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Tsens are Gods: The Impact of Deity Beliefs and Rituals on the Experiences of Health and Subjective Well-being in Gawaithang Village, Bhutan

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Abstract

This research investigates the impact of deity beliefs and rituals on health and subjective wellbeing in Gawaithang village, Bhutan. The study explores how the villagers' spiritual practices are interwoven with their daily lives and health experiences. Drawing on participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and autoethnography, the research highlights the significant role of 'tsens' (deities) in shaping social norms and communal identity. It suggests that the deity rituals, deeply rooted in villagers' spiritual beliefs, are essential for both physical and emotional healing for villagers. The findings indicate the importance of understanding local ritual practices and beliefs to appreciate the holistic nature of health in Gawaithang and possibly beyond. This research contributes to the anthropology of religion and medical anthropology by providing insights into the interplay between spiritual beliefs, cultural practices, health-seeking behaviours and well-being.

Keywords: Deities' ritual in Bhutan, spiritual beliefs, subjective wellbeing.

Introduction

“*Tsens* are gods if they are propitiated, and they can turn to devils if neglected”, a 53-year-old lay Buddhist practitioner stated. In Gawaithang village, *tsens* (local deities) are revered as worldly gods who fulfil desires for wealth and health. Villagers of Gawaithang emphasised that these deities must be propitiated through rituals to ensure that prayers are answered. Rituals are defined as culturally prescribed symbolic actions, behaviours, or ceremonies performed by individuals or groups within a society (Smith, 2004). Rituals serve as emblems of cultural identity, which is an intangible thread that unifies people in a society (Hicks, 2010). Deity ritual is one of the distinct ritual practices deeply ingrained in the life of Bhutanese, influencing their beliefs and daily existence (Allison, 2019). Deity ritual transcends mere expressions of faith, acting as conduits for cultural values and worldviews, and influences individual health and collective well-being (Kuyakanon & Gyeltshen, 2017; Allison, 2019; Ura, 2000). Health and well-being are often used interchangeably, but there are subtle distinctions. Health simply means the absence of disease in a person (Kleinman, 1983). Anthropology is interested in understanding how different societies have different healing practices and belief systems regarding health (Stoner, 1986; Pelto & Pelto, 1997; Moerman et al., 1979). Well-being, on the other hand, focuses on subjective perceptions of satisfaction and fulfilment in various aspects of life, reflecting an individual's holistic experience and happiness within their cultural context (Suh, 2000).

For this research, Gawaithang village is the specific site of focus to contextualise the concepts of health and wellbeing in relation to the deity ritual and beliefs. This village, located in Sarpang dzongkhag, is a newly formed village, housing migrants from different regions in Bhutan. Each migrant is rooted in their distinctive regional origins and culture. This makes the village an interesting place to examine how migrants from various regions who have lived together for almost two decades have come to form a harmonious religious community. The customs and beliefs of the villagers are centered on '*tsens*' (deities), which this project will show, are vital to the overall health and well-being of the inhabitants. This study investigated how the villagers' daily lives and health experiences are impacted by deity rituals. Moreover, the research aimed to shed light on the role of deity worship and rituals in defining the experiences of the well-being of individuals and the

community in Gawaithang by emphasizing the relationship between religion, culture, and health.

In Gawaithang, deities are significant from both a cultural and spiritual perspective. It affects several aspects of villagers' lives, such as their subjective sense of fulfilment and health-seeking behaviours. Regular rites and rituals reflected the villagers' belief in the healing and protective abilities of deities. These customs were ingrained in the social fabric and transcend simple religious observances. Consequently, these practices have an impact on how the villagers perceive and deal with health issues. Thus, this research focused on how deity veneration contributed to the health and overall well-being of the Gawaithang villagers in Bhutan. This treatise on deity beliefs and rituals in health and wellbeing aims explicitly to unearth how deity rituals and practices are interwoven into everyday life in Gawaithang village.

Research Question

How do deity rituals and veneration influence the experiences of health and well-being of Gawaithang villagers?

Literature Review

The anthropology of religion is interested in rituals that enrich human cultures and societies (Atkinson, 1992; Hicks, 2010; Whitehouse & Lanman, 2014). These rituals hold cultural and symbolic significance, which serve as the threads that bind people to their own societies (Turner, 1961). A subset of these rituals involves the worship of deities, where the spiritual and worldly realms intersect (Babb, 1988). These practices not only express faith but also transmit cultural values and worldviews (Babb, 1988). This literature review critically examines the anthropological discourse on rituals, deity veneration, and their impact on the wellbeing of individuals and the community.

Deity Veneration in the Bhutanese Context

Scholars in Bhutan have identified a connection between environment, socio-cultural milieu, and spiritual beliefs (Pommerat, 1994; Ura, 2000; Allison, 2019; Montes et al., 2020). According to Ura (2000), the existence of deities inhabiting Bhutan's ecological landscape dates back to Buddhism's introduction in the 8th century. Karma Ura's (2000) seminal work provides a historical foundation for understanding deity belief in Bhutan. Ura traces the roots of this tradition to Guru Rinpoche's arrival in Bhutan and his effort to subdue the evil spirits, transforming them into guardians of Buddhist dharma. This historical account illuminates the influence of deity veneration on Bhutanese culture.

Further exploration of the belief in deities is found in Pommaret's (1994) and Allison's (2019) work, where they delve into the role of deity beliefs in the preservation of the environment in Bhutan. Moreover, scholars describe a complex interplay between local livelihood practices, state policies, and the influence of cosmological deities on Bhutan's sacred landscape (Kuyakanon & Gyeltshen, 2017; Montes et al., 2020). By unravelling this complex relationship, this research explores how deity rituals and practices can potentially contribute to physical and mental well-being. All in all, the series of literature helped in informing deity rituals and belief's significance in this health and wellbeing research.

Deity Beliefs and Rituals in Health and Well-being

The tradition of deity veneration and rituals in the local communities' health has been a focal point of scholarly attention in religious studies (Rountree, 2002; Cohen, 1998; David, 2012). However, only a few researchers have touched on the deity rituals and their impact on health and well-being. One example is Pelzang's (2010) research on religious practice and hospitalization in Bhutan, which emphasizes how cultural beliefs and practices, including deity rituals, influence the understanding of health and illness among Bhutanese. In this context, Pelzang's findings illustrate how patients and their families turn to religious rituals, such as deity veneration, during times of illness to instil hope and enhance patient's physical well-being. This practice underscores the deity rituals' role in the local communities' health and well-being.

Also, Lungten et al. (2020) delve into the relationship between cultural perceptions of illness

and individuals' choices when seeking healthcare. These empirical explorations within the Bhutanese context offer insights into the practical aspects of how these deity rituals are conducted and how they can contribute significantly to the healing process. Similarly, Tashi's (2020) research into Bon religious practices in the Goleng community sheds light on how rituals involving deities contribute to an individual's well-being. He emphasises that these rituals are vital for maintaining health and combating illness, restoring balance, and easing suffering to improve overall well-being. Similarly, Kuyakanon and Gyeltshen (2017) highlight how deity ritual serves as a means to strengthen the bond between the community and the mountain deity, Khobla Tsen, thus positively impacting the community's material well-being.

Likewise, Chhoki (1994) explored the folk cultures of Tobesa village, focusing on practices like appeasing deities for worldly needs. These practices, while diverging from dominant religious values, show the significance of addressing laypeople's material well-being. Chhoki's (1994) ethnography offers insight that enriches the discussion on the role of deity rituals in fostering material well-being, shedding light on how such practices extend beyond spiritual realms to impact individuals' daily lives and material prosperity. Through their respective ethnographic studies, Tashi (2020), Kuyakanon and Gyeltshen (2017), and Chhoki (1994) contribute valuable insights into the interplay between religious rituals, community well-being, and the material aspects of daily life in relation to deities.

In examining the literature on the role of deity veneration and rituals in Bhutan, a clear research gap is the specific exploration of the direct impact of these practices on health and well-being from an anthropological standpoint. Most of the literature focuses on the historical, cultural, ecological, and territorial aspects of deity beliefs and rituals. The literature provides a solid foundation for understanding the historical origins and cultural significance of deity veneration in Bhutan and its ecological dimensions. Although previous research, like Pelzang (2010) and Lungten et al. (2020) touch upon the relationship between deity rituals and health, their primary focus lies outside the anthropological lens.

Even the anthropological exploration of deities by Tashi (2020), Kuyakanon and Gyeltshen (2018) and Chhoki (1994) focused on material well-being, overlooking its impact on the health and well-being of the villagers. These studies, while briefly acknowledging the influence of deity beliefs

on illness perception and health-seeking behaviours, do not extensively delve into the in-depth examination of how these beliefs and rituals are intertwined with cultural practices, social dynamics, and individual well-being within the Bhutanese context. Therefore, the existing literature provides foundational insights but falls short of providing a comprehensive anthropological exploration into the direct correlation between deity rituals and holistic health experiences within Bhutanese society.

Rationale

This research addresses a notable gap in studies of how deity rituals and beliefs influence health and well-being experiences in the Bhutanese context. It contributes to the discussion in the anthropology of religion by offering insights into the intersection of religion and health (Mckinley, 2023). This intersection is worth exploring because it adds an in-depth understanding of how rituals not only impact physical health but also the subjective construction of fulfilment and satisfaction in individual's lives (Levin, 2009). This paper offers a holistic viewpoint that extends beyond just physical health and goes on to include psychological and emotional aspects. Exploring these aspects is important because they significantly influence overall well-being and quality of life. This intersection explores the subjective elements of human life, examining how individuals perceive satisfaction, happiness, and fulfilment. It also provides insights into how cultural meanings are embedded in religious rituals, enriching academic discussions on a range of cultural viewpoints, including beliefs, practices, and norms. In doing so, it adds depth to the discourse on the role of religion in influencing societies and individual lives.

Research Methodology

Participant observation and semi-structured interviews were used in this study. These methods were central to understanding the connection between deity rituals and their impact on health and well-being in Gawaithang. These methods complemented each other in providing a thorough understanding of how the villagers' daily lives and health experiences were shaped by their spiritual practices.

Participant Observation

Drawing from the rationale which emphasises the importance of lived experiences, participant observation was an apt method for this research as it allowed me to understand the lived experience of Gawaithang villagers. It is a valuable method as it provides deeper insights into a community's practices, beliefs, and behaviours, offering a holistic understanding of their way of life (Musante & Dewalt, 2010). To understand the connection between deity rituals and their impact on health and well-being, I have employed the research method of participant observation during the two months of intensive fieldwork in Gawaithang village. The decision to use participant observation was rooted in my familiarity with this village. Since my early years, I have been an observer - knowingly or unknowingly - of various rituals and ceremonies that took place in the community. I have witnessed the rituals accorded to local deities and the communal spirit that pervades the village during these occasions. Such observations have prepared me for an immersive participant observation experience I have undertaken during my fieldwork.

Semi-Structured Interviews

I have employed semi-structured interviews as the primary interview method for my ethnographic study. This approach is characterised by open-ended questions that foster comprehensive discussions rather than curt responses (Bernand, 2017). This method was suitable for my research since it allowed me to prepare questions and adapt based on their responses. It also created a comfortable space for my participants to express their knowledge about deity rituals, allowing me to delve into detailed conversations. During the interviews, I created a comfortable and open environment for my participants. I encouraged them to share their knowledge and insights about deity rituals without feeling pressured or constrained. This approach enabled me to engage in interesting conversations with villagers of different ages and backgrounds, capturing a diverse range of experiences and viewpoints.

Sampling Strategy

I used the purposive sampling method to select participants for my ethnographic interview in Gawaithang. Gawaithang is a village formed recently in the early 2000s by migrants from different regions of Buddhist Bhutan. Observing and comparing the ritual practices of villagers from different regional backgrounds was significant for comparison in their deities' beliefs. It has given insight into the varied religious traditions and their commonality. Selecting participants who deeply understand deity beliefs and rituals within the local context was crucial. Therefore, I purposefully selected individuals from the community who have actively engaged in or witnessed such rituals.

Ethical Considerations

Before commencing my research, I diligently obtained informed consent from all participants. This process involved a complete explanation of my research objectives and the data I intended to collect. In line with ethical standards, verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants, including the relevant authorities such as *gups*. I extended this practice to taking field notes during informal conversations. Before every interview and data collection activity, I provided detailed briefings to the research informants, explaining my study's objectives and broader purpose. The recording of interviews was carried out with the explicit consent of my informants. Regarding confidentiality and anonymity, I allowed participants to choose between anonymity and recognition, providing them with a comprehensive understanding of the potential consequences of their decision. In the case of anonymous participation, I used pseudonyms to safeguard their identities, while those who choose to be identified, had their actual names and information used appropriately.

Data Findings and Analysis

Gawaithang Village

It is important to note that the formation of this village was recent. It was not until the 1990s that

Gawaithang village (Kaflay¹) was officially recognised as a village. Under the leadership of His Majesty, the Fourth King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, Bhutanese from different regions resettled in Gawaithang. His Majesty bestowed land *kidu*² to disadvantaged and poor Bhutanese people. Around this time, ‘one nation and one people’ policies were implemented. For this reason, people from across Bhutan were given land in the southern region in places like Gawaithang village. The village housed migrants from regions like Sakteng, Bikhari, Punakha, Tsirang and Zhemgang.

In Gawaithang village, deity rituals play a crucial role in shaping social norms, values, and interpersonal relationships. Rituals such as offerings and prayers serve as symbolic expressions of gratitude, entreaty, and communal solidarity. Additionally, the presence of deity rituals in Gawaithang village transcends mere religious observance. It permeates various aspects of daily life, including health-seeking behaviours, and community dynamics. While the respondents I interviewed may have resettled in Gawaithang village from diverse regions of Bhutan, they continue to uphold traditional beliefs and practices associated with local deities from their places of origin. The villagers maintain a strong sense of communal identity through their collective engagement with the deity rituals of their village of origin. Each family or individual propitiates their respective deities, which they brought with them from their original regions before resettling in Gawaithang. However, these diverse practices coexisted harmoniously within the village, contributing to its cultural vibrancy.

Influence of Deity Rituals on the Concept of Health and Illness

In the existing literature, researchers explored how the deity ritual in Bhutan is related to entreating invisible entities for worldly concerns such as fertility and bountiful crops (Kuyakanon & Gyeltshen, 2017; Chhoki, 1994). In Gawaithang, beliefs in deity rituals deeply influence how villagers approach health-related challenges and illnesses. The influence of deity rituals on health-seeking behaviours is pervasive and multifaceted, shaping various aspects of villagers' responses to illness. These beliefs are not just about spirituality and religious faith. They shaped the villagers' decisions when faced with illness or misfortune.

¹ Kaflay is the old name for Gawaithang village.

² It is a customary gift from His Majesty to the Bhutanese people.

Deity Rituals

Deity rituals hold great cultural and symbolic significance in the village. They serve as a means to keep an individual 'healthy' without any illness. Deity rituals vary in the Gawaithang given the different roots and origins of the villagers. Since Lhotshampa members were the earlier inhabitants, they were the first ones to recognise and worship the deities that were believed to reside in/near the village. They propitiated the deities in the clearing (See Figure 1) with a *paw* (Shaman) to initiate and perform the ritual. According to the stories shared by my respondents, the *paw* often goes into a trance during this propitiatory ritual. Then, he communicates with the deities in the spiritual realm, often entreating blessings for all the villagers. This type of ritual is conducted once a year.

The Concept of Health and Illness

Having explained the significance of deity rituals in Gawaithang, it is crucial to understand how these rituals intertwine with the villagers' perceptions of health and illness. The belief in deities and their rituals not only defines their spiritual practices but also shapes their understanding of health. Anthropological theories on health and illness emphasise the cultural construction of these concepts (Comaroff, 1979; DiGiacomo, 1992; Kleinman, 2020). They argue that these concepts are socially embedded phenomena shaped by cultural beliefs and practices. Within this framework, illness is analysed through a holistic lens, which includes the reflection of social, spiritual and environmental factors (Kleinman, 2020). Similarly, concepts of health and illness among Gawaithang villagers are largely influenced by their belief in deities and timely rituals. Illness is seen as a disruption in the harmony between villagers and local deities. The 53-year-old lay *chospa* stated:

If you don't pray to them, you will get sick. So, if he is not appeased, he will give *neyzhi* (sickness) to you and your cattle, and nothing will go according to your plans.

You will lose your wealth, the water in the village will get too scarce and the villagers will succumb to starvation. So, you should pray and perform rituals to make amends and restore balance through offerings and prayers.

Similarly, the 60-year-old Lhotshampa *paw* of the village expressed the importance of the deity's ritual to individual and communal health.

The ritual is very important to me as a *paw*. It is very important to the point where I will die for not conducting the ritual. Not only my life, but even the lives of my children, family and the village as a whole will be at risk because I am the one to mediate between the real and spiritual realms. The retribution will deteriorate my health, consequently leading to death. Subsequently, the deadly sickness in the village will occur as retribution for upsetting the deities.

The most interesting case of health deterioration as a result of angering deities was that of my informant Tsenda Dorji. He is currently a teacher in training and my cousin's spouse. He is visually impaired with little vision. He recounted his experience thus:

When I started to lose my vision, I visited the hospital. During that time, the doctor said that I had an eye problem due to a genetic disorder. After a few years, I went and sought the blessings of the great *lamas*. Their divination explained that my problem was due to the failure to appease my local deities. My parents and great-grandparents used to appease those local deities but due to negligence, when we came from the village to the urban area 30 years ago, we neglected that. This is why the local deity is unhappy, and which is why I am suffering from such a problem. Now to share that in detail, it proves that science didn't work in my case. If I am suffering from the genetic disorder of my situation, someone or everyone in my family should suffer. It is not true because, in my family, no one is suffering from visual impairment. If genetic, then we all have to have this genetic problem. This made me believe that my illness was caused as a consequence of forgetting the deity. That is why sometimes science cannot explain everything. Right now, the little vision I have is due to the timely rituals I conduct to propitiate my birth deities in my village, Bikhar.

He continued to share how he then started to believe in the spiritual cause of his impairment, and now unfailingly conducts rituals to propitiate his birth deities. These responses suggest that the cause of illness is often traced to the deities in their respective village. They attributed misfortunes and illnesses to the displeasure of these deities caused by neglect. Based on my research, many villagers still rely on deity rituals as a form of healing and protection. Participants stressed the importance of

rituals in seeking blessings and protection from local deities. This perspective aligns with the findings of Pelzang (2020), who argued that cultural beliefs such as deity rituals play a significant role in shaping the understanding of health and illness among Bhutanese. Even in the context of my research, angering deities or failing to propitiate is considered a cause of illness. The villagers perceived that their health was protected by deities and upsetting them would bring adverse consequences.

Deity Beliefs and Rituals in Subjective Well-Being

Subjective well-being encompasses individuals' perceptions and evaluation of their own emotional, psychological and physical states (Fabian, 2022). Mathews and Izquierdo (2008) contend that 'well-being' is influenced by cultural, social and individual factors, which reflects the holistic understanding of human experiences and expressions of fulfilment. Similarly, this study indicates that deity rituals function as a form of emotional and psychological support during times of illness. The ethnographic evidence collected for this project offers valuable insights into how cultural beliefs and practices intersect with individuals' approaches to maintaining well-being and coping with illness.

Tashi's (2020) exploration of pre-Buddhist religious practices touched upon the influence of Bon religion such as deity's rituals in the *Goleng* community. He emphasised the spiritual and subjective dimension of well-being in the context of the deity's ritual. Tashi (2020) elucidate that deity rituals in Bon beliefs are perceived as essential mechanisms for maintaining health and combating illness. This ritual further restores balance and alleviates suffering to enhance an individual's overall well-being. Similarly, Kuyakanon and Gyeltshen's (2022) study of *tsensol* ritual focuses on the relationship between ritual and the material well-being of the community. The authors explored how ritual functions as a conduit for renewing the bonds between the community and the mountain deity, *Khobla Tsen*.

Drawing parallels between these studies and my research findings, it is evident that deity rituals play a significant role in shaping well-being. My research similarly shows that deity rituals

play a significant role in bringing well-being in the form of peace and assurance. This study also reveals that deity rituals serve not only as pragmatic measures for physical healing but also as sources of emotional and psychological support during times of illness. One of the most striking findings from the study is the significant reliance on deity rituals as a form of healing and protection. Villagers deeply believe in the efficacy of these rituals in promoting health and warding off sickness. For instance, the 45-year-old woman Pema Lhadon recounted, "Whenever someone in the village falls sick, we immediately perform rituals to appease the local deity, believing it will bring about healing and restoration. Only after the ritual, I feel a sense of security under the refuge of local deity". This underlines the significant trust placed in these rituals as a means of addressing health concerns within the community. Similarly, a 19-year-old college student shared her perspective on deity rituals and their impact on her well-being.

Whenever I feel sick, be it stomachache, head pain, chest pain and other sickness, I always tend to call my mother. Since my childhood, she always took care of my health and complaining to her about my sickness made me believe that she would find a cure. So, when I call her to talk about my sickness, the first thing she does is to ask a local monk to conduct *serkhem* to the deity. Since I was born in Gelephu hospital, my birth deity is Durshing tsen. I have to go to Nima Lhakhang to prostrate and offer for my birth deity. After that, I feel at peace knowing the protective deity will take away all my pain. Even if the pain is there, I would feel calm after this offering and prayers to the protective deity.

This suggests that these rituals are not only believed to have tangible effects on health but also provide comfort and reassurance to individuals and their families. The rituals provide a sense of hope, comfort, and reassurance to individuals and their families. They feel reassured that their life will be guided and protected by the deities. Interestingly, failure to conduct the deity ritual is believed to disturb the mental state of an individual. For example, Karma Pelzang, a village *tshogpa*³ and a lay *chospa*, shared insights on how failing to perform rituals has implications on mental well-being.

³ Tshogpa is a leader of a chiwog (Village).

During the early 2000s, we just migrated here to Gawaithang. I was married to your *Abi* (maternal grandmother's sister) and we had four children. It was difficult to feed all my family. We used to live in a small hut made out of bamboo. We were raising cattle and our time was always spent on preparing cow fodder, herding them to the forest for grazing, and bringing them back to their herd in the evening. We barely had time to eat. My children had to work from the early age of two and three since both of us were busy trying to work. We also forgot to conduct the annual ritual given how we were busy with work. Moreover, we were also poor to even afford to feed the guests if we were to conduct the ritual. One time, my youngest daughter was severely sick, and she was vomiting during the night. I went to a local astrologer. He said that we have failed to propitiate the local deities of our village of origin. Immediately, I was eaten by guilt because my negligence nearly cost my daughter's life. The next day, I borrowed money from *Gup Sonam* and conduct *lama kencho* (propitiatory ritual for deities) for the protection of our families. Since then, I felt obliged as the head of the family to always appease the deities and conduct rituals. With the fear of losing my family again, I never forget to conduct rituals.

On the same note, most of my respondents shared how delaying or forgetting to conduct deity rituals makes them conscience-stricken. For instance, the village *paw* said he conducts the deity ritual in his own home after the village has stopped doing it in the forest clearing near the perceived citadel of the deity. He fears deities might bring catastrophe upon villagers. For the benefit of the whole village and his role as village shaman, he conducts the ritual at his own house. These examples show how belief in the efficacy of rituals is tangled with a sense of obligation and fear. Consequently, it drives villagers to conform to these practices as a means of safeguarding their physical and emotional well-being. Also, the failure to perform rituals can evoke feelings of guilt and insecurity. This shows the psychological impact of these practices on individual and collective well-being.

However, there are some significant differences between my research and other writings on deity rituals in Bhutan, especially in the argument put forth by Kuyakanon and Gyeltshen (2022). My research contributed to the study of well-being related to the absence of illness. It delved into the

practices and beliefs that influence people's feelings and perceptions about health and well-being related to deities. Kuyakanon and Gyeltshen (2022), in contrast, emphasised the material well-being of the deity ritual such as ensuring good harvests. Their study focuses on the tangible outcomes of this ritual, especially agricultural prosperity. Their emphasis overlooked the well-being of the individuals in health and only focused on material gains. However, the findings of this study delineate the less tangible but important role of these rituals in providing emotional security during times of sickness.

It is essential to recognise the constraints of each perspective. While Kuyakanon and Gyeltshen's (2022) research provides valuable insights into the tangible benefits of the rituals, it overlooks the psychological and emotional aspects of the rituals. On the other hand, my focus on the subjective dimension of well-being may not fully capture the material realities that shape people's lives in rural Bhutan as it was not the focus of my research. Nonetheless, both these studies highlight the folk practices and the daily lives of villagers. Through the lens of the deity ritual and beliefs, it showed the daily workings, communal aspirations, and individual desires. These rituals are not isolated occurrences but are intricately linked to the cultural fabric of village life.

All in all, the influence of deity rituals on health-seeking behaviours in Gawaithang village is deeply ingrained and multifaceted. Cultural beliefs and practices, intertwined with supernatural elements, inform villagers' decisions regarding medical care, while traditional rituals provide both physical and emotional support during times of illness. Understanding these dynamics is essential for delivering culturally sensitive healthcare interventions and fostering holistic well-being within the community. This study adds depth to the understanding of how rituals shape human behaviours, social dynamics and perception of health. This also shows the interplay between spiritual beliefs and everyday life practices. Furthermore, this research has the potential to contribute to the broader anthropological discourse on rituals, spirituality and health.

Conclusion

This research offered an analysis of how deity rituals influence social, cultural, and health behaviours in Gawaithang village. The findings indicate how important these rituals are to maintaining

harmonious relationships within the community. These customs are not merely religious rituals, but they are an integral part of village life. The practice of deity rituals promotes a strong sense of communal recognition and cultural continuity among the villagers despite their different backgrounds. This study also underlines how important it is to understand local cultural customs to gain insight into the holistic aspect of health and well-being in Gawaithang village.

Furthermore, the findings of the study suggest how closely the villagers' beliefs about their health relate to their spiritual beliefs. In addition to being considered spiritual activities, deity rituals are also vital tools for emotional and physical healing. The villagers' spiritual beliefs shape their views of well-being and influence their health-seeking behaviours. These customs guide their actions when pursuing health, integrating both traditional rituals and modern medical practices. This method demonstrates the community's all-encompassing approach to health and illness management. The stories gathered for the study highlight the rituals' psychological consolation and certainty, which greatly enhance the villagers' general well-being. This dual approach to healthcare raised the possibility of the need for culturally competent health interventions that honor and incorporate customs.

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