According to the 2011 Census, the population of Lahaul-Spiti was 31,564, with 62.01% identifying as Buddhist, 36.91% as Hindu, and 1.08% belonging to other religious groups (Census, 2011). This study primarily focuses on the Lahaul Valley, a tribal region marked by a distinctive confluence of religious and cultural traditions shaped by its historical evolution and geographical isolation. Over time, the ancient Bon religious belief system gave way to Buddhism and Hinduism, resulting in a unique religious syncretism that defines the cultural identity of this tribal region. The valley's terrain is mountainous and rough. Its long and severe winters contribute to a sense of defend less among local residents, which has historically fostered a reliance on animistic traditions. Indigenous belief systems often centre on appeasing spiritual forces believed to inhabit natural elements such as rivers, mountains, and cedar trees. Sacrifices and ritual offerings were commonly performed to maintain communal health and spiritual harmony between human and supernatural power. Buddhism is the predominant faith in Central Lahaul, where significant monasteries like Gemur and Shashur serve as vital religious and cultural canthers. In contrast, the lower regions of Lahaul—particularly around Udaipur—are largely Hindu. The Trilokinath Temple in Udaipur, dedicated to both Lord Shiva and Buddha, symbolizes the deep interconnection between Hindu and Buddhist religious traditions.

Result and Discussion

1. Bon and its evolution

In Lahaul, the Bon religious belief is locally known as *Lung Pe Choi*, which translates to the *Religion of the Valley*. This belief system is closely associated with the worship of mountains and nature. In the local dialect, it is also referred to as *Naale Ka Dharm* meaning *the religion of the streams*. The term *Naala* refers to mountain streams and natural water channels, which are considered sacred, as they are believed to be inhabited by deities, holy spirits, and local Gods. The word *Dharma* here implies a system of belief, faith, and modes of worship. Therefore, *Naale ka Dharm* essentially means worship of deities and spirits residing in natural water sources. *Lung Pe Choi* represents a form of Bon religious practice that is fundamentally animistic, revolving around the veneration of spirits and deities. These spirits and deities are perceived to be both benevolent and malevolent in nature. They are believed to reside not only in water streams but also in rocks, pencil cedar trees, and caves. The people of Lahaul worship these spirits and deities, and to appease them, sacrificial offerings are made—so that these entities do not cause harm. In his report *The Himalayan Districts of Kullu, Lahoul, and Spiti*, Harcourt (1972:59-69) notes that in Lahaul, 'Both animal and even human sacrifices were historically offered to appease deities and spirits'. In many areas, such beliefs are directly linked to the Bon religious belief, particularly in the regions bordering Tibet, as the Lahaul Valley has historically served as a channel for Tibetan religious and cultural traditions. Over time, Bon beliefs in the valley have been influenced by both Buddhism and Hinduism. Buddhism first made its presence felt during the reign of Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE, but it was Guru Padmasambhava who had the most significant influence. A specialist in the Tantrayana tradition, Guru Padmasambhava introduced esoteric practices including necromancy (commonly referred to as black magic), wherein Buddhist monks establish contact with spirits and the dead to maintain harmony between the human world and the spiritual realm. Such practices are also a part of the Bon religious belief system in the valley. As a result, Guru Padmasambhava holds a highly revered place in the lives of the people of Lahaul, symbolizing the deep intertwining of Bon,

Buddhism, and Hinduism. The influence of Hinduism from the Kullu region introduced Vedic elements such as sacrificial rituals and ancestral offerings, which played a role in shaping Bon's funerary rites. The rituals of three religious belief share significant similarities. Moreover, follower of both Buddhism and Hinduism did not seek to eliminate the local customs and traditions of the valley; rather, they incorporated them into their teachings. Bon followers, local leaders, and other influential figures- who were deeply influenced by Buddhist and Hindu thought-actively encouraged this cultural and religious synthesis to maintain harmony in the valley. As a result, three faiths gradually merged and coexist peacefully. Despite this syncretism, the people of the Lahaul Valley have retained some elements of their distinct religious identities through local deities, rituals, and monasteries. Yet, these belief systems continue to coexist in the region with mutual respect and cultural harmony.

2. Bon Deities and its connection with Buddhism and Hinduism in Lahaul Valley

In the Lahaul Valley, many deities are worshipped. These deities are mainly categorized into three types, as follows:

2.1. Heavenly Deities:

The primary heavenly deities include *Ghepang*, *Dalba*, *Zangdaulm*, *Mipasha*, *Srong*, *Tangur*, *Siring Choma*, *Taral Gyalma*, *Yalha*, and others. These are also referred to as ancestor figures. They are worshipped as celestial protectors, meaning they are associated with natural elements and are believed to maintain cosmic balance are worshipped, often associated with specific lineages or households called heavenly deities. Small temples are built on the rooftops of some houses to honour them, and they can be either benevolent or malevolent. These deities are worshipped four times a year, on the Sankranti of Magh, Chaitra, Vaisakh, and Sawan. Offerings of lamps and wicks are made to benevolent deities, whereas no lamps or wicks are offered to malevolent ones. When people's wishes are fulfilled or when they wish to perform a good deed, they offer ibex horns and colourful cloth at these temples. Many Bon celestial deities were later absorbed into Buddhism as Dharma protectors (Dharmapalas). A prime example is *Ghepan*, the supreme deity of Lahaul, revered in both Bon and Tibetan Buddhism. In Bon cosmology, *Ghepan* is a guardian spirit, protecting people from evil forces, calamities, and external threats. Traditionally, Bon shamans and priests invoked his blessings through rituals and offerings. Over time, Buddhism integrated *Ghepan* as a Dharmapala (protector of Dharma), while Hindu traditions revere him as a local deity, worshipped through festivals and community rituals. Malevolent and evil deities like *Yalha* and *Galpo* are considered more powerful, and if not appeased, they can become extremely harmful. These deities are not offered incense or lamps like benevolent ones. Instead, they are worshipped through silent offerings, regulated summoning, and symbolic gestures. In silent offerings, objects such as ibex horns and coloured cloth are offered to these deities. In respected summoning, they are invoked through sacred chants or mantras. In symbolic gestures, sacred stones—kept inside temples as symbols of these deities—are anointed with milk and juniper essence to prevent these forces from becoming overly destructive and to keep their power in balance. People worship these deities not only to avoid harm but also to continue receiving their blessings. Over time, these heavenly Bon deities gradually became integrated into Buddhism. For example, *Ghepan*, who is considered the most powerful deity in Lahaul, became associated with Buddhist traditions. In Buddhism, *Ghepan* is regarded as a protector of the Dharma (*Dharmarakshak* or *Dharmapala*). He is believed to protect against evil forces, natural calamities, and external threats. Buddhists believe that *Ghepan* safeguards their values and monasteries. Among Hindus, *Ghepan* is worshipped as a form of Lord Shiva. The status of *Ghepan* in Lahaul is similar to that of Rishi *Jamlu* in Kullu. People in Lahaul believe that *Jamlu Rishi* is the brother of *Ghepan*. In this way, even among the heavenly deities, one can observe a blend of Bon religious beliefs, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

2.2. Earthly Deities

Drlha, *Mipon*, *Lu (Sabdag)*, *Tsen*, and *Yul-Lha* are considered primary earthly deities. They are also referred to as terrestrial spirits and local guardians who offer protection to the valley, maintain productivity, and bring prosperity. These Bon deities are believed to reside in mountains, rocks, rivers, trees, and villages. These deities, too, can be both benevolent and malevolent. They are worshipped to ensure harmony between humans and natural environment. Rituals for these deities are performed four times a year, especially during the months of Magh, Chaitra, Vishakh, and Sawan. Benevolent deities are offered butter, oil lamps, juniper essence, grains, and beer at natural sites. It is widely believed that these deities mostly reside in sacred natural locations. These offerings are typically made by village elders, family elders, or shamans, particularly during the start of new agricultural activities or important life events, with the intention of ensuring good harvests and preventing misfortune in the valley. Malevolent deities, on the other hand, are not worshipped with direct

rituals such as offering butter lamps or grains. It is believed that if they are worshipped too directly, they become extremely angry and may cause harm. Hence, like the heavenly malevolent deities, they are worshipped through silent offerings, controlled invocation, or symbolic gestures. Over time, elements of Buddhism and Hinduism have merged into these Bon religious beliefs. In Lahaul, earthly deities are considered protectors of the Dharma in Buddhism. For example, *Yul-Lha* is believed to guard villages and monasteries and is worshipped through monk chants. Among Hindus, these deities are revered as village deities (Gram Devta) or clan deities (Kul Devta). A *gur* (priest) acts as the mediator between the local deity and the people. Before the influence of Buddhism and Hinduism, the belief system in tribal region of Lahaul was primarily rooted in the Bon religious tradition, but today, it has become difficult to distinguish these deities in their original, separate forms due to the merging of religious traditions.

2.3. Underworld Deities

The main deities and spirits in this category include *Lu*, *Sadak*, *Tsen*, and *Gyalpo* spirits. These are referred to as subterranean deities and spirits because they reside beneath the earth, often dwelling in caves and water bodies. They are associated with the earth, weather, health, illness, and ancestral forces. Like other deities, they can be both benevolent and malevolent. When properly worshipped, they offer protection and blessings, but if neglected, they can cause harm. For example, the *Naga*, known as *Lu* in the Bon religious belief system, is believed to inhabit both water bodies and underground realms. They protect water resources and hidden treasures, and also enhance the fertility of the land. To appease them, offerings such as milk, grains, water, and torma (ritual cakes) are made. These offerings are part of a special ritual known as *Lu Chok*, typically performed by village elders and Bon priests. Over time, these rituals merged with Buddhist and Hindu practices. In Buddhism, *Naga* deities are also recognized as subterranean protectors, often depicted as half-human and half-serpent beings. They are believed to guard water bodies, hidden treasures, and even sacred texts. In Hinduism, underworld deities also hold great significance. *Naga* deities are considered to bring both prosperity and good health. However, if not worshipped properly, they are believed to bring about curses, such as misfortune and infertility. They are especially worshipped on Nag Panchami, a festival dedicated to them. In this way, the present-day beliefs in the Lahaul Valley reflect a fusion of Bon religious traditions with Buddhism and Hinduism—a blending that did not exist in the pre-Buddhist and pre-Hindu era.

3. Main Bon Rituals Practices and its assimilation with Buddhism and Hinduism in Lahaul Valley

In the Lahaul Valley, many religious rituals are performed by the people to appease deities and spirits, seeking their protection from misfortune and harm. Following rituals are performed by people in the valley:

3.1. Lha Sang Ritual

Lha Sang ritual is traditionally a Bon ritual and has been practiced throughout the Lahaul Valley. Even today, it continues to be performed in the region, especially in Sissu, Gondhla, and Keylong. It is also known as the smoke offering to heavenly deities. Lahaul Valley is surrounded by high mountains and has difficult terrain, so whenever a person undertakes a journey, they perform this ritual to please the sky-dwelling deities, known as *Lha*, to ensure a safe and smooth journey. This ritual is also performed during seasonal transitions. In this ritual, juniper branches, butter, and pine needles are burned in a stone hearth, and the smoke is offered toward the sky, the mountains, and in all four directions. Along with this, Bon shaman chant mantras, and villagers join in the prayers. To please the deities, a goat or sheep sacrifice is also offered. In many villages, horse races are also organized as part of the celebration. Later, when Buddhism spread into the valley, its followers adopted this ritual. While Bon practitioners used to perform it outdoors, Buddhists began performing it within monasteries. In the Buddhist version, monks chant prayers and burn butter, juniper essence, and barley, offering the smoke to the sky. On the other hand, in Hinduism, a similar ritual exists in the form of *havan*, in which ghee and herbs are burned, especially to please the Sun God, to protect against the harsh and cold climate of the valley. Fire is also worshipped as Agni Dev, who is believed to cleanse evil forces with his flames, which is quite similar to the Bon belief system. Today, elements of this ritual are visible in Bon, Buddhist, and Hindu practices, reflecting a deep integration of these three religious traditions.

3.2. Lu Chok Ritual

The *Lu Chok* ritual in the Lahaul Valley is performed to please the water spirits and serpent deities. This ritual is especially observed before beginning of any agricultural activity, after floods, or following the outbreak of a serious illness. It is typically performed in early summer or just before the onset of the monsoon, and always performed near a water source. In this ritual, milk, beer, grains, and a small effigy are offered. A Bon shaman recites mantras, and the offerings are released into the water. It is believed that if the water spirits

accept the offering, they will ensure peace and protection. Originally, this was a pure Bon ritual. Bon water deities are considered sensitive and peaceful, and so animal sacrifice is not part of the ritual. Instead, offerings include milk, barley flour, and juniper essence. Over time, due to the influence of Buddhism and Hinduism, elements from both religions became integrated into the ritual. In the Buddhist version, water deities are worshipped through chants, while in Hinduism, water deities—especially *Nagas*—are invoked through Vedic mantras. This syncretism shows how the ritual practices of Bon, Buddhism, and Hinduism gradually merged over time, reflecting a blending of religious beliefs in the region.

3.3. Sa Chok

The *Sa Chok* ritual is an important ritual in the Lahaul Valley. It is primarily performed before sowing seeds in the fields or before constructing a new house. This ritual is conducted to please the *Sadang*, the earth deities. It is believed that these deities reside in the soil, ground, and rocks. In this ritual, milk, barley, wheat, beer, and juniper essence are offered, along with Bon mantras. These offerings are either placed on the ground or buried into the soil during prayers. It is believed that this ritual pleases the earth spirits, and they do not cause any harm to people or bring any misfortune. Over centuries, some Buddhist elements were influenced by this Bon ritual. In Buddhism, these earth deities are regarded as local guardians and protectors. The ritual is performed by a monk, who offers milk, butter, barley, and wheat, with the aim of keeping the earth deities content and maintaining peace in the valley. In Hinduism as well, Bhoomi Pujan (worship of the Earth) holds importance. In this ritual, turmeric, flowers, rice, etc. are offered to the land while chanting Vedic mantras. Thus, elements of this ritual are now found in all three religious traditions—Bon, Buddhism, and Hinduism—reflecting a rich integration of belief systems.

3.4. Gser-skyem

The *Gser-skyem* ritual is one of the most commonly practiced rituals in the Lahaul Valley. It is also known as the *Golden Libation*. This name comes from the practice of offering chang (a local alcoholic beverage) to deities and spirits by placing it in a golden or brass vessel. During the ritual, a Bon priest, village elder, or even a common person chants mantras and pours the chang in a clockwise direction onto sacred stones, water sources, trees, and holy places. The ritual is mainly performed before starting agricultural work, building a new house, or at the beginning of festivals. It is a way to show respect to deities and spirits, seeking to maintain harmony between humans and unseen forces. Traditionally, this ritual is associated with the Bon religion, but over time, its elements have been assimilated into both Buddhist and Hindu religious practices. In Buddhism, this ritual is especially performed during the Losar festival, where along with the libation, offerings such as butter, barley, flour, etc. are made to deities and ancestors to express gratitude for their protection from misfortune. Similarly, in Hinduism, offerings of milk, water, ghee, etc. are made to ancestors, as well as to deities like *Agni Dev (Fire God)*, *Bhumi Dev (Earth Goddess)*, and *Surya Dev (Sun God)*, seeking their blessings and requesting them to protect the ancestors. Thus, this ritual reflects a clear fusion of Bon, Hindu, and Buddhist traditions.

3.5. Drak

In the Lahaul Valley, this ritual is known by various names such as spirit expulsion, exorcism, and purification, as it involves expelling harmful spirits or angry nature deities from a household or even an entire village. It is believed that such spirits bring illness and misfortune. This ritual is performed during times of sickness, natural calamities, or after a death in the family to purify the house—based on the belief that the deceased soul should peacefully depart without causing harm to the living. In this ritual, a symbolic effigy called *zor* is made using dough, cloth, or wood. The Bon shaman chants mantras and invites the evil spirit to enter the effigy. The effigy is then either moved around the house, rubbed on the sick person, and finally either burned or thrown into a river or stream. It is believed that the spirits accept this offering, and thus, people are protected from illness or misfortune. Sometimes, a sheep or goat is also sacrificed during the ritual. However, with the influence of Buddhism, which opposes animal killing, the animal sacrifice was replaced by offerings of butter, grains, and lamps. In Hinduism, too, purification rituals are performed after death, which closely resemble this Bon practice. Thus, the *Drak* ritual in Lahaul today reflects a fusion of Bon, Buddhist, and Hindu traditions.

Many sacrificial rituals are performed on many occasions in almost all parts of Lahaul Valley, particularly in Bon and Hindu to appease powerful deities or spirits. Though Buddhism discourages blood sacrifice, some villages continue the practice, especially during birth, death, marriage, and festivals like Losar, etc. These sacrifices are performed to appease celestial and earthly deities, including Gram Devtas. For example, during weddings, when the bridal or groom's procession arrives, a live sheep or goat is thrown from above at the house entrance, where people catch it mid-air and immediately extract its heart while it is still alive. It is

believed that this ritual appease any evil spirits that may accompany the wedding procession. Similarly, a sacrifice were once offered when a wedding procession crosses a stream, as it is believed that these type of sacrificed are offered at various location in the valley when people's wishes were fulfilled. In some families in the valley animal sacrifice is performed as a part of ritual practice, even today some Hindu families observe this tradition to appease the deities. This indicate that elements of the Bon religion still exist in these areas. *Tobjong* deity is regarded as the first to renounce animal sacrifices, such as goats or sheep, and accept instead symbolic offerings made from wheat flour and ghee. In some part of region these symbolic sacrifices are also offered. But still maximum area of valley perform these type of animal sacrifice to appease the deities or spirit, because people are of opinion that if one cannot sacrifice these animals to deities or spirit, they will course or punish us. But on the other hand in Buddhism, however, does not follow such rituals, instead, offerings like butter, milk, barley, etc. are made to appease the deities. In this way, we can observe many rituals performed in Lahaul Valley to appease the deities and bring peace and harmony to the region.

4. Syncretism of Worship Places

There are many religious places in the Lahaul Valley associated with Bon, Buddhist, and Hindu faiths. In earlier times, followers of the Bon religious belief did not have any specific places of worship. They used to worship natural deities and spirits in the open. However, with the influence of Buddhism and Hinduism on Bon followers, the worship of Bon deities gradually began to take place within monasteries and temples. Still, some Bon practices are performed in open spaces even today. Some rituals are carried out in temples constructed on the rooftops of houses, while some temples are especially dedicated to demons and are called *Iha Khang*. There are also temples built on hilltops, which are believed to be the abodes of mountain deities. Traditionally, worship here was carried out strictly according to Bon religious beliefs, but nowadays, Buddhist monks occasionally visit these temples and perform rituals. This reflects the influence of the Buddhist religion on the Bon belief system. Guru Ghantal, also known as Gondhla Monastery, showcase a fusion of Bon, Buddhist, and Hindu religious practices. The monastery's walls display wooden idols and signs of rituals related to spirit appeasement. In the *Ghepan* temple as well, elements of Bon, Buddhist, and Hindu traditions are visible. *Ghepan* is traditionally a Bon mountain deity, rooted in shamanistic traditions. Buddhist priests have incorporated Bon rituals—especially chanting, which is considered most important—into their own festivals and ceremonies. In the Hindu tradition, *Ghepan* is regarded as a form of Lord Shiva. The Mrikula Devi temple, considered a temple of the Hindu goddess Kali or Durga, shows architectural features that resemble those found in Bon religious practices. However, there is no direct link to Buddhist tradition in the rituals of this temple, although at times, Bon, Hindu, and Buddhist rituals do overlap here. Along with these, there are other religious places such as the Trilokinath Temple, Shashur Monastery, and Gemur Monastery, where a blend of rituals from all three traditions—Bon, Buddhist, and Hindu—can also be observed. Cham dance at Shashur monestry incorporate both the elements of Bon and Buddhist practices (Skorupsky, 1981:26). Trilokinath temple is unique confluence of Buddhism and Hinduism, where a statue of Lord Shiva is installed over an idol of Lord Buddha (Avilokiteshvara). However, the local people believe that there was once a strong presence of Bon traditions in this region. Therefore, this region reflects the influence of all three traditions.

Conclusion

Bon, Buddhism and Hinduism have co-existed in Lahaul Valley since around 8th century, shaping the religion into a unique cultural and spiritual landscape. This is clearly visible today in Valley's deities, monasteries, and rituals. Bon was the dominant religious belief in Lahaul prior to the arrival of Buddhism from Tibet and Hinduism form kullu region. With the advent of these religions, Bon gradually absorbed elements of both Buddhism and Hindu tradition into its own belief system. Over the time people of valley accepted this synthesis as a way to maintain harmony and peace. Even today, followers of all three religious system- Bon, Buddhism, and Hinduism-live together in Lahaul Valley. The religious beliefs of the valley reflect a remarkable interweaving of spiritual traditions. Due to this distinctive blend of Bon, Buddhist, and Hindu belief systems, the Lahaul Valley presents an ideal context for studying religious syncretism and cultural continuity within a Himalayan tribal setting. This study highlights the adaptability and resilience of Bon belief system, which not only find common ground with Buddhist and Hindu practices but also retain its distinct identity.

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