

**Ritualistic Ceremony in *Thiden* Tradition of *Tulku* in the Himalayan  
Buddhist Communities**

A Thesis Submitted to

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Nepalese History, Culture, and Archaeology

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**LETTER OF APPROVAL**

This dissertation prepared and submitted by *Dorjee Susil Sherpa* entitled *Ritualistic Ceremony in Thiden Tradition of Tulku in the Himalayan Buddhist Communities* has been accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Master Degree of Arts in Nepalese History, Culture & Archaeology.

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## LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

This is to recommend that **Mr. Dorjee Susil Sherpa** has prepared this thesis entitled **“Ritualistic Ceremony in *Thiden* Tradition of *Tulku* in the Himalayan Buddhist Communities”** under my guidance and supervision for his partial fulfillment of Master’s Degree in Nepalese History, Culture and Archaeology under the faculty of Humanities and Social sciences of Tribhuvan University. He has worked in accordance with my suggestion and guidance, and I, therefore, would like to recommend the thesis for evaluation and examination

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## LETTER OF DECLARATION

I, Dorjee Susil Sherpa, hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been copied from elsewhere without proper citation. It has been completed as part of the requirements for my degree and adheres to all the ethical guidelines pertaining to the conduct of research.

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.....  
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## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### 1.1. Background of the Study

Siddhartha Gautam Buddha had initiated Buddha *shiksha*<sup>1</sup> on 5<sup>th</sup> BC. His *shiksha* is popular as Buddha *dharma* these days. His *dharma*<sup>2</sup> covered many parts of the globe in the historic times. Buddha *dharma* was flourished even in the entire Himalayan regions including Nepal, Bhot, India, Mongolia, Bhutan until 1<sup>st</sup> century (Puri, 2015). The *dharma* of Buddha became part of the lives of the peoples assimilating with local culture and traditions. The *tulku* system is one of the outputs of the development of the Buddhism in the Himalayan regions.

As per Buddhism, the body of a person collapses and destroys but the *citta*<sup>3</sup> of the person does not get destroyed. The *citta* travels and flows continuously as the water of the rivers. The *citta* has an unique nature of changing the house and or the *alaya*<sup>4</sup> as per the time. The person gets *citta* of previous lives and it leaves his or her body after the death. Then, it searches out another suitable *alaya* or body to be continued as the river.

As per the Himalayan Buddhism, the profound scholar *Lama* also gets rebirth. They call it *tulku*, or *yang si*. The *citta* of the previous *Lama* gets continuation in the body of new child- *tulku*. The young child recognizes the personal things such as scriptures, sacred

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<sup>1</sup> *Dharma* of Buddha. The Buddhist education.

<sup>2</sup> The word *Dharma* has many meanings: a. the teachings of the Buddha, b. law, doctrine, c. things, events, phenomena etceteras.

<sup>3</sup> The conscious mind

<sup>4</sup> The house and or body

musical instruments, robes, *gonpa*, friends and parents, relatives of the previous life (L. S. Sherpa, Aug. 21, 2024, interview).

It appears that the *Avatari* tradition has been practiced in the Himalayan region for a long time. It is believed that if Buddhist lamas have studied Buddhism well in a given birth, practiced what they have studied in their lives, and taught those practices well to their disciples and the general public, they will be reincarnated. Lamas use the Buddhist teachings they know for the benefit of all humans and animals. They also pray for the well-being and liberation of all, and they strive tirelessly for the liberation of the general public and their disciples.

Especially after lamas have studied at a very high level, they work not only for their own benefit but also for the benefit of their disciples, their neighbors, and all humans and animals. They work for their well-being. Great lamas have hearts full of compassion for the welfare of others, and they work with great compassion for all humans and animals. They work to alleviate the suffering of others, even if it means sacrificing their own happiness.

In fact, the process of being born, dying, and being reborn repeatedly in this world in this ocean of existence is considered suffering in Buddhism, and in order to overcome the cycle of suffering of being born and dying, one practices Buddhism and its teachings. Himalayan people believe that in order to overcome that ocean of suffering, human beings must purify their minds and practice Buddhism (field study, 2024). After practicing Buddhism, they remove ignorance, purify their minds, and develop wisdom, becoming aware of the *Dharma* and *samsara*.

As per tradition, Himalayan people believe that there are three forms of the Buddhahood as the Tulku. The Tulku possesses all good or the boundless light of the dharma,

glorious body of the Buddha and as the incarnated physical body of the lotus born guru from Urgyan, who is Guru Padmasambhava<sup>5</sup>. In this context, Snalegrove mentions:

Bddhas of different names. Among the older order of Tibetan (Himalayan) Buddhism: The absolute body is represented by the Buddha all good or the Buddha Boundless light, the glorious body by the would be Buddha glancing eyes or Powerbolt-Being, the physical body by Lotus-Born teacher from Urgyan and all the perfected lamas of his tradition

Thus since they are regarded by their followers as their perfected Buddha manifest in the world of men, the four lamas of Dolpo with whom we are concern here, are identified as manifestations of Lotus-Born Padmasambhava. (Snellgrove, 1967: P. 21)

In this way, Himalayan people believe that the Tulku are the reincarnated form of the Buddhas and connects them to their second Buddha- Guru Rinpoche. Himalayan people pay homage to Guru Rinpoche daily offering several rituals. The prayer of the Guru Rinpoche is “*OM A HUM VAJRA GURU PEMA SIDDHI HUM*”.

In many places of the Himalayan regions, the Himalayan communities were connected to nature worshipping practices before adopting the Buddhism. Most of them were practicing *Pon (Bon)*, the pre Buddhist practice, where a Master- *Pon* performs the dharma representing other people. Himalayan people take Guru Rinpoche as the divinary characters. They believe that Guru is the son of Sky-Guide. It is presented in the paintings and the idols in the Himalayan regions. For example, one can observe the live the paintings in Dolpo *gonpa*. It mentions:

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<sup>5</sup> Popularly known as Guru Rinpoche. Himalayan people believe Guru Rinpoche as the Sangye Ngipa- the second Buddha.

There are also some miniatures paintings of 'Sky-Guide' (*dranpa-nam-kha*) represented as a yogin together with his two sons, 'Lotus-Born' (*Padmasambhava*) and 'Life-Empowering-knowledge-Holding' (*tshe-dbang-rig- dzin*). Later on we obtained the complete works of the latter and learned that he is regarded as the first formulator of Pon doctrine just as Lotus-Born is popularly regarded as the founder of Tibetan Buddhism. It is interesting to observe that the *Pon-pos* treat them as brothers (Snellgrove, 1981: P. 50-51)

The Himalayan people treat to Pon not as the enemy but also as the brother. It means that the *Guru Rinpoche* as the body of the Buddha and Pon are taken as the sibling and the children of the same Sky-Guide.

Himalayan people pay deep level of devotion to *Guru Rinpoche*. They take him not only the human but also the divinity power and body of the Buddha-Body in the form of reincarnated form of the Buddha. Therefore, in any case, he is represented not as a historical being, but as a supreme 'Buddha-Body' for these colors are those of the 'Holder of the Vajra' (*Vajradhara*) and his partner, who symbolize supreme buddhahood for all the great yogins. (Snellgrove, 1981: P.65)

Most of the Himalayan people follow the tradition of either one school of thought amongst the four schools of the thoughts. In *Shyar Khumbu* (Solukhumbu) Sherpa people follow the Nyingma sects of the Buddhism. They have been continuing the Tulku traditions for generations.

It is interesting that how people recognize a Tulku. The child who tells the stories of his past life is also taken to the place he told and to the lama's *gonpas* and introduced to them.

In this way, if he recognizes his old *gonpa*, his old relatives and friends, and the Buddhist worship materials he used, he is adopted as an *avatari*.

For that, they also practice strict discipline while remaining in the *sila*, and then they practice meditations such as the *nyungne*. After practicing meditation while remaining in the *sila*<sup>6</sup>, they reach the stage of *samadhi*<sup>7</sup>, and then wisdom arises in them. After wisdom arises, they reach a state of complete knowledge and are always concerned for the welfare and liberation of themselves, as well as the entire animal world, including humans and other living beings.

In this way, they always strive for the salvation of other living beings, for their welfare and well-being, with great compassion. After that, if they do something and pass away, it is believed that they will be reborn in the next life. Thus, a person who was a Buddhist scholar lama in a previous life dies and is reborn as another small child in another incarnation. When the child starts talking, he tells stories of his previous life, and through this, the family and society come to know that the child is an incarnated lama.

Such reincarnated lamas, or *Tulku* lamas, are found in abundance in the Himalayan regions of Nepal. The children of these *Tulku* lamas study traditional *gonpa* education and then return to their communities to teach Buddhist teachings, perform rituals, perform worship, and fulfill their merits collecting practices.

Thus, after a new incarnation Lama *Tulku* is discovered, it is customary for him to be ordained in the *gonpa* of his previous birth. When performing the enthronement ceremony of an incarnate lama, they perform a very long series of rituals. In between, from viewing the scriptures to performing the piercing ceremony and enthroning the lama, many rituals are

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<sup>6</sup> Discipline and the vows

<sup>7</sup> Higher stage of the *dhyana*

performed by the lamas and relatives of the great lama of the *gonpa*. It is customary to invite great incarnation lamas from other *gonpa* as well as lamas from other *gonpas*, local residents, and relatives of former lamas.

The ascension of the incarnate lama is celebrated as a special festival and occasion in that region. They also consider this occasion as a special religious festival in that region. It is also considered a matter of luck to witness and participate in the procession of the incarnate lama in any region. That is why Buddhist practitioners, not only from their own villages and regions, but also from faraway places, come to the *thiden* program to see the new lama, offer him donations, and receive blessings from him. That is why, whenever an incarnation of a lama is enthroned in the Himalayan region, it is celebrated with great excitement and ceremony.

They celebrate the occasion of the *thiden* of such an incarnated lama in the Himalayan Buddhist tradition very well. There have been few academic studies and writing about such a grandly celebrated *thiden* program.

Although some people have studied and written works about incarnate lamas, the present research has not found the academic study on the ascension of such a specific type of incarnate lamas. Since there is absence of sufficient studies on the practice of the *thiden* of the incarnated lamas, this researcher is going to study the incarnated Lamas and their *thiden* rituals.

People respect *yang si tulku* as to previous life *Lama*. There is a *thiden* ceremony to formalize the *tulku* of the *yang si* in the *gonpa* of previous life *Lama*. *Thiden* is the coronation of the *Lama*, who continues the tradition of previous *Lama*. So *thiden* is very important in the *tulku* system. People have been practicing and performing special cultural, *dharmik* and spiritual rituals in the *thiden* ceremony (Field study, 2023).

The entire Himalayan peoples practice *tulku*, and *thiden* traditions. People are the Buddhist followers. They practice *Nyingma*, *Kagyu*, *Sakya*, and *Gelug* schoolss of the Buddha *dharma*. All of these Himalayan schoolss practice the *tulku* system. Therefore, they practice the *thiden* culture to coronate the reincarnated *Lamas*. There are traditional procedures to identify *tulku* of expired *Lamas*. The traditional guidelines and the procedures help them to identify the right *tulku* of expired *Lama* (S. Sherpa, Aug 21, 2024, interview).

After the *thiden*, the young *tulku* has to follow the strict monastic vows. He has to follow monastic *vinaya*<sup>8</sup>, study Sambhota script, language, and sacred scriptures. He has to learn chanting, *Dhyana*<sup>9</sup> and practice of the *dharma* properly. He has to be able to give *dharma* education, practice *dharma* and give *wang* to the junior *Lamas* and the lay followers. They have to follow traditional guidelines to achieve these schedules.

Now, the time do not remain the same. The old settlements of the people have been emptying due to migration. The time, sources and the belief of the people have been affected these days. Ultimately, the traditional cultural and *dharmik* practices of the people are also badly affected these days. There is a vast change in these types of cultural practices in the Himalayan regions. The present study aims to conduct research and document these types of precious cultural heritage before it gets extinct from the societies.

The *thiden* of an incarnate Lama *Tulku* is considered a very rare opportunity. In fact, the *thiden* of an incarnate Lama may not be seen for decades. But sometimes, even in a year, one may get the opportunity to see the *thiden* of more than one *tulkus*. For this reason, the opportunity to see the *thiden* of an incarnate Lama, to seek blessings, to study, and to conduct research observing live *thiden* ceremony may not be available to anyone at any expected time. In the context of this study, the researcher was fortunate enough to observe two *thidens*.

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<sup>8</sup> Monastic vows and *sila*.

<sup>9</sup> Meditation

Therefore, the researcher should consider the Buddha's blessing as a privilege to conduct research on *thiden* ceremony in Himalayan Buddhism.

*Tulku* is a strong system in the Himalayan regions. It carries the spiritual faith of the people. Sherpa people see the reflection of past *Lama* and Buddha in behavior of new *tulku*. They expect too much from the *tulku*. People pay highest level of respect, faith and devotion to new *tulku*. They believe that a *tulku* knows everything. In this case if he cannot give as expectation of the people, then more problems arise. Then more thoughts arise. In addition, *tulku* has to face more and more criticisms. Therefore, keeping these aspects in mind, a *tulku* has to give his full effort for the study, learning and practicing Buddhism in his life. It helps to turn out a real *guru*- the perfect *guru*.

The present study is focused on the *thiden* culture of the entire Himalayan Buddhist culture. It has the great value in the cultural and *dharmik* life of the people. There is no detail works done in *thiden* culture yet. The academic world is unknown about this important Buddhist practice. So, there is a gap in the study of subject *thiden*. Therefore, the study aims to explore the tradition of *tulku* and the ritual of *thiden* in the regions.

## 1.2. Statement of the Problem

The *thiden* culture, a ritual integral to identifying and ceremoniously placing a new *Tulku* within the Buddhist community is undergoing transformation overtime. Remarkably, there has been a notable absence of detailed scholarly exploration into this significant tradition. Recognizing the urgent need to preserve and protect this cultural heritage, there is a compelling call for dedicated research efforts. Conducting through academic research on the *thiden* ritual holds the potential to document and safeguard its procedures, contributing to the preservation of our rich cultural heritage.

### 1.2.1. Research Questions

This research thesis has intended to answer the following research questions:

1. Which tools and methods are traditionally used to identify a new *Tulku*?
2. How is the *thiden* ritual performed?
3. What are the challenges and responsibilities of a *tulku*?

### 1.3. Objectives of the Research

The research has the following objectives:

1. To explore the tools and methods to identify a new *Tulku*
2. To explore on how people perform *thiden* ritual
3. To study the challenges and responsibilities of a *tulku*

### 1.4. Limitation and Delimitation of the Study

Although the entire Himalayan regions are the areas of the practice of *thiden* culture, the present study has not studied the whole areas. It is limited to Solukhumbu, it's vicinities and the Kathmandu valley. Although many Himalayan peoples practice *thiden* culture, the study limited into the study of *thiden* culture only in the Buddhist *Mahayana Nyingma* schools of the Sherpa society.

The main settlement of the Sherpa is Solukhumbu district and it's vicinity areas of the country. There are many *gonpas* practicing *thiden* culture in the regions. People have been

residing even in the capital city – Kathmandu these days. Therefore, the study has selected Solukhumbu and the Kathmandu valley as the site of this study as the scope of the study.

### **1.5. Significance of the Study**

The present research explores the *tulku* and *thiden* tradition practiced in the Himalayan Buddhism. It will describe the *tulku* and the *thiden* traditions in the Himalayan regions. It will explore the traditional procedures which are practiced to find out the *tulku* of the deceased *Lama*. Further, the study will analyze the challenges to the *tulku* and *thiden* culture respectively. This research uncovers the unexplored *thiden* culture and does documentation academically. The research contributes in the field of the cultural heritage of a Buddhist community. The entire Himalayan communities, Government of Nepal, interested people and the scholars will benefit from the findings of the study. Therefore, the present study has great significance.

### **1.6. Justification of the Study**

Numerous researchers have conducted research in the Himalayan regions for many decades. They have worked on different dimensions of even the Buddhist communities and their socio-cultural and religious aspects. But no one has worked on the *thiden* culture of the Himalayan Buddhist people yet. There is lack of the study on *thiden* culture. The present research has thrown lights on those gaps and hidden areas of the study. The research aimed to explore *thiden* culture, procedures to find out *tulku*, process of *thiden* and challenges to the *thiden* culture of the Sherpa community from the Buddhist perspectives. Thus, the study has contributed to fulfill the gaps of information and knowledge in the field.

## 1.7. Methodology of the Research

*Thiden* system is one of the major cultural heritages of the Himalayan Buddhist peoples. They practice it to coronate the *tulku* in the *gonpa*. It is the special ceremony to public *tulku* to the societies, formalize, and institutionalize the reincarnated *Lama*. The methodology of this research was based on the fieldworks conducted in Solukhumbu and *gonpas* in Kathmandu for the collection of primary data.

### 1.7.1. The methodology

The study has adopted the following methodology to conduct the present research.

This thesis is qualitative in nature based on exploratory and interpretive method. It has adopted the qualitative research design along with Buddhist research practice to explore the rituals consist in the *thiden* ceremony of the Himalayan Buddhist Sherpa people. It is based mostly on the primary sources explored from the research fields related to the objectives of the study and utilized them in the thesis. It has also explored secondary and tertiary sources of information as required.

### 1.7.2. Methods of data collection

The researcher has adopted the following methods of data collection to collect the data from the fields.

#### 1.7.2.1. Interview

The present study has used the interview, focus group discussion, and observation as the tools of the data collection. The interview is one of the effective methods of data collection to explore cultural heritage in the Himalayan region of Nepal.

The researcher has undertaken personal interviews with local Sherpa people living in Solukhumbu district. He conducted interviews of few key persons among the targeted community or groups. The main knowledgeable person shared key information on the research topic, such as with *Tulku*, and other *Lama*.

#### **1.7.2.2. Observation**

Observation is another important method of data collection from the field. The researcher has collected useful data on his research topic using the observation method. As the researcher belongs to the same Sherpa community, he observed the tools and methods developed since previous generations to choose a *Tulku* and also observed the rituals and the difficult role fulfilled by the *Tulkus*. The study has adopted both participatory and non participatory observation approaches to collect the fresh data from the fields.

#### **1.7.2.3. Focus Group Discussion**

The researcher consciously observed the group, community, and their natural activities. There were around fifteen people in the group. All of them were living in Solukhumbu and members of the Buddhist communities in the region. Those people had participated the Thiden ceremony in the Mendopake Gonpa. Then, the researcher collected the fact data in which he or she is convinced.

#### **1.7.2.4. Secondary sources**

Further, the research has consulted the available works of literature published in the research field of the *thiden* study as the secondary sources. The researcher has consulted

Buddhist manuscripts, books, articles, and other publications in the research field for the background study of the research.

The Sherpa words are shown in *the italic* form in the thesis and maintained them in a glossary to make it easier to understand the meaning of the Sherpa words to the readers. Similarly, the Nepali and or Sanskrit words are shown in *the italic* form in the thesis. The researcher has maintained footnotes to make clear the Nepali and or Sanskrit words in the thesis.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

The *thiden* ritual is an important component of the *tulku* tradition in the Himalayan Sherpa community. No work has been conducted from the *thiden* perspective of the people yet. Regarding the study of the *thiden* culture of the research community, there is a gap of knowledge. Therefore, the researcher is eager to explore the ritualistic *thiden* culture of the Sherpa people and do the documentation of explored tradition academically. Few issues of the *thiden* culture of Himalayan people have been explored and taken as the sample to reflect the whole Himalayan region and the community. Some of scholars have done some works on different aspects of the *tulku* culture. For the background study of the research field, the researcher has consulted various resources that are directly and or indirectly related to the research topic. Among them, the most relevant resources for the Literature Review are included in the present study.

**Burman** writes in her book *Religion and politics in Tibet* that Sonam Gyatso was the third incarnation of Tsong Khapa, Yellow Hat. She describes that the new tradition of incarnation system emerged in Gelugpa Schools. Later, ruler of Mongolia- Altan Khan had provided title “*Talai Lama*” to third incarnation of Tsong Khapa- Sonam Gyatso. The writer mentions that:

The practice of incarnation also started after the death of a successor of Tsong Kha-Pa. The third successor and incarnation, Sonam Gyatso, spread the new faith in Mongolia and received the title of *Dalai Lama* Vajradhara from the Mongol ruler Altan Khan (Burman, 1979, P. 8).

The meaning of *Talai* is the ocean in Mongol, which means the ocean of the knowledge and *prajna*. It became Dalai in derogated form later. A few incarnations of Dalai *Lama* were found even in Mongol families. After that, Buddhism became the dharma of the Mongolian rulers and the people.

Further, the writer mentions about the death of third reincarnation of Dalai *Lama* Sonam Gyatso on 1588. The reincarnation came into Mongol ruling family. He was Yonten Gyatso, grandson of King Altan Khan on 1589. Then, 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai *Lama* was Ngawang Lozang Gyatso, who became ruler of the Tibet later.

But she has not worked on the *thiden* tradition of incarnated Dalai *Lama*. There is also incarnated *Tulku* system in Himalayan peoples in the entire Himalayan regions. There is absence of sources in the topic. The writer has not studied the *thiden* tradition in the Sherpa community, which has been found a gap of the study. Therefore, the researcher aims to do further research in the *thiden* culture of the Himalayan Buddhist culture.

**Shakabpa** writes in his book *Tibet A Political History* that while Sakya was the religious leader of Mongol ruler, Karma Pakshi *Lama* was a member of Karmapa Schools at that time. Future incarnations of the Karmapa *Lama* took place after the death of Karpa Pakshi. The writer mentions that:

Kublai Khan had favored the Sa-kya-pa, but his successors did not remain devoted solely to it. A Kar-ma-pa *Lama*, Rangjung Dorje was invited to China to Mongol court in 1331. Two years later, he acted as a master of ceremony at the coronation of Togon Temur as Emperor of China, and the Emperor bestowed on him the title of “All-knower of Religion, the Buddha Karmapa” (Shakabpa, 1984, P. 71-72).

Karmapa *Lama*, Rangjung Dorje had acted as the profound leader and/or master of the *thiden* ceremony of the Togon Temur as the Emperor of China. Then the Emperor had honored him with the title of “All-knower of Religion, the Buddha Karmapa”. It was the first record in the history of Tibet. The 4<sup>th</sup> Black Hat Karmapa *Lama* was recognized as the first reincarnation in Tibet.

Further, Rangjung Dorje had predicted himself to rebirth again in the region. In this regard, the writer mentions in the book:

Rangjung Dorje, the third Black Hat Kar-ma-pa *Lama*, lived 1284-1338. He is said to have predicted his future rebirth and the fourth Black Hat Kar-ma-pa *Lama* was recognized as the first reincarnation in Tibet (Shakabpa, 1984, P. 72). As per his prediction, he took rebirth as the fourth Black Hat Kar-ma-pa *Lama*. He was recognized as the first reincarnation in Tibet.

Furthermore, he describes that Panchen was the actual administrative of the central Tibet maintained office at Sakyas. The meaning of Panchen is great Master. Sakya Phagpa had appointed Panchen, whose name was Shakya Zangpo. Mongol ruler Kublai Khan had presented 13 *tripon* districts to rule over in Tibet. Sakya had received honors and homage by all 13 Tibetan Chieftains. Sakya was religious leader and Panchen was political leader at that time- 1247.

Panchen *Lama* followed Karmapa and then Dalai separated. He has described about the reincarnation of different schoolss and *Lamas*. The writer describes about emergence of the Dalai *Lama* in separate chapter in the book. Dalai *Lamas* are the reincarnation form of Tsongkhapa, the founder of Gelugpa schools of Buddhism. Gelugpa is the youngest schoolss of the Buddhism while ancient schools is Nyingma and other schoolss are Kgyugpa and Sakyapa. He traces the history of Dalai *Lama* from the first Dalai *Lama* Gedun Gyatso to

14<sup>th</sup> Dalai *Lama* Tenzin Gyatso. The book is useful to this research for the basic knowledge of the research topic. But author has not worked on their *thiden* culture. Therefore, there is a gap of study in the *thiden* culture of Sherpa community in the Himalayan region. Therefore, the researcher aims to conduct research in the field.

**Bell** writes in his book *The Religion of Tibet* about the reincarnation tradition of the Dalai *Lama*. He describes that the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai *Lama* was the priest throne, who had attended Buddhahood and recognized as the incarnation of Chen-re-zi, the patron deity of Tibet. Further the writer mentions that:

With the enthronement of the fifth Dalai *Lama* as sovereign over the whole country, the power of the Yellow Hats was greatly increased. The priest was on the throne, and he was more than a mere priest, for he had attained Buddhahood, the right to return to earth no more, being recognized as the Incarnation of Chen-re-zi, the patron deity of Tibet. One may speak of all these Incarnations, the lesser as well as the greater, as Living Buddhas, for this is how the ordinary Tibetan regards them. He in fact uses Sang-gye,.. (Bell, 1987, p. 129).

The writer mentions Dalai *Lama* as the incarnation of the patron deity of Tibetan- Chen-re-zi. Chen-re-zi is the deity of the *karuna*<sup>10</sup>. People see the quality of *karuna* in Dalai *Lama*. In addition, people believe that the Dalai *Lama* carries the qualities of the Sangye- the fully purified one- the Buddha. He was taken as a living Buddha.

The writer describes the power and politics of the palace, ministers along with the role of Dalai *Lama* in the book. But he fails to describe on the most important part of the *tulku*-reincarnated *tulku*, which is *thiden*. He has not shaded lights on the *thiden* culture of the *tulku*, which is the gap in the study of the *thiden* culture. Therefore, there is a need of the research in the *thiden* culture of the Himalayan peoples in the regions.

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<sup>10</sup> Compassion, loving kindness.

**Tucci** and E. Gherzi had visited Tibet on 1912 and recorded their daily diary about the trip in book form. They write about what they observed, hear, and got written literatures. They mention about different parts of the life of the Tibetan people. The writers shade lights on the *tulku* tradition as well. Further, the writer mentions that:

He is a *tulku* (*sprul sku*) that is to say not really a living Buddha, as is often written, but an incarnation; the incarnation of a bodhisattva, who, having attained the highest perfection has become potentially a Buddha; he renounces the blessedness of Nirvana and makes a vow to remain in this world in order to promote by example and teaching the salvation of as great a number as possible of its creatures. His vital essence thus passes from body to body- because the body, like every material aggregate, is destined to dissolve- but it remains immaculate in its acquired, unalterable purity and holiness (Tucci and Gherzi, 1996, P. 38).

The writers explain that the people see *Tulku* as a living Buddha. They take it as the reincarnation of a *Bodhisattva*<sup>11</sup>. The Bodhisattva carries the potentiality of being a Buddha. He teaches *dharma* and lead people to the salvation. Bodhisattva holds the vital essence of Buddha the purified *citta*<sup>12</sup>, which passes from one body to another. Furthermore, the writers explain the nature and qualities of a *Tulku* but have not worked on the major rituals of the *Tulku*- the *Thiden*.

But they have not thrown lights on the *thiden* procedures and the culture, which has been a gap in the study. Therefore, there is a need of the fresh research on the *thiden* tradition of the Himalayan peoples.

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<sup>11</sup> Bodhisattva carries the quality of deep *karuna* to free sentient beings from the *dukha* of *vaba sagar*.

<sup>12</sup> mind

**Das** writes in his book *Contributions on The Religion and History of Tibet* about the *tulku* and reincarnation systems. He mentions to king Sron-tsan-gampo as the incarnation of Chenrezsig- the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. In this regard, he mentions that:

Accordingly, during the reign of Sron-tsan-gampo the reputed incarnation of Chenressig, the minister Thon-mi-Sambhota visited India to study the various sciences and Buddhism.... The union of the incarnation of Chenressig in Sron-tsan, and of the two incarnations of the divine mothers (Tara) in the persons of the two princesses produced great joy and happiness in the palace of Yambu-Lagan. Two princesses, come from two great centers of Buddhism, viz, China and Nepal, jointly exerted their influence for the propagation of Buddhism (Das, 1970, P. 34-35).

The writer mentions that the king of Bhot Sron-tsan-gampo as the incarnation of Chenressig, who is believed as the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. Chenressig is one of the main deities of the Himalayan peoples including people of Bhot. The king had sent his minister Thon-mi-Sambhota to India through Nepal to study and explore suitable scripts. As the result, they can learn script easily and study dharma of Buddha in their own native language. Writer has not worked in the *thiden* ceremony and its rituals in the book.

Further, he describes Ron-Sem Lochava as the incarnation of Pandit Kalacharya of India. But there is an absence of the *thiden* cultures and their procedures in his works. These are the gap in the study of *thiden* culture. Therefore, the researcher aims to do further research in the field.

**Yusheng** mentions in it's book *Tibet 700 Years of History* Vol. 2 that the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama Thupten Gyatso died at the age of 58 on Dec. 17, 1933. He was facing east while he

died. So as per custom, Razheng sent three teams to eastern site of central Lhasa to search the latest incarnation of the late 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai *Lama* on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1936. They found three possible candidates. Razhang confirmed candidate from Qinghai Province as the reincarnation of 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai *Lama*. His religious name was Tenzin Gyatso, Jan 26, 1940. In addition to this, writer mentions that:

On February 5 (1940), the Nationalist Government issued Order No. 898, “The Qinghai soul boy Lhamo Toinzhub, with unusual wisdom and extraordinarily intelligent signs, has been found to be the reincarnation of the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai *Lama* and should be allowed to ascend his throne as the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai *Lama* without going through the lot-drawing ceremony. The Executive Yuan orders the Ministry of Finance to appropriate 400,000 French dollars to pay the costs of the enthronement (*thiden*). February 5 of the 29<sup>th</sup> year of the Republic China” (Yusheng, 2010, P. 310).

The Government of China issued the order of ascended incarnation of 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai *Lama* to throne of 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai *Lama*. They had spent a remarkable amount of money in the *Thiden* ceremony of Dalai *Lama*. It mentions that 400,000 French dollars were spent in the *thiden* ceremony. But it has not mentioned about the rituals performed in the *thiden*.

Further, it mentions about the enthronement of the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai *Lama* in the book but not mentioned about the procedures and rituals in the *thiden* ceremony. But the writer has not worked in the *thiden* culture in the Himalayan regions, which is the gap of study. Therefore, the researcher aims to do further research in the *thiden* culture of the Himalayan peoples.

**Drukpa** writes in his book *An Introduction of Drukpa Lineage and Collection of Discourses on Buddhism* about the Buddhism. He introduces the development of Buddhism in Bhot regions. He mentions that many schoolss of Buddhism are in practice in Bhot.

Among them, Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya and Gelug are the major schools. The writer is related to Kagyu schools, therefore, he focuses his writing in the Kagyu tradition. According to him, one of the 84 Maha Siddhas Tilopa founded Kagyu school in 11<sup>th</sup> century. Then, it continued by Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa etceteras.

Saraha- Lingchen Repa Pema Dorje was the first Gyalwang Drukchen Changpa Gyare. The present Gyalwang Drukpa is the 12<sup>th</sup> reincarnation of Drukpa Kagyu lineage. He is taken as the combine reincarnation of Arya Avalokitesvara and *Maha Siddha* Naropa.

The writer has thoroughly described the nature, qualities, skills, and contributions of the *tulku rinpoche* in the book. But it has not worked in the *thiden* ritual in his work, which is identified as the gap for present study.

**Harrer** writes in his book *Return to Tibet* about the *tulku* and reincarnation systems. The writer was been in Tibet for seven years in 1982 and wrote the book. He describes about the finding out *tulku* of 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai *Lama*. He thoroughly explains that the two year child recognizes the personal attendant, personal belongings of 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai *Lama* easily and he passes all the tests of being a *tulku*.

Further, he expresses his own reading in the book that:

I believe that these new reincarnations will have to face more difficult tasks than their earlier incarnations. As they belong to Tibet's natural aristocracy they have first of all duties and only then do they have rights. Their task is to concern themselves with man's ethical purpose (Harrer, 1985, P. 116).

He expresses his opinion that the new *tulkus* have to face more and more difficulties in the changing pace of time and situation especially Dalai *Lama*, who has to educate people religiously as well as politically.

The writer has mentioned about the professions of the siblings of 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai *Lama*. Some of them are also found *tulku*. But he has not worked on ritualistic ceremony of the reincarnated *tulku*, which is identified as the research gap for present study.

**Yumiko** writes in article *The Historical Significance of the Incarnation Lists of The Third ICang-skye (1717-1786) and the Qianlong Emperor (1711-1799)* compiled in Exploring Tibet's History and Culture about the name list of *tulku* and reincarnation. The writer has rigorously worked in exploring the lists of the incarnation of *tulkus*. Different leaders, traditions and gurus have presented different types of name lists of the reincarnated *tulkus*. Most of them mention themselves as the older tradition and more authentic *tulku*. Writer mentions about the lists that:

In short, the previous lives of ICang-skye, Qianlong, the Panchen *Lama*, and Dalai *Lama* were reborn many times and closely related to each other in order to diffuse Tibetan Buddhism where and when they worked (Yumiko, 2011).

There is the historical record of reborn of Panchen and Dalai *Lama* for many times. All of them had contributed to the development of the Buddha dharma in their lifetime. Further, writer concludes the reading in the lists that:

In the end, the Panchen *Lama* composed their incarnation list consisting of famous historical figures to recognize Qianlong and his preceptor, ICang-skye. These two lists are symbolic works for authority in the Tibetan Buddhist hierarchy that leads to the official recognition of the Manchu emperor's contribution to Tibetan Buddhism (Yumiko, 2011).

Among other lists these two lists seem the official list of the reincarnated *tulkus* in both Panchen and Dalai *Lama* traditions. But the writer has failed to study the *thiden* culture in the Himalayan regions. Therefore, the rituals in the *thiden* ceremony is the gap of study for present research.

**Ortner** writes in her book *High Religion* about the cultural and political life of the Sherpa. Writer mentions in the article about the religious life of the Himalayan Sherpa people. She has slightly shaded lights in the *tulku* tradition in Sherpa. In this context, she mentions that:

He (Zatul Rinpoche) informed *Lama* Gulu that the two of them had been father and son in a previous existence. Specifically, he said that he, the Zatul Rinpoche, was the reincarnation of the great Sherpa folk hero *Lama* Sangwa Dorje, and that *Lama* Gulu was the reincarnation of *Lama* Sangwa Dorje's father (a certain *Lama* Budi Tsenjen, who was not particularly famous) (Ortner, 1992, P. 133).

Zatul Rinpoche was the *tulku* of folk hero of the Sherpa Sangwa Dorje and *Lama* Gulu was the *tulku* of father of Sangwa Dorje. Zatul Rinpoche encourages *Lama* Gulu to build a *gonpa* in Tengpoche, Solukhumbu. He reminds that both of them were father and son in their previous life. There was a prediction in their previous life that *tulku* of father will build a *gonpa*.

The writer has mentioned reincarnation story in the context of building Tengboche *gonpa*. But she has not explored the ritualistic ceremony of the *thiden* culture.

The existed literatures clearly define the *tulku* and or reincarnation system in the Himalayan Buddhism. It has been continued till to date in their settlements. The all

Himalayan Buddhist schoolss- *Nyingma*, *Kagyu*, *Sakya*, and *Gelugpa* schoolss continue the reincarnated *Tulku* tradition.

### **Research Gap**

The study seeks to uncover the facts related to the research questions of the thesis. However, the *tulku* tradition is a live cultural heritage of the Himalayan Buddhism, there is rare and or absence of research work in the *thiden* culture related to the *tulku* tradition. Therefore, there is a gap of the research in the *tulku* tradition of the Buddhist peoples. The *thiden* culture may be in the shadow and maybe out of the scene in the future. Therefore, the researcher aims to conduct a rigorous research in *thiden* culture, explore new information, and do documentation of the tradition before it disappears from the Himalayan Buddhist culture.

## Chapter Three

### Customary Methods and Systems to Identify the *Tulku*

#### 3.1. The Customary Methods to identify the *tulku*

Himalayan people have been practicing the *Tulku* system from a long time. There is a general Buddhist belief in rebirth as a series of personal existences. People have been practicing some customary methods to recognize the proper *Tulku* of previous lamas.

The customary methods include the necessary conditions for the practice of *dharmik* life.

They are listed as four blessings circumstances such as:

1. One must be a male
2. One must be born in Buddhist country
3. One must be complete in one's senses and physical parts
4. One must not be of perverse intentions -(Snellgrove, 1967: P. 18)

Himalayan peoples including Sherpa people adopt different type of methods to identify the new *tulku*. As per custom, the candidate of the Tulku must be a male. It defines that only male could be the Tulku of previous lama. Similarly, he should born in the Buddhist country. He must also complete in one's senses and physical parts etceteras. They use varieties of methods to select the *Tulku*. Sherpa people also adopt varieties of indicators to confirm the *new Tulku* candidate. The massively used methods (Field Study, 2023) are as following:

##### 3.1.1. *Serki Bampla Ma Tamk Gyamne- Gola system*

If the child is not found even after two or three years, the monastery also searches for the children who have attained *Siddhi* by casting lots in a golden urn and searching according to the tradition of *Gola*. This method is called *Serki Bampla Ma Tamk Gyamne*. In this method, the names of many children born in different villages that match the qualities and characteristics of the previous birth Lama are collected and after completing the names of those children in a golden urn that is worshipped according to Buddhist rituals, the final rule is to select according to the *Gola* system (L. S. Sherpa, Aug. 21, 2024, interview).

Here, the practice of casting a golden urn is only the last resort, but the choice of name to be placed in the urn is completely based on astrology.

In Sherpa tradition and religion, astrologers are seen in two ways: one is mathematical astrology which is called *Karchi* and the other is fruitive astrology which is called *Nakchi*.

Only after the selected children are selected according to the specific astrological process, the name list is placed inside the urn. Thus, the *Chir Tak Pramana* is given great importance and attention in this method. According to the 3 *Takshama Guna Lakshmi* and *Pramana* Medium method, the third important method is the *Pramana* Medium that matches the qualities and characteristics of the previous Lama Guru very closely or completely, which is called *Takshama*.

In this, regardless of the village or place where they were born, there is a tradition of considering a child who has learned to speak at the age of two or three to be an incarnation, who, according to Buddhist tradition, has the ability to clearly distinguish and recognize him from the objects he has mixed with himself and the objects he has used for worship, including other objects, and who has passed other tests.

### 3.1.2. *Dhyana*

*Dhyana* is the deep level of concentration into one pointed meditation. The chief disciple and or the master *Lama* of the *gonpa* practice deeper level of *Dhyana*. He would be very aware about the indication message achieved in the *Dhyana*. If he receives any kinds of signal and or indication regarding the incarnation of the *tulku*, then he goes forward towards the finding the new *tulku*. Then, he searches out the *tulku* of their late high *Lama* in the direction of indication and the signal received during the *Dhyana*.

### 3.1.3. Checking *chi*

In some *gonpas*, the chief *Lama* checks the *chi*- astrological indication to search out the new *tulku*. *Lama* uses *thyanga*, fresh rice grain and other means along with *mantra* to receive appropriate indication towards the new *tulku*. According to the signals received during the *chi*, *lamas* seriously analyze the indications related to their previous *Guru lama*. Then, the team of the *lamas* searches out candidates of *tulku* in the directions achieved during *chi*<sup>13</sup>. They may form different teams of the *lamas* so that they can search out the possible new *tulku* in a short span of time. Among them, some teams goes to the north direction, some go to the southern parts of the settlements, some to the western parts and some to eastern parts of the settlements simultaneously.

### 3.1.4. Indication of the right dream

Sherpa people believe in the result of the dream. Especially, the head of the family gives attention to the dream and it's impact in their real life. Similarly, the senior head *Lama* pays attention in their dream after the demise of their senior *Lama* of the *gonpa*. After two three years of demise of their *Guru*, they pay attention in the dream. If they receive any

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<sup>13</sup> Astrological prediction

indication in the dream, they send masters to find out possible candidate of the *tulku* in the direction of the dream.

In some cases, the head *Lama* of other *gonpa* sends invitation to parents of child that their child is a *tulku* of the proper *Lama*. In some other cases, *Lama* sees expired *Lama* in the dream and says to come to meet him next day. One of Rinpoches sees a child in the dream in the night. In the next morning in real life, if some parents visit *Lama* with child, he confirms that the *tulku* of *Lama* seen in the dream last night is the same child. For example, late Thulsik Rinpoche saw passed away *Lama* Karma Lama Sherpa of Mendopake Gonpa in his dream last night. In the next morning, the daughter and son in law visited Rinpoche with their baby son. Then Rinpoche confirmed the baby son as the reincarnated *tulku* of late *Lama* Karma Lama. He is own grand-son of the late *Lama* Karma (D. T. Sherpa, 2024, interview).

### **3.1.5. Collections of the Stories of the Candidates**

In some cases, there may be more than one child, whose parents claim as the reincarnated *tulku* of the past *Lama*. Every parent has different stories about the behavior of their baby son related to the late *Lama*. In this case, the senior *Lamas* of the *gonpa* of previous *Lama* collect different stories from different child candidates of different areas. Then, they create questionnaire related to fact and characteristic of the past *Lama* to ask to child. After that they visit fields and check the candidates for the *tulku*. In this case, they seriously ask questions to the parents and the baby child related to previous *Lama*. Finally, they select the child, who answers correctly and or mostly related to the late *Lama*.

### **3.1.6. Chief *Lama*- master's visits**

In some cases, the senior disciples of the late *Lama* visit many possible villages to recognize the child with special capacities and skills which match their expired *Guru- Lama*. The team of the senior *Lamas* must have been studied and practiced Buddha Dharma with late *Lama*. All of them must have been closely familiar with late *Lama* so they know the behavior and character of the late *Lama*. The groups of *Lamas* search out the clues and indications. They also consider the calculation of the divinatory symbols which match their late *Lama*. Sometimes, it takes not only months, but also takes years to find out proper *tulku* of their *Guru*.

### **3.1.7. Parents recognize *tulku***

In most cases, the parents of child confirm that their child is the *tulku* of the late high *Lama*. When a child starts to walk and talk, he demonstrates extra ordinary behaviors such as, I am that person, my name is this (previous *Lama*'s name), the name of my gonpa is this (name of late *Lama*'s gonpa) etceteras. Sometimes, if previous *Lama* was married, in that case the child remembers his wife's name and tells to his present parents and or friends that his wife's name is this (name of late *Lama*'s wife). He claims that he had a dog (tells color and name of dog). In this case, parents of child take him to proper *gonpa* and consult to its senior *Lamas* for confirmation process of the *tulku*. They also share their child's behaviors with other relatives and neighbors. Further, they may do lobby for the confirmation of *tulku* and perform the *thiden* ceremony in the *gonpa*.

In the case of *Tulku Konjok Jangbu Sherpa* from Fera, the *Tulku Lama* does not remember the situation of that time now, but according to his parents, relatives, and neighbors, when he was two and a half or three years old, he cried out to his parents that

house was not his own. Then they should find out and take him to his house. Then, when they tried to take him from the house to the main road to the north, they refused, but were happy to go to the main road to the south. After seeing that, it was definitely three to four kilometers from his village.

Since lamas have been living in the nearby village, which is 3-4 kilometers away, since then, his parents thought that some lama had come to that village and took him to that village with them. They say that child recognized the house where he was born in his previous life. Currently, that village is in the ward number one of Solu Dudhkunda Municipality Chiwong Khop.

In his previous birth, his name was Lama Pasang Nimiu Lama. At that time, the famous and accomplished lamas after him were Lama Danu, Lama Karma, and Lama Gombu. They were the ones who kept the books of the dharma, *thyanga*, bell, and *damaru* that he used in his previous birth safely. Three years after his birth and when he found his previous birth home, while he was living in that house, the feudal lords of the village caused them suffering and threw him out. After that, he along with his family left that house and moved to the Bhote Gaon settlement in Darjeeling (Tulku K. J. Sherpa, March 19, 2025, interview).

Although he had regained this birth and recognized his previous home, the child *tulku* did not like to stay there for more than a night or two because he had suffered a lot in that home in his previous birth. He also used all the necessary things for the lama he used in my previous birth. He was a relative at that time and had been continuing to provide them until then. At that time, he presented various methods to test whether he was an incarnation or not.

But in some cases, however their child shows that he is the *tulku* of proper late *Lama* they know, parents may feel shy and uneasiness to claim a *tulku*. Because, after claiming the

*tulku*, new *tulku* takes over previous *Lama*'s *gonpa*, it's name and fame along with it's property. So that they do not claim and make their child a *tulku*. Instead, the parents grow their child as an ordinary child.

In some other cases, some parents claim that their child is *tulku* of that *gonpa*'s *Lama* or *tulku* of their own late father, who was the head of proper *gonpa* or their family *gonpa*. In this case, the child may or may not exhibit extra ordinary behavior of late *Lama*. In that case, the grandchild takes leadership of his grandfather's *gonpa*. This kind of initiation has created discussion, disputes, problem, and confusions in the society in some cases. People blame the parents that they tried it to hold *gonpa*, it's property and faith of the people, especially of the follower of the late *Lama*. Then, they rule regularly the society, collects respects and *dana*<sup>14</sup>, gifts from the society.

### 3.2. Customary Systems to identify the *Tulku*

The Himalayan Sherpa people have been practicing different types of tools and indications in identifying the new *Tulku* of the past *Lama*. A person who has been proven to be an incarnation as mentioned in the Buddhist scriptures by completely controlling his/her seal and vow in a previous life and undergoing rebirth can become an incarnation *Tulku*.

There are mainly three types of *Tulkus* selection process in the middle village. In this method, the living *Lama* Gurus, who have become very powerful by practicing tireless meditation and tantra *sadhana*, voluntarily declare themselves in the latter half of their lives. Then, two to four years after their stay in heaven, they say in which place and direction they will be reborn. It has been the practice of a child of one year old in that direction or village to announce them after they have learned to speak (L. S. Sherpa, Aug. 21, 2024, interview).

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<sup>14</sup> Charity and donation.

Mostly, they consider the following tools to identify the *tulku* (Field, 2023):

### **3.2.1. Divinatory symbol**

Normally, the *tulku* child has special qualifications than other ordinary children. He shows different behaviors reaching up to two to three year age. He exhibits divinatory symbols and owns special power. He talks about his past life, talks about his parents, relatives, friends and wife if he had. He also talks about his lovely pets such as dogs (L. S. Sherpa, Aug. 21, 2024, interview). Further, he may talk about his *gonpa* etceteras. Then, he request present parents to take him to that *gonpa*. In this case, parents and relatives inform about the extra ordinary characteristic of child to the *gonpa* of passed away *Lama*.

### **3.2.2. Verifications of the divinity power of *tulku***

After receiving information about the extra ordinary divinatory symbol of the child, Lamas visit the child, his parents and villagers. They carefully take the interview of candidate child to find out special evidences in him. They go through the other traditional verification process as well. The team tries to trace the continuation of the memory of the late *Lama* in candidate. They observe other hidden divinity power consisted in the candidate.

### **3.2.3. The possession of the previous *Lama***

Himalayan Sherpa people believe that the child carries the proper attributes of the previous *Lama*. He should be knowledge and skillful about the behavior of the passed away *Lama*. They believe that the young *tulku* carries the *citta*- mind of the previous *Lama*.

Therefore, the team of *Lamas* investigates the continuation of behaviors and *citta* of past *Lama* in the candidate child. *Tulku* Gyurmi Hisi Gyatso always used to cry in the nights that

the present house was not his own house. He has another house (D. T. Sherpa, 2024, interview).

#### **3.2.4. Selection and recognition of the objects**

The senior *Lamas* check the memory of candidate child by letting him select the personal objects used by the previous *Lama*. They mix up the similar objects, used by *Lama* along with other *Lamas*. Such as, *Damar*, *Tiluk*, *Dorje*, *thyanga*, *thi*, manuscripts, bedroom etceteras. If he recognizes the objects and belongings of previous *Lama*, he would be selected as a new *tulku*.

But in some cases, the candidate does not recognize the objects of deceased *Lama*. But he possessed other characteristic of the previous *Lama*. In that case, the team may select candidate as the *tulku*. For example, the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai *Lama* had not recognized the objects of previous 4<sup>th</sup> Dalai *Lama* during the screening process. But he was selected as a new *tulku* of 4<sup>th</sup> Dalai *Lama*. Then, he became 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai *Lama*- the reincarnated *Lama*.

But in the case of Konjok Jangbu Sherpa, Avatari *Tulku* *Lama* from Fera, he recognized all of his ritual tools. At that time, seeing that new *tulku* child was able to distinguish and identify all the items that he had used in his previous life among all those items, his parents, relatives, and all the villagers began to consider him an incarnation (*Tulku* K. J. Sherpa, March 19, 2025, interview).

#### **3.2.5. Recognize previous *Lama*'s friends**

During the selection and verification procedures, the child candidate recognizes his friends and colleagues. Similarly, the candidate should recognize deceased *Lama*'s relatives and *gonpa* as well. In addition, he may talk about incidents and happenings of the past lives.

In the case of Konjok Jangbu Sherpa, Avatari *Tulku* Lama from Fera, when he visited house of his previous life at that time, he was also able to identify people from a village four or five kilometers away, living towards Salleri Chyalsa, Mulkharka, who he had good connections with in his previous life (*Tulku* K. J. Sherpa, March 19, 2025, interview).

### 3.2.6. Checks the sharpness of the memory

People believe that the *Hyangsi* carries sharper mind than ordinary children. If he reads scriptures once, he catches that in his mind easily. He should not repeat it for several times as other normal children because he carries the profound and purified *citta*- the mind of previous *Lama*.

The *Lamas* of *gonpa* worry on the next leadership of the *gonpa*. They worry that who operates the *gonpa*, who takes care of financial challenges of the *gonpa* etceteras. Who preaches and gives *dharma* education to *Lamas* and the people. These kinds of questions keep *Lama* to be worried. To solve all of these problems, they expect to receive *tulku* of deceased *Lama* in near future. Therefore, they wait for a long time to receive *tulku*. Sometimes, they send team of *Lamas* to find out suitable candidates of the *tulku* up to far away from *gonpa* region.

After the successful selection of the *tulku*, *Lamas* try to perform *thiden* of *tulku* as soon as they can. People believe that the mother of *tulku* may face big challenges in her life. The challenge would be in very harmful to her. Sometimes, it may be life threatening to her as mother of other Bodhisattvas. Such as, mother of Siddhartha Gautam Buddha- Mahamayadevi. Sometimes, it harm to the family of the *tulku*. Therefore, to get rid of these kinds of threatens, parents of *tulku* want to get *thiden* of *tulku* as soon as possible. If not performed *thiden*, it is taken as farce- unfavorable circumstances to the family. But after

*thiden*, people believe that the family of *tulku* may receive merits along with prosperity in their lives. They believe that after *thiden*, the farce will be eradicated and brings favorable situations and happiness in the family. The *thiden* frees *tulku* from the responsibility of other occupational earnings to feed family. The family of previous *Lama* and family of present *tulku* have respect, faith and devotion towards new *tulku* equally. The *gonpa* of *Lama* pays some cash and property in symbolic way to parents of new *tulku* as they buy their child- *tulku* from parents for the sake of the *dharma*.

### 3.3. Types of the *tulku*

The Himalayan people believe that there are mostly three types of *Tulku* in the practice. As per *dharmik* scripturers, the Buddha may have three types of re incarnated forms.

Snalegrove mentions about the qualities of the four lamas of the Dolpo. He writes:

In early times innumerable ages ago, he completed the three stages of perfecting, ripening and purifying<sup>15</sup> and having gained buddhahood, he worked through the means of physical forms in order to convert those who are hard to convert and for the good of sentient beings in this mountaineous land of snow. It is to him we offer our prayers:

Mental offspring of the former buddhas!

Bodily representative of the future buddhas!

Verbal activity of the present buddhas!

Salutation to the bodies of the buddhas of all the three times<sup>16</sup> (Snellgrove, 1967: P. 81)

In this way, Himalayan people believe on the three qualities of the reincarnated *Tulkus*. They are mental, bodily and verbally form of the Buddhahood in new *Tulku*.

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<sup>15</sup> These are three conventional terms describing the acquisition of Buddhahood.

<sup>16</sup> Concerning the three bodies of Buddhahood.

Normally, there are three types of *tulku* practiced in the Himalayan Sherpa culture (Lama Chochyang, Baisakh 21, 2079 BS, interview). They are:

### 3.3.1. *Ku Ki tulku*

*Ku* is the physical body. *Ku ki tulku* is the *tulku* of the physical body of the previous *Lama*. *Ku ki tulku* is the body of the *Hopame*, who is symbolized as the deity of long life and the *dewachen- Sukhawati bhuwan*<sup>17</sup>.

### 3.3.2. *Sung ki tulku*

*Sung* is the *dharmik* scripture. It is the collection of the sutra of the Buddha. These are taken as the symbol of the *vacan*<sup>18</sup> and voice of the Buddha. Therefore, *Sung ki tulku* is the form of the continuity of *vacan* and voice of the Buddha in the form of deceased *Lama*.

### 3.3.3. *Thu ki tulku*

*Thu* is the *chhorten*, the stupa. *Thu* is the symbol of the heart. The nature of heart stays constant in many ways. The main *tulku* is taken as the *thu ki tulku*. Sometimes, there may be four to five different *tulku* of even only one deceased *Lama* in some cases.

After the carefully selection of a new *tulku*, the senior *Lamas* teaches him *dharmik* education step by step as per their curriculum. They train *tulku* to follow monastic *silas*<sup>19</sup> and *vinayas* respectively. The *silas* and *vinayas* are taken as the foundation of the continuation of the *dharma* in the *gonpas*. Then, in a suitable year, month, day and time, they organize the *thiden* celebration of the new *tulku* in the *thi* of previous *Lama* in his *gonpa*.

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<sup>17</sup> The highest realm as per Buddhism.

<sup>18</sup> The words of the Buddha.

<sup>19</sup> Monastic disciplines.

As per tradition and beliefs, the new *tulku* always performs better than previous *Lamas* in every aspect of the dharma. He studies the higher and deeper level of Buddha philosophical education. Similarly, he practices deeper levels of *dhyanas*, tantric *sadhana*<sup>20</sup> and accumulates better level of merits than previous *Lamas*. In addition, he teaches his disciples and preaches in higher levels to lay followers in better ways than previous *tulkus*. It means that the growth ratio and graph of *tulku* has always to be in plush percentages.

### 3.4. Background of the *tuklu*

Every *Tulku* comes from different family background. Some of them come from educated and or wealthy family and some of them come from backward family. The study examines the background and the opinion of the *Tulku*.

#### 3.4.1. Case number 1

Past *Lama*- Kyabje chatral Sangtrul Dorje Rinpoche was senior *Lama*. He had attained *dzokchen siddhi*<sup>21</sup> in his lifetime. He was the head *Lama* of *gonpa* in Pharping nearby ancient pond. He was from a Khamba clan family of Bhot people. Actually, the *siddhi dzokchen* does not need *gonpa* to practice the *dharma* traditionally. He used to say his family to not to build *gonpa*. Instead he used to suggest building *chhortens* so people can perform *kora*. He was very simple person and did not expect much respect and property from the society (D. J. Sherpa, Interview, 79, 2024,) on *thiden* day.

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<sup>20</sup> practice

<sup>21</sup> Highest level of Siddhi

According to Dawa Jangbu, past *Lama* had donated remarkable amount of money to Pharping and Godavari *gonpa* in his lifetime. He was married and had two daughters and wife. The first daughter did not get married therefore she has been taking care of her father's *gonpa* in Pharping as a celibacy *ani*. His wife lives in her own house in Narayansthan area these days. The late *Lama* usually uses to tell to his family that he was not interested in taking birth in the universe again. He uses to claim that his *tulku* will not come again. Therefore, his family did not believe to the new *yangsi* in Sherpa family. The previous family was confirmed that *Lama* does not return as *tulku*. Therefore, they are not convinced with new *tulku* so that they did not accept new child *tulku* born in Nepalese Sherpa family.

Name of new *tulku* of late Kyabje Chatral Sangtrul Dorje Rinpoche is Jikdral Thinley Rinpoche. His parents come from typical Sherpa family from Jubing, Solukhumbu. Name of his father is Ngawang Dorje Sherpa and mother's name is Ngima Lhamu Sherpa. He was born on February 16, 2015.

Dupchen Rinpoche of Gantok had declared child as a reincarnation *tulku* of late *Lama*. The team of people tried to convince to accept new *tulku* as their late *Lama*'s *hyangsi*. But they did not accept him. As the result, no one family members, relatives and representatives of *gonpa* participated the *thiden* ceremony of *tulku*.

Normally, *tulku* has to perform *thiden* ceremony in the *gonpa* and *thi* of late *Lama*/ but this kind of exceptional case, *thiden* can be organized in other *gonpa* of the same tradition. The new *tulku* belongs to Sherpa family. Therefore, Sherpa *Gonpa* made available the *thi* and *gonpa* for his *thiden* ceremony.

### **3.4.2. Case Number 2**

*Lama Karma* was the head *Lama* of Mendopake *Gonpa* in Mendopake, Solukhumbu. It was a family *Lama* clan *gonpa*. After the demise of *Lama Karma*, there was absence of

head *Lama* in the *gonpa*. After a few years, the family of Lt. *Lama* also migrated to capital city of the country. Some of them migrated to even abroad. So there was no sufficient caring for the *gonpa* as it required. It was in a difficult situation in operating *gonpa* smoothly.

Later with the consent of *Lama* clan and *Lama Karma*'s family, the *gonpa* converted into a public *gonpa*. Then, it became a common *gonpa* of other clans of the Sherpa rather than single *Lama* clan. It converted into community *gonpa* and other Sherpa also contributed in major maintenance, operation and development of physical infrastructures as well of the *gonpa* in later periods (see Appedix A Picture no. 9).

After some decades, one of daughter of Lt. *Lama Karma* took initiation to declare her son born and living in USA as *Hyangsi tulku* of her father *Lama Karma*. Lt. Thulsik Rinpoche had declared him as *tulku* of his own maternal grandfather (see Appendix A Picture no. 17). The family of *tulku* keeps quiet for few couples of years. Then parents sent *tulku* to study Buddhism to Mindroling *Gonpa* in Deharadoon, India. He completed Seta level of study in the *gonpa*. Then, parents of *tulku* took initiation to do *thiden* ceremony of *tulku* in his late grandfather's *gonpa* (see Appendix A Picture no. 7).

But at that time, the private ownership of *gonpa* was transferred into a public *gonpa* with investment and efforts of the public. The tussle and uneasiness occurred whether to let them arrange *thiden* ceremony in the *gonpa* or not. Finally, *thiden* ceremony took place in the same *gonpa* with participation of the current management team members of the *gonpa* (field study, 2023). Most of the close maternal and fraternal relatives of the *Tulku* participated the *Thiden* ceremony in Mendopake, Solukhumbu. Most of the neighbours also observed the *Thiden* ceremony of new *Tulku*. They received Buddha *dharma* education and *wang* from the *Rinpoche* in the second day of the ceremony.

Normally, the searching out *Hyangsi* of Lt. *Lamas*, confirmation procedures take place before five or six years age of the child. So he tells truth without the influence of parents and others. As per tradition, people believe that there is less chances of imitating and lying in this age. They believe that a child speaks the truth and he or she does not lie. The researcher met Tulku with his spouse both in Kathmandu and Solukhumbu (see Appendix A Picture no. 18, 19). The *Tulku* has been studying higher level of Buddhist studies with Mindroling tradition in India.

There are mainly four schoolss of Buddhism in the Himalayan regions. They are *Nyingma*, *Sakya*, *Kagyug* and *Gelug*. All of these four schools of thoughts have been practicing *tulku* tradition in the regions for centuries. *Nyingma* is the oldest and the root school of thought living in the Himalayan regions. It was introduced by Guru Rinpoche in the early 8<sup>th</sup> century. *Nyingma* followers follow the Mindroling *gonpa* tradition in dealing with the *tulku* tradition.

Nepalese Government has ratified twenty indigenous Himalayan peoples in the country ([www.nfdin.gov.np](http://www.nfdin.gov.np)). They are Siyar, lhomi (Singsawa), Lepcha, Bhote, Topkegola, Dolpo, Mugal, Larke, Lhopa, Walung, Tangbe, Thakali, Tingonle Thakali, Barhagaonle, Marphali Thakali, Sherpa, Byashi, and Hyolmo. Most of them practice the *tulku* tradition for many thousand years in their ancestral lands. Most of these Himalayan communities have been practicing the reincarnated *Tulku* and their *Thiden* ceremonies for generations.

## Chapter Four

### Thiden Ceremony and Rituals of the *Tulku*

#### 4.1. Tradition of ascending the throne of an incarnate lama

After any lama is selected through various methods and evidence, first of all, he and his guardians are invited to the monastery with special respect and reverence. At that time, the monastery organizes a grand welcome program with the significant participation of the monastery, the monastery's board of directors, and the residents of the surrounding area (L. S. Sherpa, Aug. 21, 2024, interview).

After being seated in the monastery's residence, a program is held on the same day to purify and sanctify the *gonpa*. After that, other lamas dress him in new clothes. According to the three astrological calendars, then, according to the Tantric worship method, the head lama of the monastery in the village settlement near the monastery, including almost everyone, is invited to the ceremony (see Appendix A Picture no. 13).

During this time, many important and urgent rituals are performed, including prayers for the longevity of the *Tulku* lama, removing obstacles, and praying that no obstacles should come to the monastery, village, or *Tulku* (see Appendix A Picture no. 11).

After all the necessary rituals and prayers, the monastery expresses its joy and devotion to its former gurus and resolves to serve them and offers a *mandala*. The people present also donate various materials, jewelry, money, some even land, some even donate money to the participating religions.

#### 4.2. *Thiden* ceremony of a *tulku*

*Thiden* is the coronation ceremony of a new *tulku* in the *gonpa* of deceased *Lama*. This is the proper seat and den is to sit in Sherpa language. Therefore, it is a ceremony of coronation of a new *tulku* in the seat of past *Lama*. *Thiden* ceremony formally accepts new *tulku* legalizes new *tulku*'s rights in the *gonpa* as the continuation of *citta* of the past *Lama*. Then, *tulku* takes over the rights and responsibilities of the *gonpa* and society with the guidance and support of senior disciples of previous *Lama*. The study observes and explores the rituals performed during *thiden* and other traditional culture practiced during *thiden* of a *tulku*.

The most practiced rituals consist in *thiden* are following (Field study, 2023):

### **4.3. Pre *thiden* rituals**

Sherpa people offer several rituals before performing the *thiden* ceremony. Some of them are as follows (field study 2022, 2023):

#### **4.3.1. *Sang Serkim***

The team of *Lamas* performs *Sang Serkim* rituals in the home of the *tulku* early in the morning of *thiden* day. It is a mandatory ritual to be performed to purify the house, day and the mind of the *Tulku*.

#### **4.3.2. *Thu sol***

*Lamas* purify *tulku*'s body, mind and speech performing *thusol* ritual. *Thu* is the sacred water in Himalayan Buddhism.

#### **4.3.3. *Jyang wa***

*Lamas* perform *jyang wa* rituals to eradicate the sin performed by *tulku* if any knowingly and or unknowingly. It also aims to clean the dirt from the body of *tulku*. Finally, the rituals turn the body of *tulku* as a sacred and pure body.

#### **4.3.4. Tsering**

*Lamas* offer special rituals, prayers, worshipping, concentration *Dhyanas* and *mani jap*<sup>22</sup> to extend the life span of *tulku*. They perform these rituals for the Tsering- long life of the *tulku*.

#### **4.3.5. Tashi takya, Chhembak, Chhechyang rituals**

Besides above mentioned rituals, *Lamas* offer different rituals hoping to extend life span of *tulku*. Among them, *Tashi takya*, *Chhembak*, *Chhechyang* rituals are the major rituals performed for the good health and long life of the *tulku*.

#### **4.3.6. Mendal**

After offering good luck and long-life rituals, *Lamas* offer *Mendal* to *tulku* to make safe him in all the four directions, including sky, moon and stars.

### **4.4. Thiden Rituals**

In the main day of the coronation, after performing pre *thiden* rituals, people perform the following rituals in the coronation ceremony of a *tulku* (Field study, 2023):

#### **4.4.1. Sang serkim in gonpa**

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<sup>22</sup> Silent *mani*

A team of the *Lamas* perform *sang Serkim* rituals in the *gonpa* in the morning. The people support *gonpa* to decorate *gonpa* with colorful *khadas*, *lungtas*, *chyodhyar*, and flowers to welcome new *tulku* of their past *guru- Lama*.

#### **4.4.2. Warm welcome of *tulku* by the followers**

All the Sherpa men, women, youths and sometimes children stand up in queue in both sides of the main entrance door of *gonpa* towards main *gonpa* hall. They hold *khada* with their two hands and bow towards earth in welcome, devotion and happiness of the *tulku*. The researcher observed that people were standing up waiting to welcome *tulku* in the compound of Sherpa *gonpa* for two hours long time (see Appendix A Picture no. 1). It proves the patience and strong willingness of the people to welcome *tulku*.

#### **4.4.3. Auspicious *chhatra* to *tulku***

Usually, *thiden* performs at very early age of *tulku*. Such as, five to six years age of the child. So *tulku* would be a child while performing *thiden* ceremony. Therefore, *Sebji Lama* carries *tulku* holding with his two hands. Other *Lamas* put shade of special *tashi takya chatra* to the *tulku* to protect him from strong heat, light and negative forces (see Appendix A Picture no. 2). People believe that it will bring lots of good wishes to *tulku*.

#### **4.4.4. *Mi Tsering* welcome *tulku***

*Mi Tsering* is the funny masked persons with special attires. They perform happy dances in front of the *tulku* and they lead dancing to *tulku* towards the *thiden* seat of previous *Lama*. As per Himalayan tradition, people believe that *Mi Tserings* bring good health, prosperity of the *dharma* and long life to the *tulku* (see Appendix A Picture no. 1).

#### 4.4.5. *Shili* dance

Another group of people perform traditional *Shili* dance to welcome *tulku* in the premise of *gonpa*. People sing good luck songs and perform dances in devotion to the *tulku*.

#### 4.4.6. *Tashidelek* song

The group of the Sherpa men and women welcome *tulku* singing *Tashideleg* songs. The song carries good luck, good health, peace, prosperity and happiness to the *tulku*, *gonpa* and the whole universe. In fact the song is offered as the welcome and devotion to the *tulku*.

#### 4.4.7. *Surjyang*

*Surjyang* is the welcome rituals (A. Sherpa, 2080) offered to *tulku* in just in front of the *gonpa*'s main door. *Surjyang* contains a bowl of clean water, flowers, colorful fruits, sweets, *Chhimar* etceteras, which are the symbol of prosperity in the Himalayan Buddhism. The *Sebji Lama* guides *tulku* to sprinkle the *thu*, *chhimar* towards the sky as offerings to the deities.

#### 4.4.8. *Thiden*

*Sebji Lama* takes *tulku* towards main *gonpa*. Then he guides *tulku* to take sit in the *thi* of the previous *Lama*, which is the highest *thi* in the *gonpa* (see Appendix A Picture no. 3). In some cases, the *Guru* and or *Rinpoche* of the same tradition offers special cap of the last *Lama* to the new *tulku* as the dharma crown. Other *Lamas* offer *chhyag* to the deities and the *tulku*. The *thiden* ritual follows the Mindroling tradition and system.

#### **4.4.9. *Sang*, recitation of scriptures and rituals offerings**

The team of around fifty *Lamas* were reciting scriptures after *sang serkim* offerings. They offered monastic musical instrumental orchestral sounds to the deities. The *tulku* also offered hand gestures to the deities from the *thi*. He performed especially *damar*, *vajra* and *tiluk* during the ceremonial worshipping offerings. Other *Lamas* performed all the complete set of monastic instrumental frequently during the offerings (see Appendix A Picture no. 10, 11). *Tulku* also performed as per the signal guidance of his *guru- Lama*.

#### **4.4.10. *Chhyak* of relatives of the *tulku***

The close relatives of the new *tulku* performed *chhyak* to the *konchhog sum*. Then, *tulku* blessed them with placing his quite small right hand on forehead of relatives with blessings.

#### **4.4.11. Offering *mani***

Then, all the *Lamas* offered *mani*, counting *thyanga* and performing deep *Dhyanas* at the time of *thiden* (see Appendix A Picture no. 3).

#### **4.4.12. Other auspicious gifts to the *tulku* by relatives**

Relatives offered full set of fruits to *tulku* first (see Appendix A Picture no. 4). Then, they offered fruits to *konchhog sum* as well.

#### **4.4.13. *Thsog pulsi***

After that, *Lamas* offered set of *tshog* to the deities reciting Guru Rinpoche's prayers.

#### 4.4.14. *Mendal, kusum offerings to tulku*

Close relatives including parents offer *mendal* and kusum to the *tulku*. The relatives offer different types of presents to the *tulku*. Some of them offered idols of *Sangy Chomden De*, some of them offered *pastuk*<sup>23</sup> - any *pastuk*, some offered bunches colorful flowers. Similarly, some of them offered another idol of the deity, some scriptures, *chhorten*, flowers etceteras. They offered ritualistic tools such as *phumba*, silver *takyo*, flooring den, silver *kungbu* and bunch of flowers. In addition, one of them donated a full of tray with ritual tools. Some of them also donated *duna*- varieties of crops filled in colorful bag of fiber (see Appendix A Picture no. 4). Those crops usually contain either seven or five or nine types of crops, which are taken as the symbol of prosperity in Himalayan traditions.

In addition, some relative donated *mani khorlo*, colorful *khadas* also. One relative donated the set of monastic musical bands. One person donated even a hand *khorlo*.

After that, of ne relatives offered *dana* in cash to every *Lama* involving in the *thiden* ceremony. He distributed Rs. 500 to each *Lama*. Another relative donated Rs. 150 to each *Lama* while other relative donated Rs 150 to each *Lama*. Some of them distributed such *dana* to *Lamas* in the envelopes to each *Lama* and do *dhog* along with *khada*. *Lama* returns *khada* to *jindag* with blessings. Each relative offers offerings and *dana* to *tulku* and other *Lamas* turn by turn in queue.

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<sup>23</sup> Sacred scriptures

#### **4.4.15. *Dyasil to tulku***

Finally, relatives offered *dyasil* to the *tulku*. Then they offered *dyasil* to other *Lamas* and visitors respectively.

#### **4.4.16. *Su chya to tulku***

After offering *dyasil* to the *tulku*, relatives offered *suchya* in a decorative silve *takyo* to *tulku*. They also served *su chya* to each *Lama* and visitors in the *gonpa*.

#### **4.4.17. *Syorke offerings to tulku***

The group of relatives performs *syorke* ritual to the *tulku*. In *syorke*, they sing a song in the honor of the *tulku* topping up *suchya* in the *takyo*. All of the relatives wear traditional attire along with beautiful Himalayan *Soma*- cap. They also wear their traditional ornaments as the sign of prosperousness. There were some nine to ten people in *syorke* team. Some of them hold artistic pong.

#### **4.4.18. *Syorke to parents of tulku***

Then they perform *syorke* to parents of new *tulku* in respect of them as they gave birth, took care, feed to *tulku* till to date. And then they are offering their lovely son to *gonpa* for the sake of the Buddha *dharma*. They have great contribution to save the *dharma*.

#### **4.4.19. *Shebru for temdil***

After that, relatives and other follower offer *shebru* dance singing good luck songs for the good fortune to *tulku* (see Appendix A Picture no. 6). They sing song such as, ride *dolmi ri* (the deity of the Himalayas) etceteras.

#### **4.4.20. Good wishes songs by the *Lamas* of the *gonpa***

After *Shebru* dance, the group of *Lamas* sings good luck songs to the *tulku*. They also offer colorful varieties of fruits to the *tulku* as they are meeting him for the first time.

#### **4.4.21. *Gep* of *tulku***

Then *tulku* himself perform *Gep* ritual to all the *Lamas* of the *gonpa*. In *Gep* ritual, *tulku* offers some amount of cash to each *Lama* for their support in the *thiden* ceremony.

#### **4.4.22. *Wang***

In the last day of the *thiden* ceremony the senior Rinpoche from other *gonpa* performs *wang* to the *tulku*, *Lamas* and all the lay followers in the ceremony (see Appendix A Picture no. 8).

#### **4.4.23. Preaching and or words of *tulku***

In some cases, *thiden* of *tulku* happens at old age such as 22/25 years. In that case *tulku* gives preaching to the *Lamas* and the lay follower for the first time with the permission of the senior Rinpoche. In a *thiden* in Mendopake Solukhumbu, the *tulku* expressed his opinion during his *thiden* in the *gonpa* (field study, Baishakh 21, 2079 BS) that every *fungmo* has to be cremated in a clean and carefully way. The *thuti* should also be clean. The

cremation performed with pure and clean mind, there is high chances of coming *kewa*-reincarnation quickly. Further he gives message to *Lamas* about worshipping. Further, he emphasizes on the cleanliness of the mind of a *Lama* while performing *pooja* and preaching. He emphasized to the unity between all four schoolss of Buddhism in the Himalayan regions. The four schoolss are *Nyingma*, *Kagy**u*, *Shakya* and *Gelug*. He convinces that all are *Nangwa* and all are the same (see Appendix A Picture no. 7, 12).

#### **4.4.24. Make Public the *dana* and gifts donated to *tulku* during *Thiden***

The organizer of *thiden* made public the received *dana* in both cash and goods during the *thiden* ceremony. It was taken as the public property of the *tulku* and the *gonpa* society.

#### **4.4.25. Thanksgiving to organizers of *thiden***

The announcer of the ceremony announced the name of the organizers and sponsor of the *thiden*. Finally he thanked to all of them for their support and hard labor to make *thiden* ceremony success.

#### **4.4.26. Organizer's *dana* to *tulku***

Finally, organizers offer *Mandala* and some other *dana* to both new *tulku* and his *guru* Rinpoche. They also donated a set of scriptures to the *tulku*.

#### **4.4.27. *Kwin* to *Lamas***

The organizer *lawas* of the *thiden* ceremony offered *kwin* to all the *Lamas* who were involved in *thiden* rituals and the ceremony.

In this way, a *thiden* ceremony is observed in the Sherpa community. After the *thiden* ceremony, the new incarnated *tulku lama* becomes a spiritual, *dharmik* and public figure in the society.

At the end of the enthronement ceremony, the other chief lamas, the gurus, the new *tulkus*, and the others who were raised during the ceremony, will deliver a sermon to all the community present there and will be given a *wang*. After the lama guru and the *tulku* have conferred the *abhishek*, the attendees will be given a *wang*.

It is a tradition to perform the throne ascension ceremony in the presence of the Tulku's original gurus and many other incarnated lamas. Each ceremony is conducted only by looking at the astrology calendar and fortune telling.

## Chapter Five

### Challenges and Responsibility of the *Tulku*

The incarnate *tulku lama* is seen as the Buddha in the Himalayan Sherpa community. He is considered as the form of the Buddha in the society and is given high respect and position. They aspire to receive numerous blessings, teachings and the best path from the incarnate *lama*. People also believe that the *tulku lama* will remove all of their obstacles and grant them innumerable merits. They also believe that the *tulku* will liberate them from the miserable worldly life. Therefore, there is a high expectation of the community from the reincarnated *tulku* (see Appendix A Picture no. 15).

In such a situation, it is very important that the incarnated lama always has a high level of intellectual knowledge and mastery of Buddhist teachings. He must always remain in the religious morality of the society. Therefore, society always desires a high level of religious and divine ability from an incarnated lama.

There are some textual guidances on how to prepare a Tulku himself to tackle the challenges in his dharmik life and take responsibility to fulfill the expectations of the community. The necessary conditions for the practice of religious life are listed as six blessings circumstances such as:

1. One must know how to direct one's faith arise
2. A Buddha must have appeared in the world
3. He must have taught the doctrine
4. The doctrine he has taught must have remained intact
5. One must be willing to follow his doctrine

6. One must have a good religious guide (Snellgrove, 1967: P. 19)

The *guru* of the Tulku trains a new Tulku from his childhood to be profound as indicated in the textual guidance. As per the tradition, he should know how to direct one's faith arise, he must possess the quality of the Buddha, and he should teach the doctrine of the Buddhism. In addition to that, a Tulku must remain the Buddhist doctrine intact without any distortion. He must also be willing to follow and practice the Buddhist doctrine in his practical life. To achieve all of those skills and perfection, the new *Tulku* must have a *dharmik* lama- the *guru*.

Therefore, an incarnate lama always tries to take responsibility to fulfill such a desire of the community. It seems that such an incarnate lama also has to constantly face the challenge of fulfilling the desires of the society.

## **5.1. Expectation and the opinion of the community from a *tulku***

The researcher has consulted various persons about the role, responsibilities and challenges of the *tulku* in the society. Some of them are as following:

### **5.1.1. Opinion of the people about the *tulku***

The researcher conducted an interview with several people. The people have a special image of the *tulku* in their belief and culture. For them an incarnate lama means that in a previous life, he was ordained a monk and spent many years in monastery education, following the teachings of the Buddha through *Tawa*, *Lopen* to *Khempo*. To become a *Khempo*, after 3 years, 3 months, and 3 days of strict penance and meditation, he must receive initiation from his guru or another higher-level incarnate lama. Those who have attained

purity and proficiency and have embarked on the Buddhist path can become incarnate in a later life. This is how the people learn the difference between becoming a lama and becoming an incarnate *tulku* lama.

The general Sherpa people vastly differentiate between the learned and incarnated *tulku* lama. There is a lot of difference between the incarnation *Tulku lama* and the learned-*Padhi*<sup>24</sup> Lama. Both the incarnate Lama and *Padhi* Lama follow a high level of behavior and conduct *silas* of Buddha's *dharma*. Only after strictly following the path of the path of Buddha *dharma*, can one achieve incarnation in the second or last life, so in the Sherpa society, *tulku* incarnation is given more respect rather than *padhi lama* (G. Sherpa, Sept. 27, 2024, interview).

The Sherpa people believe that a *tulku lama* contributes a lot in society. In fact, since *Tulku*, the incarnation, had already received a wealth of knowledge and education related to Buddhism in his first life, people respect and believe in him as a *Bodhisattva*<sup>25</sup> because he continued to provide the same education even after his incarnation. When the incarnate becomes a *tulku*, he is also given the necessary protection and education related to Buddhism. Since he himself is a *Bodhisattva*, society has been praying for a happy world from him since his childhood, offering *darshan* and receiving blessings from him. He also propagates the teachings of Buddhism, guides the society according to the teachings of the Buddha, and follows the rituals adopted in the society according to Buddhist traditions. He participates in religious and cultural activities, such as worship, marriage, and other rituals (see Appendix A Picture no. 16).

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<sup>24</sup> The learned academic lama.

<sup>25</sup> The person having a high level of *karuna* and willing to be a Buddha in future.

He participates directly in all kinds of activities and ensures their completion, bestows blessings on those present, and encourages and protects Buddhists to follow the path of Buddhism. Society also believes that he has immense divine power, qualities.

Whether it is an *Avatari* lama or a learned lama, they have been serving society as monks and nuns throughout their lives in the protection and promotion of our religion, culture, and tradition. Since they do not have other business, business, or income sources, our society also respects them providing *dana*.

Since the incarnate lama teaches religion and helps protect the Sherpas in their rituals, there is a tradition among the Sherpas to give them as much donation as they can. Similarly, on behalf of the deceased parents, it is customary to offer the clothes and other belongings used by them for their final resting place to the incarnate lama and his monastery. Similarly, it is customary to offer a separate donation, *Dakshina*, for those who are engaged in the worship of the scriptures and other activities in the family (G. Sherpa, Sept. 7, 2024, interview).

### **5.1.2. Opinion of an academic learned Lama about the *Tulku***

The researcher conducted an interview with a learned lama in the Sherpa community- Acharya Lama Sarki Sherpa, Solukhumbu District, Solududkunda Municipality Ward No. 2, Beni Fera. He is currently serving as the Office Chief, Nepal Buddhist Federation.

According to him, in Buddhism, the tradition of taking incarnations began with Vipassi Buddha, and Shakyamuni Gautama Buddha himself came to this world to protect all living beings and nature with peace and stability and to incarnate God in human form. Since then, he has taken many incarnations in this world, and they have completed them during their time. Therefore, incarnation is the process of coming to the next life and continuing the

work of the previous life, which is responsible for the work of that time, and then continuing the work of the previous life.

It is customary to call a person who is born again with the same responsibility and complete determination an incarnation. In this sense, those who have had a strong faith and belief in Buddhism in their previous lives, followed the teachings and path of Gautama Buddha throughout their lives, made tireless efforts, meditated and practiced, and resolved to follow them in their next lives as well, can become incarnations (L. S. Sherpa, Aug. 21, 2024, interview).

In Buddhism, there is a system of three bodies, in which the construction of the *Dharmakaya Lung*, the *Sambhogakaya*, and the *Tulku* are performed by the incarnation.

The third of these is the incarnation of *Tulku*, which is in the system of construction work, according to which there is a tradition of what kind of person can become a *Tulku*.

After tireless meditation and cultivation of the virtues in a previous life, one finally becomes an incarnation before one's disciples and servants, well-wishers, before the time of leaving that life, and thus one takes rebirth according to one's wishes, taking birth in such a place (L. S. Sherpa, Aug. 21, 2024, interview).

### **5.1.3. Opinion of a Sherpa scholar**

The study consulted with a person, who performed researches in the cultural heritage of the Sherpa community. She is Anglami Sherpa from Solukhumbu District, Solu Dudhkunda Municipality, Ward No. 5, Salleri. She shares her opinion on the incarnation *Tulku* tradition in the Himalayan Buddhist community, especially in the Sherpas. According to her, the tradition of incarnation has been deeply rooted among the Himalayan communities

residing throughout the Himalayan region for a long time. The incarnation practice is very prevalent in the *Beyul* regions, such as Pema Kod in Arunachal Pradesh, India, to Demodzong, Khenpalung, Khumbu, Lapchi, Yalmo, Kimolung etceteras. The *Tulku* practice is also found to be practiced regularly among the Himalayan Sherpa communities. Among the Sherpas, one can also find *Bodhisattva* lamas who have taken many incarnations. They have taken up to 15/20 incarnations and are reborn to save the entire Himalayan region, including other inhabitants, and the entire sentient beings of the universe. They are found to be dedicated to their service by taking reincarnations.

It is believed that in order to dispel the ignorance of ignorant people, sow the seeds of knowledge and dharma in them, and free them from the cycle of birth and death, the gods are reincarnated in society as *Tulkus* at various times (A. Sherpa, May 19, 2025, interview).

According to her, in fact, academic lamas have a deep knowledge of Buddhism and have studied Buddhist philosophy for a long time, and they may have a good understanding of it. Incarnated lamas, on the other hand, have received traditional *gonpa* education and may not have had the opportunity to pursue academically in-depth study of Buddhist philosophy. In Sherpa society, it is believed that the reincarnated lamas also possess supernatural divine powers, as they also possess the knowledge of Buddhism of the first-born lama. Therefore, due to the belief that incarnate lamas possess mysterious divine powers, Sherpa society tends to give greater esteem to incarnate lamas than to academic lamas.

#### **5.1.4. Opinion of the parents of a *tulku***

There are four of us in my family. I have two sons. The eldest son is Tulku Tsering Samdup. His *dharmik* name is Gyurme Hisi Gyatso. He was identified by the venerable incarnation Thulshik Rinpoche. Both sons had normal childhoods. But *Tuklu* had an

extremely sharp intellect and always observed everything. He was the type to mingle with lamas who wore a long robe. He would sniff out something to eat and then eat it. He always took care of his younger brother with love and care. The *thiden* event took place on May 2, 2022, at Mendopke Gonpa, Dudhkunda Municipality, Solukhumbu.

After the *Tulku* is identified, I will pay attention to keeping his food, clothes, room, etc. clean and tidy, as instructed by Thulsik Rinpoche. We are proud and happy that *Tulku* was born in our womb. Now he is involved in pooja, offerings to deities, performing *dhyana* and studying Buddhist scriptures. We are very fortunate that our son *tulku* to be able to show compassion be charitable, and pray for the welfare of all humans and animals rather than our own selfish interests.

## 5.2. Opinion of the *Tulku*

The study has consulted opinions of the reincarnated *Tulku* lama about the *Tulku* tradition and the challenges of the *Tulku lama*.

### 5.2.1. Do *Tulku Rinpoche*

In some cases, a *tulku* abandon his monastic life along with his celibacy. Further, he adopts *sansaric*<sup>26</sup> life marrying to woman. Famous Do *tulku Rinpoche* express his opinion that continuous and non-stop pooja, meditations are the boring part of a *tulku*'s life. There is so much to study. He has to live in another world. That is why he tries to be *Lama* but it did not work for him. To be a *Lama* is a wonderful part of the life but it need modification in *vinaya* ([www.aryatara.net](http://www.aryatara.net)).

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<sup>26</sup> *Grihastha* life as people

### 5.2.2. Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche

The famous scholar *rinpoche* Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche express his experience that *tulku* system ruins the precious childhood of a child. It destroys privacy of child. People are eager to know his previous life rather than present life. They do not care about the human feelings, emotions but behave him as a machine. A small child has to work hard to fulfill the high expectation of the people. Further, Rinpoche states his bitter opinion that *tulku* has to sit and act as a statue for hours, how can he face it being a small child ([www.buddhistleakes.com](http://www.buddhistleakes.com)). Of course it would be painful punishment to the child. He has to lose his golden parts of childhood of a person. He missed those golden moments as a human beings.

### 5.2.3. Tulku Lama Konjok Jangbu Sherpa

The researcher interviewed with Konjok Jangbu Sherpa of Fera Lama, Avatari *Tulku* Lama. According to him “My name is Kunjok Jangbu Sherpa Lama. I was born in Beni Phera, Soludkunda Municipality Ward No. 2, Solukhumbu District, in the month of Shravan, BS 2004. I am currently 77 years old. I am not affiliated with any particular monastery, but I am a member of the Kathmandu Gumba. I have been frequently participating in all the activities of the Sherpa monastery in Kathmandu, including worship, rituals, and other activities. I have currently been living in Ramhiti, Ward No. 6, Kathmandu Metropolitan City, Kathmandu District, for the past 12 to 13 years” (K. J. Sherpa, March 19, 2025, interview).

Tulku lama Konjok Jangbu shares his opinion on his past life that “in my previous birth, his name was Lama Pasang Nimiu Lama. At that time, the famous and accomplished lamas after him were Lama Danu, Lama Karma, and Lama Gombu. They were the ones who

kept the books of the dharma, *thyanga*, bell, and *damaru* that he used in his previous birth safely. Three years after his birth and when he found his previous birth home, while he was living in that house, the feudal lords of the village caused them suffering and threw him out. After that, he along with his family left that house and moved to the Bhote settlement in Darjeeling” (K. J. Sherpa, March 19, 2025, interview). The researcher inquires about his present daily life. The *tulku* shares his daily life with the researcher that “When I was 5 or 6 years old, I studied Buddhist education, worship, and consecration at Takshindo Monastery, a large monastery near my village, mainly under the leadership of Tokden Chuldim Lama, who became the head lama of that monastery. After that, I studied for 30 years in Buddhism, including conducting rituals and consecration.

Then, the researcher had the opportunity to study further with the greatest Nyingma Rinpoche, Dipzong Ronpaksha, in Darjeeling and Kalingpong regarding the Abhishek Van Van Terjung. At that time, there was no policy for such studies. Even then, for 6 years, he studied Sambhota script, grammar, literature, Bhot language, and English grammar at the Tyangboche Monastery in Solukhumbu with Kalden Sherpa, a *Gegen* teacher appointed by Sir Edmund Hillary. What happened then was that around 1976, I got the opportunity to study higher education in Sarnath, India for a few years. But due to the geographical environment not being conducive, I was not able to complete my education” (K. J. Sherpa, March 19, 2025, interview). Further, he shares his experience that “Other friends who studied with me at that time included the now famous Lamas Lama Waser Sherpa and Chojor Sherpa. In 1962, when the famous Lama Thulsik Rinpoche was staying at the Chiyong Monastery, I also received initiation into Buddhist teachings and ritualistic worship from him. He studied at Dhaksang Rinpoche's monastery in Kathmandu, related to Buddhism, and then lived in America and Europe for a few years, where he also did Buddhist teachings and worship.

I have been living in Kathmandu for the past 15 years and am busy with Sherpa and Buddhist religious activities. I have not done any other business or profession, we cannot do that. In this way, I will continue to fulfill my responsibilities and duties in the society that protects Buddhism for the rest of my life” (K. J. Sherpa, March 19, 2025, interview). Furthermore, he explains that “When I was a small child of two or three years old, I was identified as an incarnated lama based on the memories I shared with my parents from my previous birth and the examination and confirmation by the senior lamas of the time. Now, I do not remember anything about my past life at that time, even though I remember memories of my past life during my childhood. At the age of two or three, at that time, as others reminded me, they tested me and instilled faith and trust in me. After that, I grew up in that environment and situation, now, I do not remember about my past life” (K. J. Sherpa, March 19, 2025, interview).

Now a day, *Tulku* lama Konjok Jangbu Sherpa is living in Kathmandu with his wife. Studying Buddha *dharma*, offering regular *dharmik* rituals to the deities and performing rituals of the people upon the request have been his daily routine these days (see Appendix A Picture no. 20).

### 5.3. Challenges of the *Tulku*

Himalayan peoples pay their devotion to the *tulku* as to the Buddha himself. People see the continuation of the Buddha nature in a *tulku*. Therefore, a *tulku* has a high level of *dharmik* position in the society. To maintain the high level of faith, respect and devotion of the followers, a *tulku* has the big challenges developing that level of qualities, education and spiritual values himself. To achieve and maintain the constant devotion of people, *tulku* has to

work very hard. The study explores the following challenges of the new *tulku* (Field study, 2023):

### **5.3.1. Learn and study the Buddhist philosophy**

The unique philosophy of the Sakyamuni Buddha has been taken as the highest level of philosophies in the world. It is higher than mountains, deeper than oceans and broader than the sky. It deals and addresses the holistic dimensions of the *citta*- the mind. Therefore, the Buddhist philosophy has been considered as the top level of philosophy that talks all about the subtle mind, phenomenon, cause and it's effect. The new *tulku* has to conquer the challenges of studying and learn these philosophies. Then he has to face the challenges of not only learning but also contemplating those learned philosophy in his own practical life and actions. There is a vast collection of Buddhist philosophy dealing in every aspect of the mind, *karma*, cause and effect, *Sunyata* etceteras. The *tulku* has to adopt those philosophies as his principal of the life.

### **5.3.2. Learn *Dhyana***

*Dhyana* is one of the fundamental elements of the Buddha dharma. The different levels and types of *Dhyanas* develop the levels of purification, perfection and realization in the mind of the *tulku*. So that the next challenge of *tulku* is to learn and practice the Buddhist *Dhyanas* as per Buddha's prescriptions and the Himalayan traditions (see Appendix A Picture no. 14).

### **5.3.3. Learn and follow *sila* and *vinaya***

A *tulku* has to abandon the *sansaric* life and enter into monastic life after the *thiden*. The *silas* and *vinayas* are the lifeline of the monastic life and the Buddha *dharma*. A *Lama* has to follow various *silas* and *vinayas* in his day to day life. There are strict rules in the *gonpa* that *Lamas* have to follow those codes of conducts. These *silas* and *vinayas* regulate the character of *Lama* towards the path of the *dharma*. They prohibit *Lama* from scattering their minds from the leak of the *dharma* and lead to the path of the *dharma*. Therefore, a *tulku* has to accept a big challenge of learning, following and adopting the *silas* and *vinayas* in his day to day life.

#### **5.3.4. Learn rituals and traditions of *Lama* and *gonpa***

The Himalayan Sherpa *gonpas* have been continuing *Nyingma* tradition unbrokenly from the time of Guru Rinpoche. They have also been continuing some elements of *Vonchhyo* from the time immemorial in their territories. Therefore, a new *tulku* who is going to lead the *gonpa* in near future has to learn and practice all the rituals to be offered to their deities in the *gonpa*. He has to learn reciting scriptures, offering hand and other gestures to the deities. In addition to these activities, a *tulku* has to be perfect in using personal ritual tools such as *tiluk*, *dammar*, *vajra* and other ritualistic musical instruments. A *Lama* especially *tulku* has to achieve perfection in counting, using *thyanga* during worshipping, rituals, *Dhyanas* and *chi* checking procedures. Hence, learning ritualistic traditions are also a big challenge a head of a new *tulku*.

#### **5.3.5. Abandon three poisons**

The *raga*<sup>27</sup>, *dwesha*<sup>28</sup> and *moha*<sup>29</sup> are taken as the basic three poisons of the mind and the *dharma* in Buddhism. These are the most negative hindrances in practicing the *dharma*. Therefore, a *tulku* has to abandon these basic three poisons from his character and mind for ever.

### 5.3.6. Adopt *karuna*

The *karuna*<sup>30</sup> is another fundamental quality in Buddha *dharma*. It is taken as the basic but most powerful quality for a practitioner of the *dharma*. *Tulku* is taken as the symbol of the Bodhisattva, who is full of *karuna* towards the creatures of the universe. Therefore, a *tulku* has to develop *karuna* in him towards people, animal and all the sentient beings of the universe.

### 5.3.7. Learn to be an *Amchi*

*So rigpa* is another basic medical and treatment system in the Himalayan Buddhism. It consists of herbal medicines, *tantra*, *mantra*, *Dharani*<sup>31</sup> (*Jantar*) and the ancient healing methods. Sometimes, *Amchi* also use different types of ritual tools alongwith dharmik musical instruments. The master of *So rigpa* and the healer is known *Amchi* in the Himalayan Buddhism. Each and every *tulku* has to achieve basic knowledge of *Amchi*, which connects him to the follower spiritually and the indigenous way of treatments. Then, the level of faith and devotion of the followers towards *tulku* increases simultaneously.

In this context, *Tulku Lama* Konjok Jangbu Sherpa shares his opinion with the researcher that “so far, we have not experienced any significant health or behavioral problems

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<sup>27</sup> Craving

<sup>28</sup> Hatred

<sup>29</sup> Attachment

<sup>30</sup> Loving, kindness, compassion

<sup>31</sup> Act of holding and or wearing the *rhuwang- Jantar* on neck

similarly we have not experienced any negative effects on our social reputation. Similarly, we Lamas do not have any greed, shame, or greed, and we do not encounter any situations where we have to be angry or jealous of anyone. Therefore, our desire and thought is always that society and the country always be good, that everyone is well, that there is health, safety, progress, and progress. We want society to always work with a positive mindset in everything. Everyone should continue to protect and follow the traditional religion, culture, and customs, and I want everyone to continue to do so. Everyone should have compassion and love for the animal world, animals, and nature. Everyone should also focus on social service, including charitable work” (K. J. Sherpa, March 19, 2025, interview).

#### **5.4. The responsibilities of the *Tulku***

After learning and practicing the monastic discipline and *dharma*, a new *tulku* develops the higher levels of degree in Buddhism. He prepares himself to lead the *gonpa* and guide the society in *dharmik* way. People see the reflection of Buddha in a *Tulku* and visit him frequently to receive blessings and accumulate merits (see Appendix A Picture no. 5). So that he has always to maintain the highest level of *dharmik* behavior in his lifetime. After the *thiden* a *tulku* has to take the following responsibilities in the *gonpa* and the societies (Field study, 2023):

##### **5.4.1. Teach the *dharma***

The first responsibility of the *tulku* would be to teach the *dharma* of the Buddha in *gonpa* to his disciples and junior *Lamas*. Teaching *dharma*, preaching scriptures and solving *dharmik* queries of the *Lamas* and the lay followers would also be the responsibility of the

*tulku*. That is why he has to earn top level of merits in the philosophical parts of the Buddha *dharma*.

#### **5.4.2. Teach *Dhyanas, tantra, mantra, dharani (Jantar)* in *gonpa***

*Tulku* has to teach, let practice *Dhyanas, tantra, mantras* and *dharani* of *Jantar* to *Lamas* in the *gonpa*. The new lamas also learn using monastic and ritual musical instruments in the *gonpa* and home. He has to lead the whole monastic community both from philosophical, practical through *Dhyanas* and the ritualistically using *tantras* and *mantras*. A *tulku* has to be a kind of priest in the society

#### **5.4.3. Maintain healthy environment in *Gonpa***

*Tulku* has to take responsibility of mentioning healthy, peace and respectful environment in *gonpa*. To achieve this goal, he has to create such an environment, where everybody follows the monastic *silas* and *vinayas* including himself. If everybody is sincere to their disciplines, the environment of the *gonpa* stays peace and healthy.

#### **5.4.4. Allow and perform *rabchung* to *Lamas* and *anis***

The *tulku*, as the head of the *gonpa* allow and perform *rabchung* to the new *Lamas* and *anis*. He leads them towards *cabdo* and formerly allows their entrance into the *dharma*. He also permits *cabdo* to other lay followers performing *tapche*, giving *dharmik* name and taking oath to the *konchhog sum- triratna*.

#### **5.4.5. Lead the regular and occasional rituals as a priest**

*Tulku* leads the regular and other special rituals in special occasions in and outside of the *gonpa*. Such as in *dharmik* festivals, annual days of the deities people mark *Nyungne* etceteras.

#### **5.4.6. Conserve and develop *gonpa***

As per tradition, *Tulku* has to take responsibility of conserving his *gonpa* in proper way. He has to work hard to take the leadership role and continue the name and fame of the *gonpa* into a new height. He has also to develop *gonpa* to cope with new necessity of *gonpa* and the monastic community. For that, a *tulku* has to collect the financial sources from the society.

#### **5.4.7. Serve and or recommend society as an Amchi**

In most of the Sherpa *gonpas*, *tulku* keeps good knowledge of *so rigpa*. In many cases, sick people visit *tulku* asking to cure of the problem. Then, he prescribes the suitable herbs, *rhuwang*, *sungdi*, etceteras as per the problem of the people.

#### **5.4.8. Checks the *chi***

*Chi* is the astrology. The Himalayan people believe in the *chi* and it's indication in their lives. Therefore, Sherpa often get checked their *chi*, the luck and unlucky, favorable and unfavorable situation of the person. Usually, they prefer to check their *chi* with as higher *Lama* as possible. To get opportunity checking their *chi* with *tulku* is taken as the top most level of the *chi*. So that people try to check their *chi* with *tulku* whenever is possible. In this way, to check the *chi* of the followers is another job of the *tulku*. After checking *chi*, he may

prescribe suitable *kurims*, *pooja* and other solution to solve the problem of the person as shown by *chi*.

#### **5.4.9. Perform rituals on request of follower**

Lay followers pay high level of devotion to the *tulku*. Sherpa people feel blessed by the deities along with *tulku* if a *tulku* performs rituals in their home and or *gonpas*. It is taken as a symbol of prestige and pride for people to invite *tulku* in their *dharmik* rituals. Therefore, *tulku* perform several rituals upon invitation and request of the followers. Mostly, he performs recitation of the scriptures; perform *kurims*, uses *tantra* and *mantras* distributing *rhuwang*, *sungdi* and *rilbu* with mantras and the blessings. Similarly, he bless people putting wither his right hand or a bunch of scriptures on the forehead of lay followers (field study, 2022, 2023). Now, *Tulku Lama* Konjok Jangbu Sherpa is 77 years old. He is not affiliated with any particular monastery, but he is a member of the Kathmandu Gonpa. He has been frequently participating in all the activities of the Sherpa monastery in Kathmandu, including worship, rituals, and other *dharmik* events (K. J. Sherpa, March 19, 2025, interview).

#### **5.4.10. Granting *wang***

**5.4.11.** *Tulku* usually bless people with *wang* of proper permission. Then, people feel blessed with the *wang* of the *tulku*. New *tulku* is not permitted to provide *wang* to the people. First of all, he must receive *wangs* from different high *rinpoches*. Further, he has to learn very details of the want. Then reaching into a merit of level, he would be permitted to provide *wang* to others (see Appendix A Picture no. 7, 8).

#### **5.4.12. Receive *danas***

Himalayan Sherpa people believe that if they could pay devotion to *tulku* while their meetings and contribute *danas* to him, they receive plenty of merits for their liberation (see Appendix A Picture no. 3, 4, 5). Further, they receive lots of peace, prosperity, and happiness in the family, territories and the universe. Ultimately, they have full faith on the positive effect of *dana*<sup>32</sup>, which increases *sukha*<sup>33</sup> in their *sansaric* lives.

The incarnate Lama is considered a very respected and revered person in our religion and society. He is believed to have appeared as a Bodhisattva in our village and society for the benefit of all living beings on the entire earth. Therefore, he is worshipped with great devotion and faith. Society gives him great respect because he is not seen as an ordinary human being but as an extraordinary person.

Therefore, in addition to performing daily regular acts of piety and worship for the benefit of society and living beings, they also play an important role in providing *Abhishek*, *Lung*, *Agam* from time to time, practicing meditation, guiding society in Buddhist knowledge and path, and also taking on the responsibility of the head of the monastery, as well as playing the role of teaching, protecting, promoting and managing the religion (L.S. Sherpa, Aug. 21, 2024, interview).

He plays the role of the chief lama in the activities of the society, from birth to death, who carries special responsibility in the religious activities of the society. Although the society also performs all the rituals and ceremonies from other religious leaders, the arrival of the incarnate lama is attended with greater reverence when possible, in large-scale worship, sermons, etc. Thus, the village lama has traditionally held great importance and role in our Buddhism and society.

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<sup>32</sup> Donation and the charitable works.

<sup>33</sup> Happiness

## Chapter Six

### Result and Discussion

#### 6. Result and Discussion

This study has revealed many new things about the *thiden* ceremony of the incarnated lamas. This study has also uncovered the *thiden* culture and its associated rituals. The results of this study and the analysis thereof are as follows.

##### 6.1. Methods and Tools to Identify the *Tulku*

In the Himalayan regions, the Himalayan people have been adopting various methods to identify the incarnation *tulku* lamas. In such methods, they focus on how to identify who the specific incarnation lama might be. In Himalayan traditions, Himalayan residents share their experiences regarding the special nature of *tulku*.

The behavior of a child born as an *avatar* is very different from that of other normal children. The child's brain is also sharp. He exhibits special behaviors, such as recounting memories of his past lives and talking about relatives from past lives, unlike an ordinary child. The study focuses on how Himalayan communities identify a reincarnated child and how they discover that reincarnated child. This study analyzes the methods used to detect new *tulku* children in practice among Himalayan peoples.

Children who match the deceased lama's characteristics, temperament, and activities are selected as potential candidates for the *tulku*. Sometimes the characteristics of the same lama's incarnation appear in different children or even in more than one child. In such cases, all of those children are considered candidates for the incarnation of the same lama. Lamas write the names of potential *tulku* candidates on pieces of paper, wrap them, then roll the paper into a ball and place it inside a golden urn, then roll the balls well. At the appropriate time and moment, a higher-level lama pulls one out of the spheres, reads the name of the child written on the sphere, and declares him or her the incarnated *tulku* Lama. People call *Serki Bampla Ma Tamk Gyamne* to this method of selecting *tulku*. In this system, the child of the team selects through the lottery. Then he is then taken to the next selection process.

A few years after the death of the great lama of any *Gonpa*, the search for the *tulku* of that great lama begins. During this process, the signs that have come to the attention of the senior disciples of the deceased lama are also considered. Similarly, it is said that other incarnate lamas in the area also receive signs during their meditation as to where and in which child the incarnate lama of the deceased lama from neighboring *Gonpa* will appear. Thus, it seems that there is a tradition of practices that occur during the meditation of senior lamas, indicating which region the new incarnation of a deceased old lama will come from, which *gonpa* he will come to, or whose son he will come to. Thus, a few years after the death of a great lama in a region, the search for his reincarnation begins. At the same time, the process of analyzing the signs received during the meditation of specific lamas in that region or neighboring monasteries also begins.

In this way, by analyzing the signals received during the meditation of a senior lama or a deceased lama's special disciples, a new *tulku* is sought based on those signals, and a child who shares many of the same activities is also made a candidate for the *tulku*.

In some cases, in some Himalayan regions, there is a different practice in selecting the reincarnation child of a deceased lama. Now, even after the death of a senior lama of a *gonpa*, children claiming his incarnation may not come for many years. In such a situation, the senior disciples of the same *gonpa*, i.e. the senior incarnation lamas of the neighboring *gonpa*, use fortune-telling to find out in which direction the incarnation child may be. Thus, it is also found that, according to the signs of fortune-telling, lamas go to look for a new incarnation child and incarnate the child who matches that sign.

Thus, it seems that the Himalayan people also adopted the *Chi- Jokhana* method among their methods of discovering the reincarnated lama.

In some cases, it is common among the Himalayans for signs of the reincarnation of a deceased lama to appear in the dreams of other reincarnated lamas in the same region. In this, the reincarnated lama sees signs in his dreams that this could be the reincarnation of the deceased lama. It is also seen that the very next day or a few days later, if a child is brought for *darshan* by his parents, the child is declared to be the *tulku* of the lama he saw in his dream the previous night.

The incarnation of the deceased great lama of Mendopake Gonpa in Solukhumbu district also appears to have been confirmed through this same dream method. It seems that the new incarnation of the Lama of Mendopake Gonpa was also determined based on this dream. In this context, Mendopake had seen the deceased Lama in a dream.

The next day, he told his assistant that someone was coming to assess the tool today. Moments later, his family, a Sherpa family with a child, arrived at the shrine of Rinpoche. Thulsik Rinpoche declares that the child brought for the *darshan* is the incarnation of the deceased lama he saw the previous night, and gives a written document as proof, written in Sambhota script, stating that the returned document is the incarnation of that lama.

Thus, in the Himalayan region, the method of discovering incarnated lamas also involves paying attention to the dreams of great incarnate lamas.

In the Himalayan region, methods for discovering reincarnated lamas include paying attention to the various sayings of children born in that region related to the deceased lama, or to what the children say. In some cases, more than one child of the same lama will have characteristics of that lama, and more than one child will speak about the deceased lama's nature or even give hints that he is an incarnation. In such a situation, if more than one child matches the characteristics of the deceased lama, the senior lamas of the same monastery collect the statements of the various candidate children.

In this way, in cases where the nature of more than one child matches that of the deceased lama, the higher-level lamas of the same *gonpa* go to meet those children in person. In this way, they meet the child's family and the child to understand his nature and behavior. The child who most closely matches the characteristics of the deceased lama is chosen as the reincarnated lama.

In this way, it is also common to select an incarnate lama by collecting the statements and memories of various children whose personalities match those of the deceased lama, meeting them, and examining them.

In the Himalayan regions, various methods, techniques and tools are used to select the incarnated lama. While identifying the deceased lama's reincarnated child, they also pay attention to some miraculous and divine signs in the child. For example, even though a child is young, he or she bows down at the sight of a Buddha statue, respects Buddhist scriptures, approaches lamas and people wearing Buddhist robes, and prefers to mingle with them.

Children who display behaviors, temperaments, and habits that match the deceased lama are also considered reincarnated lamas.

In some cases, the reincarnated child lama recognizes the deceased lama's family and friends. He also recognizes the horses and dogs in his home *gonpa* and tells them their names. The Himalayans believe that the child carries the memories of the lama's mind from his previous birth with him into his next life, and therefore believe that many of the things in the deceased lama's mind are reflected in the child.

While choosing an incarnation of the deceased lama, the child sometimes recognizes his own items, even if the deceased lama's ritual robes are mixed with other lama's items.

In this way, in the Himalayan regions, it is found that various methods are used to choose the incarnation of their respected deceased lama.

Thus, this study has revealed various ways to detect reincarnated lamas in the Himalayan region. Similarly, this study has also revealed various other ways to identify and identify those reincarnated lama

This study has made a great contribution to the lack of academic studies on the practices of such incarnate lamas, which have been practiced by Himalayan communities for centuries in the Himalayan regions.

## **6.2. Rituals in the *Thiden* Ceremony of the *Tulku***

In the Himalayan regions, Himalayan communities organize special ceremonies for the enthronement of any incarnate lama. Such ceremonies are especially held in the *gonpas* of the former lamas. It is customary to invite other incarnation lamas of the region, as well as

special lamas from other *gonpas*, to such *thiden* ceremonies. Similarly, it is seen that local political leaders and any ordinary devotees of the region are also invited to the ceremony.

This also makes it clear that the incarnate lama who will ascend the throne has special significance. Nobles from all walks of life view the incarnate lama who will ascend the throne as a shadow of the previous lama, and they believe that he also possesses the characteristics of the Buddha.

Therefore, the enthronement ceremony of the incarnate Lama seems to have been treated as a grand, civilized, and religiously spiritual ceremony in that region. It is seen that various types of worship and rituals are performed in preparation for the enthronement ceremony of an incarnate Lama

An attempt has been made here to examine the various rituals performed during the enthronement ceremony of an incarnate Lama by dividing them into two parts: the rituals performed before the enthronement and the rituals performed during the enthronement.

Among the rituals performed before ascending the throne, there is a ritual of offering a gong to purify the area, especially the area where the gong is located, and during the offering, there is a ritual of reciting Buddhist scriptures and chanting various mantras to purify the area.

After that, they perform a ritual called *Thusol*. *Thusol* purifies the body, mind, and speech of the new *Hyangsi* incarnation lama himself. After the *thusol*, the incarnated lama feels, in a way, that he himself has been granted divinity. This ritual seems to have left a great spiritual impact on the community as well.

After that, the new incarnate lama performs the *MiTsering* rituals to wish for a long life and prosperity. After this, the *Ashtamangal*<sup>34</sup> is also offered for the auspiciousness of the lama. This is a concept that the incarnate lama will have good fortune in the coming days and will be able to contribute more to the Buddhist *Sangha* and society.

After that, various other rituals are offered for the bright future of the incarnated lama, such as the *thusol* ritual, the offering of a *chhechhyang*, and the offering of a *mandala*.

These religious rituals are used to purify the newly incarnated lama and make him eligible for ascendance to the throne.

This *thiden* ceremony is performed at the former lama's old *gonpa* if there is a *gonpa*, and in the absence of a *gonpa*, it is also performed at other community *gonpas* in the area.

In the Himalayan region, it is seen that the Himalayan communities perform a very long series of rituals for the ascension of an incarnate lama. Since the main objective of this study is to find out what are the rituals performed during the ascension of the *thiden* throne, it has conducted a detailed study and research on the rituals performed during the *thiden*. Only the major rituals performed for their ascension are discussed here.

This *Sangserkim* ritual aims to bring purification to the area by inviting all the Buddhist community, natural deities, spirits, etc., present in the area, to participate in it. For the ascension of an incarnate lama to the throne, purification rituals such as in the *gonpa* of the previous lama are first performed. This provides a sense of peace and purification for the new incarnate lama to enter.

On the day of *thiden*, the *gonpa* is specially cleaned and decorated, and the *gonpa* lamas, administrators, and local residents welcome the incarnated Lama in a grand manner.

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<sup>34</sup> The eight auspicious signs

During this welcoming ceremony, the avatar lama of the village is welcomed through a ritual. *Michering* is considered a long-lived figure in the Himalayan community. Wearing a specially decorated mask, *Michering* dances and leads the *tulku* into the *gonpa*.

During the same ceremony, a special type of *Sili* dance is also performed to the incarnated Lama and he is welcomed with *Sili* dance. Similarly, to welcome the new incarnation of the lama, the people sing *Tashidelek* songs and offer *surjyang* welcome rituals. After that, the incarnated lama, with the help of an assistant, has the special task of ascending the throne of the previous lama, that is, placing him on the throne. Thus, when a new incarnate lama is enthroned on the throne of a previous lama, the instructions are given by another incarnate lama of that region, and the rites of enthronement proceed according to those instructions.

During the ascension of a new incarnate lama to the throne, the lamas also offer rituals to please the Buddhist community and gods and goddesses through the recitation of various Buddhist texts, chanting various mantras, and performing worship.

At the same time, the parents and close relatives of the new incarnate lama consider the incarnate lama to be more like a god than their own son, as the child of the Buddha and as the incarnation of the previous lama, and worship him.

After that, the relatives offer the new incarnate lama the necessary robes, Buddhist scriptures, *mandalas*, as well as various gold and silver teapots, etc. as gifts for his future as a good religious teacher. In the Himalayan Mahayana Vajrayana Buddhist tradition, lamas are also given valuable items such as gold, silver, lands etceteras. This is seen as a sign that the lama will be able to use such items better and contribute to society as a good Buddhist teacher.

The Himalayan people also believe that the more beautifully decorated the incarnate lama is in the *gonpa*, the better he can impart Buddhist teachings and work for the benefit of all living beings. That is why the communities decorate their *gonpa*, their places of worship, and even the lamas in a special and lavish way.

After that, they offer the new incarnate lama food and drinks such as salt, tea, and *dyashil*, along with relatives wishing the lama a bright future. They also perform traditional Sebru dances, singing songs with wishes for a bright, beautiful, and safe future for the incarnate Lama, wishing him a happy and prosperous life. The songs sung seem to carry messages of good wishes. During this time, the lamas of the *gonpa* also sing a special song to welcome the new incarnate lama, and the incarnate lama also sings a hymn for the old lamas of the *gonpa* and out of respect for the gurus. This is how the *thiden* rituals are performed. After the *thiden* ceremony, the old incarnate lamas and the new incarnate lamas also deliver some words to the community.

The special incarnation lama who leads the *thiden* ceremony also delivers the Buddha's teachings and anoints the devotees present at the end of the *thiden* ceremony. Thus, the enthronement ceremony of a new incarnate Lama is usually performed with special splendid display, ceremony, and spiritual faith. After the *thiden* ceremony, the newly incarnated lama receives official recognition and serves as a continuation of the legacy of the previous lama.

### **6.3. Challenges and Responsibilities of the Tulku**

In the Himalayan region, the incarnated *tulku* Lama is seen as having great respect, honor, and dignity. The Himalayans consider him to be the shadow of the deceased Lama. He is considered by the society as the former Lama. On top of that, it is believed that the new

incarnated *tulku* will have additional divine power. The new *tulku* is seen in the community as a guru with special abilities, divine and miraculous qualities, carrying the power and teachings of the Buddha himself.

In such a situation, it is very important for the new incarnation *tulku* to also possess the same high level of intellectual knowledge, Buddhist teachings, religious faith, and faith. He must always have the ability to fulfill the desires of his devotees. Tulku seems to always be striving to fulfill the intellectual and religious desires of his devotees and society. If a *tulku* is unable to fulfill these needs of society, it is almost certain that the society's respect, devotion, trust and faith in him will gradually erode. Therefore, the great challenge for any incarnate lama is always to provide continuity to the religious, divine beliefs, and traditions of society.

It is said that even when the incarnate *tulku* Lama fails to live in modesty and virtue according to Buddhist religious tradition, his reverence for him is decreasing. For example, he lies, drinks alcohol, commits adultery, etc. Similarly, in the Himalayan Buddhist tradition, only the incarnate Lama appears to be conceived. If he marries, the community will abhor him. It is said that the respect he had when he was an unmarried monk will gradually erode. Such an incarnated *tulku* also has the great responsibility of maintaining a high level of divine, *dharmik*, and moral balance in society.

## Chapter Seven

### Conclusion

People have a deep level of spiritual faith on *tulku*. Therefore, *tulku* is not only *Lama* and or guru of them. In addition, he is the spiritual deity, who carries elements and quality of spiritual deities. He is the symbol of deity. So that they respect and pay devotion to *tulku* as to their deities. Therefore, the position and hierarchy of *tulku* is taken more than a human being. In fact, Himalayan people believe that *tulku* is the living Buddha so he can provide salvation to the followers. He has the spiritual, miraculous powers to take them out from the ocean of *dukha*. Finally, he could guide them to the final destination of the Buddhists that is *Dewachen*.

*Tulku* is taken as an ambassador of spiritually powerful deities. He is respected as the bridge between deities and the lay followers. People believe that the deities hold the power who can take them to *Dewachen*. Therefore, people die to receive even a short span of moments that could be shorter than 15 second time. People travel from remote regions for weeks to meet a *tulku* even for a short moment hoping that he is the powerful supernatural *Lama*, who can rescue them from the ocean of *dukha*<sup>35</sup>. Finally he would be very *karuna*, kindness to *dukhi* followers. And then, he considers to freed them from *dukha* and take them to high realm. That is *dewachen*- the *sukhawati bhuwan*, the land of Amitava Buddha-*Hopame*. The present study finds the main reason of the deep devotion of the people to the *tulku*.

However people have committed some sort of sin in their long life, they also believe that by touching of *tulku* on their forehead, their sin would be faded out and washed from their body and mind. So that people also die to meet a *tulku* even for a short moment like a flash of lightening. Besides these causes, there is another main reason that lay Sherpa people would like to meet *tulku* frequently as many times as they could. That cause is the blessings

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<sup>35</sup> Unsatisfactoriness

of the *tulku*. People believe that they receive lots of merits from the *tulku*. As the result, they receive the blessings to receive prosperous and wealthy lives ahead.

In this way, the study finds that there is the deep imprint of *tulku* in the culture, lifestyle and mindset of the entire Himalayan peoples. The Himalayan peoples worship to Uddiyanian Buddhist scholar Padmasambhava as the reincarnation of the Buddha himself. Therefore, they call him *Sangye Ngi pa*- the second Buddha. He had promoted Buddha *dharma* in the entire Himalayan regions on early 8<sup>th</sup> century defeating to *Von* followers. Therefore, the Himalayan peoples worship him as the reincarnated *tulku*- *Sangye Ngi Pa*. People also worship to his consort Khen Dolma as the *tulku* of *Tara* deity.

In this way, Himalayan peoples see the reflection of the Buddha in the *tulku* even these days. They have strong belief on *tulku* that the *citta*- mind he is carrying is the continued *citta* of the Buddha. The *tulku* system is the live Buddhist tradition among entire Himalayan communities. Therefore, a *tulku* has to develop divinity powers in him by studying, practicing, contemplating the Buddhism very seriously and carefully. His every step must be distinct from the people. His dressings, eyesight, speech, practical behaviors, ritual performances must be of highest levels. These behaviors should be very profound to maintain the faith and devotion of the followers towards a *tulku*. In concluding the findings of the study, the major finding of the present study are as following:

Himalayan peoples including Sherpa people adopt different type of methods to identify the new *tulku*. They use varieties of tools to select the *tulku*. Sherpa adopt varieties of indicators to confirm the *tulku* candidate such as *Gola* system, *dhyana*, checking *chi*, indication of the dream, collections of the story of the candidates, visits of high level of Lama etceteras.

The Himalayan Sherpa people have been practicing different types of tools and indications in identifying the new *tulku* of the past *Lama*. A person who has been proven to be an incarnation as mentioned in the Buddhist scriptures by completely controlling his/her *sila* and vow in a previous life and undergoing rebirth can become an incarnation *tulku*. They adopts especially, the divinatory symbols, Verifications of the divinity power of *tulku*, the possession of the previous *Lama*, Selection and recognition of the objects, recognize previous *Lama*'s friends, the sharpness of the mind etceteras.

The study has explored different types of rituals that Sherpa people perform as the prior to begin the *thiden* ceremony. The most popular pre *thiden* rituals explored as *Sang Serkim*, *Thu sol*, *Jyang wa*, *Tsering*, *Tashi takya*, *Chhembak*, *Chhechyang* rituals, *Mendal* etceteras.

Exploring the rituals in the *thiden* ceremony in the Sherpa community is another objective of this study. Therefore, the study has explored several rituals that Sherpa people, especially Lama and the kin relatives of the *tulku* perform during the *thiden* ceremony. The most popular rituals performed during the *thiden* ceremony are explored as *Sang serkim* in *gonpa*, warm welcome of *tulku* by the followers, Auspicious *chhatra* to *tulku*, *Mi Tsering* welcome *tulku*, *Shili* dance, *Tashidelek* song, *Surjyang* etceteras. Then the supporter guide lama takes *tulku* towards *Thiden*- to take sit in the *thi* of the previous *Lama*. Then Sherpa people offer other mandatory rituals for the *thiden* ceremony such as, *Sang*, recitation of scriptures and rituals offerings, *Chhyak* of relatives of the *tulku*, offering *mani* and other auspicious gifts to the *tulku* by relatives, *Thsog pulsi*, *Mendal*, *kusum* offerings to *tulku*, *Dyasil* to *tulku*, *Su chya* to *tulku*, *Syorke* singing offerings to *tulku*, *Syorke* to parents of *tulku*, performing *Shebru* for *temdil*, Good wishes songs by the *Lamas* of the *gonpa*, *Gep* of *tulku* to other lamas and his guru etceteras. Then, the guru lama of the *tulku* provides *wang* to people, preaching the Buddha *vacana* and also a few words of the new *tulku*.

The third objective of the study is to explore and analyze the challenges to be faced by the *tulku*. Therefore, the study has analyzed the challenges faced by a *tulku* in the society. The study has also traced the responsibilities of a *tulku* in the Sherpa society.

In this way, the study has achieved the objectives of the study by exploring the tools and methods to identify a new *Tulku*, *thiden* rituals and the challenges and responsibilities of the reincarnated *tulku* Lama.

The present research has made various knowledge contributions fulfilling the gaps of research in the field of *thiden* ceremony in the research community. The present study has found a deep research gap in reincarnated *tulku* and *thiden* ceremony in the Himalayan regions. Thus, finding out the research gap is a contribution to the knowledge. Similarly, the study has made a significant knowledge contribution exploring the reincarnated *tulku* systems and the rituals in the *thiden* ceremony of Sherpa in the Himalayan regions.

In this way, the present research fulfills the gaps in the study by exploring the unexplored *tulku* and *thiden* tradition in the Sherpa society. In this way, the study has fulfilled the commitment to fill the gaps in the study. The present research has contributed to the academic world as well as to the Sherpa community.

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#### नेपाली भाषा:

खतिवडा, सोमप्रसाद (२०७९)। नेपालको सांस्कृतिक सम्पदा। पैरवी बुक हाउस प्रा लि।

दाहाल, खतिवडा, सोम प्रसाद (२०७७)। अनुसन्धान पद्धति। पैरवी बुक हाउस प्रा लि।

मल्ल, शिवराज श्रेष्ठ (वि सं २०७७)। मानव यात्रा। नेपाल प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठान।

रायमाझी, रामचन्द्र (२०७६)। नेपाली कला, वास्तुकला र प्रतिमालक्षण। एसिया पब्लिकेसन्स प्रा लि।

रिजाल, नारायण प्रसाद (वि सं २०७०)। बुद्ध धर्मको संक्षिप्त परिचय। बौद्ध दर्शन। व्योमकुसा बुद्धधर्म संग्रह।

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## Appendix - A      Pictures



Picture no.: 1      People along with *Mi Chhiring* welcoming *Tulku, Sherpa Gonpa*, 2023



Picture no.: 2 New Tulku on seat, Lama holding *chhatra* to Tulku, Sherpa Gonpa, 2023



Picture no.: 3 Tulku on *Thi*, Relatives of Tulku offering presents, 2023



Picture no.: 4 Relatives in queue to offer presents to *Tulku*, 2023



Picture no.: 5 People receiving blessings from newly coroneted *Tulku*, 2023



Picture no.: 6 Relatives performing *Shebru* dance to honor *Tulku*, 2023



Picture no.: 7 Newly coroneted *Tulku Rinpoche* (in lower *thi*) preaching to the followers, Sang Sang Rinpoche, *Guru of Tulku* on higher *thi*, Mendopake Gonpa, Solukhumbu, May 2, 2022



Picture no.: 8 Sherpa people receiving wang from Rinpoche- Tulku, May 2, 2022



Picture no.: 9 Gonpa of Tulku Gyurme Hisi Gyatso, Mendopake, Solukhumbu



Picture no.: 10 Performing *dharmik* rituals to the *thiden* of Tulku Gyurme Hisi Gyatso, May 2, 2022



Picture no.: 11 Lamas performing *dharmik* rituals during the *thiden* of Tulku Gyurme Hisi Gyatso, May 2, 2022



Picture no.: 12 The local people are listening to the preaching of the high Rinpoche Lama, May 2, 2022, Mendopake, Solukhumbu



Picture no.: 13 Other Lamas and neighboring Sherpa people in the *thiden* ceremony, May 2, 2022



Picture no.: 14 the researcher in Solukhumbu, research fields, 2022



Picture no.: 15 the researcher receiving blessing from *Tulku Sang Sang Rinpoche*, Narayansthan Gonpa, 2025



Picture no.: 16 Researcher (right) with Mr. Gelje Lama Sherpa, President of Sherpa Gonpa, Bouddha, 2025



Picture no.: 17 Thrulshik Rinpoche grants recognition certificate to new Tulku Tsering Samdu Rinpoche



Picture no.: 18 the researcher, Tulku Tsering Samdu Rinpoche, spouse of researcher and mother of Tulku (left to right)



Picture no.: 19 the researcher, Tulku Tsering Samdu Rinpoche and spouse of researcher (left to right)



Picture no.: 20     *Tulku Konjok Jangbu Sherpa* (sitting on higher *thi*/seat), performing rituals in a *Ghewa* in Shimaltar Sherpa Gonpa, Kathmandu, 2025.

## Appendix - B     Questionnaires

The responses have been taken by interviewing, and focus group discussions among the Sherpa people of the Solukhumbu district.

### **Questionnaire to group discussion**

1. Can you tell us something about the traditions of Tulku-Autari Lamas?
2. How do you know that the *Tulku-Autari* Lama is this child?
3. What kind of worship, rituals, and traditions do you perform when a Tulku ascends the throne?
4. If you know about Sherpa Tulkus, please tell us something about their names, places, and *gonpa*?

### **Questionnaires to the people of Buddhist communities**

Gelje Lama Sherpa, Ramechhap District Umakunda 2 BhandarGhyangtar. He is the current Chairman of the Sherpa Service Center, BoudhaTusal.

1. How do you know the *Padi Lama* and the *Avatari Tulku* Lama, that is, what are the differences between them?
2. Do you treat the Padhi Lama and the Tulku the same or differently?
3. Who do you think *Tulku* is and what contribution does he make to society?
4. When you make a donation, who do you want to give to, a simple lama or a villager, and why?

### **Questionnaires to an academic learned Lama**

Acharya Lama Sarki Sherpa, Solukhumbu District, Soludkunda Municipality Ward No. 2, Beni Fera. He is currently serving as the Office Chief, Nepal Buddhist Federation.

1. According to the Lama tradition in Himalayan Buddhism, what is an avatar and what kind of person can become and make an avatar? Please explain clearly.

2. Please tell us about the methods for identifying new avatar communities.
3. Can you also explain what the role of an incarnated lama is in society?
4. Is there a tradition of ascending the throne of an incarnate lama, and if so, how is it performed?
5. Is there a tradition of ascending the throne of an incarnate lama, and if so, how is it performed?

### **Questionnaires to the Sherpa scholar**

Anglami Sherpa from Solukhumbu District, Solu Dudhkunda Municipality, Ward No. 5, Salleri.

1. You are a scholar of Buddhist education in the Himalayan Buddhist community and the Sherpas. Could you tell us something about the incarnation *Tulku* tradition in the Himalayan Buddhist community, especially in the Sherpas?
2. How do you see the academic lamas and the reincarnated lamas in society? How have you seen them treated

### **Questionnaires to the Sherpa *Tulku***

Konjok Jangbu Sherpa of Fera, Avatari *Tulku* Lama

1. Please tell me your current name, place of residence, date of birth, and the name of your gonpa.
2. You are in the incarnation of *Tulku*. At what age did you experience the incarnation, how did you feel about it, and do you remember anything about it?
3. How have you been spending your daily life since you left your village?
4. What are the eases and difficulties you experience in the life of an incarnate lama?
5. Can you tell me something about your previous life's long practice?

### **Questionnaires to the parents of the *Tulku***

Mr. Dawa Tenzing Sherpa, Sallery, Solukhumbu

1. How many people are in your family? And which son is incarnated?
2. How did you find out that your son was an incarnation?
3. Did you find any differences between your incarnation son and your other son in their natural behavior?
4. Where and how did you get *Tulku's Thiden* done?
5. How did you take care of him after you found out that he was a *Tulku*?
6. How does society view the parents of the *Tulku*?
7. Have you got any problems or dissatisfaction with being a son incarnate *Tulku*?

## Appendix - C      List of major Interviewees

| S.N. | Name of the person            | Position                                        | Organization / Address                                  |
|------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | Gelje Lama Sherpa             | Chairman                                        | Sherpa Service Center,<br>Sherpa Gonpa                  |
| 2    | Acharya Lama Sarki Sherpa     | Office Chief                                    | Nepal Buddhist Federation                               |
| 3    | Anglami Sherpa                | Acting Campus<br>Chief, Academic<br>coordinator | Lumbini College of<br>Buddhism and Himalayan<br>Studies |
| 4    | Tulku Konjok Jangbu<br>Sherpa | Avatari <i>Tulku</i> Lama                       | Thamsere, Solukhumbu                                    |
| 5    | Dawa Tenzing Sherpa           | Parent of a <i>Tulku</i>                        | Salleri, Solukhumbu                                     |
| 6    | Chechang Lama                 | Lama                                            | Thuptenchholing Gonpa                                   |

## Glossary

Sherpa

English

|                     |                                                                                                                      |
|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>ani</i>          | Female <i>bhikshuni</i> (nun)                                                                                        |
| <i>beyul</i>        | The sacred secret hidden place to practice Buddha <i>dharma</i> in the hard times, prescribed by Guru Padmasambhava. |
| <i>cabdo</i>        | Formal entry into the <i>dharma</i> . <i>Sharanagamana</i>                                                           |
| <i>chhimar</i>      | Mixture of baked barley flour and butter                                                                             |
| <i>chhortens</i>    | stupa                                                                                                                |
| <i>chhyag</i>       | prostration                                                                                                          |
| <i>chi</i>          | astrological prediction                                                                                              |
| <i>chyodhyar</i>    | prayer flags                                                                                                         |
| <i>damar</i>        | <i>damaru</i>                                                                                                        |
| <i>dorje</i>        | vajra                                                                                                                |
| <i>dyashil</i>      | sweet butter rice, taken as the symbol of fortunate (sacred sweet rice)                                              |
| <i>fungmo</i>       | the dead body                                                                                                        |
| <i>gonpa</i>        | the <i>sangha</i> . Buddhist monastery- <i>vihar</i> .                                                               |
| <i>hyangsi</i>      | again came form of the previous lama- <i>avatari</i>                                                                 |
| <i>jindag</i>       | sponsor, supporter                                                                                                   |
| <i>khadas</i>       | piece of fabric as the symbol of garlands of pure snow                                                               |
| <i>konchhog sum</i> | <i>Triratna</i> - Buddha, <i>dharma</i> and <i>sangha</i>                                                            |
| <i>kora</i>         | circumambulation                                                                                                     |
| <i>kurims</i>       | rituals performed to eradicate hindrances, negative forces and accumulate merits.                                    |
| <i>kwin</i>         | dana and or wages                                                                                                    |
| <i>lungtas</i>      | prayers flayers                                                                                                      |
| <i>mani khorlo</i>  | turning wheel of Mani                                                                                                |
| <i>Mi Tsering</i>   | people having long life quality                                                                                      |

|                                    |                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Nangwa</i>                      | the people who look inside ( <i>citta</i> - mind) but not outside. It indicates to the Buddhist people who look inside- inside of their own <i>citta</i> - mind. |
| <i>nyungne</i>                     | performing fasting with prayers                                                                                                                                  |
| <i>phumba</i>                      | precious vas with numerous <i>ratnas</i>                                                                                                                         |
| <i>rabchung</i>                    | entry of new <i>lamas</i> and <i>anis</i> in the <i>gonpa</i>                                                                                                    |
| <i>rhuwang</i>                     | sacred threads, <i>Jantar</i> in Nepali                                                                                                                          |
| <i>Sangy Chomden De</i>            | Sakyamuni Buddha                                                                                                                                                 |
| <i>Serki Bampla Ma Tamk Gyamne</i> | <i>Gola pratha</i> system Nepali                                                                                                                                 |
| <i>shebru</i>                      | Sherpa folk dance                                                                                                                                                |
| silver <i>takyo</i>                | traditional silver cup holder like a plate with stand                                                                                                            |
| <i>So rigpa</i>                    | Himalayan healing, herbal and treatment system- <i>Amchi</i> tradition                                                                                           |
| <i>sungdi</i>                      | the sacred threads                                                                                                                                               |
| <i>syorke</i>                      | traditional formal addressing to <i>lamas</i> , in-laws relatives and relatives in the form of song                                                              |
| <i>tapche</i>                      | cutting hair                                                                                                                                                     |
| <i>tashi takya chatra</i>          | auspicious umbrella embalmed with eight auspicious signs                                                                                                         |
| <i>thi</i>                         | special seat                                                                                                                                                     |
| <i>thi</i>                         | the seat, throne                                                                                                                                                 |
| <i>thiden</i>                      | coronation ceremony of a <i>Tulku</i> .                                                                                                                          |
| <i>Thu</i>                         | sacred water                                                                                                                                                     |
| <i>thyanga</i>                     | meditating beads                                                                                                                                                 |
| <i>tiluk</i>                       | traditional bell                                                                                                                                                 |
| <i>tshog</i>                       | sacred food and drinks                                                                                                                                           |
| <i>tulku</i>                       | reincarnation form and/or rebirth of previous Lama                                                                                                               |
| <i>wang</i>                        | blessings, <i>abhishek</i> , and or the permissions from higher Lama                                                                                             |

*yang si* came again. Returned again the passed away Lama in the form of new child