



Exploring Tibetan Medicine as a Route to a Good Life, with Special Focus on Sikkim

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Abstract:

Sowa Rigpa or Tibetan medicine is an ancient healing science and the oldest extant medicinal practice. Practitioners of this indigenous knowledge, referred to as amchi or menpa, employ various diagnostic methods. A central aspect of Tibetan medical practice is the emphasis on medicinal herbs, which are valued for their natural proliferation across the globe and efficacy in treating diverse ailments. Rooted in Buddhist theory and practice, this medical tradition addresses not only the treatment of diseases but also the healing of social, mental, and physical disorders. It promotes longevity and well-being, underscoring the significance of altruism. This study examines the historical treatment methodologies of Tibetan medicine and their significance, utilising photographs of medical thangkas, indigenous tools, and plants with medicinal benefits from the Himalayan region of Sikkim and explores the relationship between the patient and the Tibetan doctor.



Keywords: Tibetan medicine; Amchi; Diseases; Medicinal Plants; Tools; Sikkim.

Introduction:

Sowa-rigpa or Tibetan medicine represents an ancient and extensively documented indigenous healing practice, recognised as the oldest extant systems in the world. The practising of this tradition is evident in various regions, such as Tibet, China, Bhutan, Nepal, Mongolia, the Himalayan regions of India, Kalmykia, Buryatia, and some countries in the West (Gurmet, 2004). Despite its long history, the origin of *Sowa-rigpa*¹ has been a topic of debate among scholars for centuries. While some argue that it originated from the teachings of Buddha, others believe it to be a translated work of Chinese medical texts, and others attribute it to Indian medical texts (Clifford, 1994). However, scholars of the Bon faith argue that *Sowa-rigpa* was copied from the Bon medical text, called *Bumshi* (Ga, 2014).

The birth of *Sowa-rigpa* have been the subject of various perspectives from different scholars, yet the majority of writings concur that it originated from the Buddha teachings known as *smān la* or medicine Buddha. It is understood that the first person to receive this teaching from Buddha was Jivaka, who subsequently passed it down to Chandranandana. Chandranandana in the eighth century then conveyed the teaching in written form to Vairochana of Tibet. During that point, Tibet was ruled by King Thrisong Deutsen, and Vairochana translated the work into Tibetan and offered

¹ '*Sowa-rigpa*, ancient science of medicine, is also known as *chheyi-rigched*, (life sustaining knowledge), i. e. knowledge of human body, causes of disease, diagnosis of disease, prevention and elimination of disease' (Phuntsog, 2006).



the text to the King and Yuthok Yönten Gönpö², the elder. Later, when Guru Padma Sambhava visited Tibet, he concealed the text in Samye monastery. Only after the middle of the eleventh century that the text was retrieved from the monastery by Trapa Ngonshe, who then passed it on to Khuton Tarmatra and the latter gave it to Yuthok Yönten Gönpö³ the younger (Clifford, 1994). Yuthok Yönten Gönpö the younger was also recognised as the father of *Sowa-rigpa* due to his considerable input in the composition of the book *Gyu-zhi*⁴. This book encapsulates the significance of various Asian medical systems, including Ayurveda, Greek, and Chinese, and is considered the oldest, most complete, and one of the world most reliable health-care system (Gonpo, 2015).

In Sikkim, the tradition of *Sowa-rigpa* has a history dating back to the 17th century, following the establishment of the Namgyal Dynasty by three Red Hat Sect lamas or monks, namely Lhatsum Chhembo, Sempah Chhembo, and Rigdzin Kunzang Chhembo (Gurung, 2011). According to Saul Mullard, ‘this was a significant achievement of Lha btsun chen po in Sikkim, as he introduced key religious traditions, and was the first lama to introduce the Tibetan medical

² ‘Yuthok Yönten Gönpö, the elder was regarded as an almost legendary figure, made a remarkable impression in his youth during a gathering of foreign physicians held at Samyé Monastery under the patronage of the king. In his later years, he travelled extensively to India and other regions in search of advanced medical knowledge, which he subsequently introduced to Tibet. Yuthok was the composer of many a work on medicine and founded the first medical college in Kongpo.’ (Gyatso, 2009).

³ ‘Yuthok Yönten Gönpö, the younger was a descendant of the elder Yuthok, was born in the eleventh century. His role in developing and establishing medicine as a distinctly Tibetan scientific tradition was exceptionally significant. He was especially influential in the propagation of *Four Tantras* (or, according to many commentators, its composition)’ (Gyatso, 2009).

⁴ ‘“Four Tantras”, a complete and profound multi-faceted text, encompassing the unabridged theories and practices of Tibetan Medicine’ (Gonpo, 2017).



system in Sikkim’ (Mullard, 2019). But this practice was restricted to the royal family, as these Tibetan doctors served as personal physicians for the royal family and the aristocratic section of Sikkimese society (McKay, 2007). But Formal education was initiated following the establishment of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology in 1957 at Gangtok, marked by the laying of its foundation stone by His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama and its official inauguration by then Prime Minister of India Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru in 1958 during the reign of *Chogyal* (‘righteous king’ or ‘dharma raja’) Tashi Namgyal. The primary objective of the Institute was to promote research in Buddhist religious teachings, along with teachings in geography, astrology, linguistics, iconography, history, and medicine (British Library, EAP880/1/1/240, <<https://eap.bl.uk/archive-file/EAP880-1-1-240>>). And it was only on 24th August 2017, BSRMS (Bachelor of *Sowa-Rigpa* Medicine and Surgery) course was started in Sikkim (sources: <<https://namgyalinstitutesikkim.org>>).

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to examine and interpret Tibetan medicinal practices in the Himalayan state of Sikkim. This research is primarily grounded in fieldwork conducted across various regions of Sikkim and Dharamshala, where primary data were gathered through comprehensive and semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were selected as the principal method of data collection because of their ability to provide both flexibility and depth, enabling respondents to articulate their experiences, beliefs, and practices in their own words while maintaining a thematic focus aligned with the study's objectives. In addition to interviews, observational methods were employed during fieldwork to document the practical



aspects of Tibetan medicinal practices, including herbal medicine preparation and practitioner–patient interactions.

This study ensured authenticity and reliability by cross-verifying oral testimonies with available secondary sources, including books, scholarly articles, historical records, and existing literature on Tibetan medicine and Himalayan indigenous knowledge systems. Ethical considerations were rigorously adhered to throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to conducting the interviews, and the cultural sensitivity associated with Indigenous medicinal knowledge was respected during documentation and interpretation.

Thus, the study combines qualitative fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and textual analysis to develop a comprehensive understanding of Tibetan medicinal practices in Sikkim and their broader socio-cultural significance within the Himalayan region.

Brief Background of the Tibetan Medical text *Gyu-zhi* or Four Tantras

Four Tantras, also known as the *Gyu-zhi*, constitutes one of the foundational texts of traditional Tibetan medicine, serving as an instruction manual for the practitioners of Tibetan medicine. These practitioners, referred to as *amchi* or *menpa*⁵ (Hofer, 2014). Hold a significant position in

⁵ ‘...In colloquial Tibetan usage, the term for a physician is *Emchi* or *Amchi*, a word believed to have been borrowed from the Mongolian language. The same term is also found in thirteenth-century Turkish sources, although the precise direction of its transmission across medieval Central Asia remains uncertain. The word used in the written scriptures in classical Tibetan is “*sman pa*” from “*sman*” medicine’ (Rechung, 1989).



disseminating indigenous knowledge. The Four Tantras are systematically organised into 156 chapters, as follows: The initial volume, designated as the Root Tantra (*rTsa-rgyud*), comprises six chapters. The subsequent volume, termed the Explanatory Tantra (*bShad-rgyud*), is structured into 11 sections and is further subdivided into thirty-one chapters. The third volume, identified as the Oral Instruction Tantra (*Man-ngag rgyud*), encompasses eight branches and 15 categories, culminating in ninety-two chapters. The final volume, known as the Subsequent Tantra (*Phyi-ma-rgyud*), comprises four compendia and is divided into twenty-seven chapters.

Diseases and Diagnosis in Tibetan Medicinal Practices

The third and fourth chapters of the Root Tantra text explore the foundations of the disease and its diagnosis. As a result, this sub-topic will briefly discuss the various causes of disease and the diagnostic methods outlined in the *Gyu-zhi* text in a formal and appropriate manner.

1. **Diseases-** The *Gyu-zhi* text identifies three primary causes of the disease: hatred, affection, and delusion, which ultimately form into phlegm (*baekan*), bile (*tripa*), and wind (*loong*) disorders. Moreover, more severe and hazardous disorders can arise from improper diet, harmful spirits, seasonal changes, and lifestyle. These disorders enter the body through six different pathways and reside in the upper, middle, and lower parts of the body, such as the brain, gallbladder, liver, waist, and hip regions. Over time, these disorders developed into nine deadly diseases



and cause twelve harmful effects. These disorders are ultimately divided into two fractions according to their nature: cold-like water in nature and hot-like fire in nature (Gonpo, 2008).

2. Diagnosis- Diagnosing illnesses is a complex process that requires a thorough evaluation of various factors. This involves examining a patient's urine and tongue, as well as their pulse and medical history, including diet and lifestyle (Gonpo, 2008). The following is a detailed description of the diagnostic methods used:

1. Analysing of urine and tongue- According to *amchi* Tsultrim Kalsang, *amchis* diagnosed diseases and disorders by analysing urine sediment, colour, cream formation, and odour (J. Bhutia, personal communication, December 05, 2023). In particular, a rough, dry, and reddish tongue is said to indicate a *loong* disorder, whereas a smooth, wet, thick, and whitish tongue is indicative of a *baekan* disorder. Furthermore, a light and thick yellow coating on the tongue suggests a *tripa* disorder (Gonpo, 2008).
2. Examination of Pulse- According to *amchi* Tsultrim Kalsang, pulse examination is conducted by inspecting both sides of the patient's wrist using the tip of the ring, middle, and index fingers of both hands of the *amchi*. To examine the right hand wrist of the patient, *amchi* employs the tip of the left hand, and *amchi* employs the tip of the right hand to examine the left hand wrist of the patient (J. Bhutia, personal communication, December 05, 2023).
3. Questioning the patient- *Amchis* diagnosed diseases by enquiring about patients' medical history, diet, and other relevant factors. Based on this information, the appropriate



treatment was provided. For instance, if a patient experiences pain in their joints, hips, or waist when they are hungry, or if they have an unrestful thinking, there is possibility of them be suffering from a disorder called *loong*. On the contrary, if a patient experiences fever, post-digestion pain, or a headache after consuming hot, spicy food, then they may be suffering from a disorder called *tripa*. Finally, if a patient experiences symptoms such as vomiting, difficulty in food digestion, or appetite loss after eating oily and heavy food, then they may be suffering from a condition known as *baekan* (Gonpo, 2008).

Figure 1.1 presents an image of a diagnostic *thangka*, which is based on the fourth chapter of the root of diagnosis in the Root Tantras, *Vaiduraya sNgon po*. This *thangka* addresses three primary stems: analysis, examination, and questioning. From the first stem, analysis, branches pertaining to the tongue and urine are depicted, each bearing three leaves, resulting in a total of six leaves. The second stem, examination, gives rise to branches representing *loong*, *tripa*, and *baekan*. The *loong* branch contained 11 leaves, the *tripa* branch had 7 leaves, and the *baekan* branch comprised 11 leaves, culminating in a total of 29 leaves. In total, the scroll features 3 stems, 8 branches, and 38 leaves. The roots are depicted in red, stems in yellow, branches in carmine, and leaves in black.

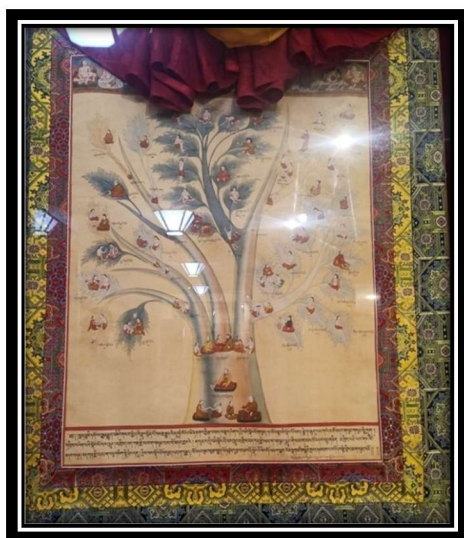


Fig.1.1: Image of Diagnosis *Thangka*. Photo taken by the author at Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, in Gangchen Kyishong, Dharamshala, on 23/08/2022.

The notion of “a good life” within Tibetan medicine is deeply rooted in Buddhist philosophical traditions. In this framework, good health is understood not simply as the absence of illness, but as the attainment of physical and mental balance, self-discipline, and inner harmony. Physical well-being, mental stability, and moral conduct are all interrelated. Crucially, Tibetan medicine posits that a good life is contingent on balance, compassion, moderation, and harmony with nature. Through preventive care, ethical conduct, and spiritual awareness, *Sowa Rigpa* offers a timeless vision of human well-being that remains highly relevant in the modern world. The diagnostic and healing methods of Tibetan medicine are profoundly connected to the notion of living a good life. Unlike the purely material definitions of success, Tibetan medicine defines a good life through moral conduct, social harmony, and spiritual awareness. An individual may



possess wealth but still experience mental unrest. Consequently, Tibetan medicine teaches that happiness is dependent on balance and wisdom rather than excessive desire.

Treatment in Tibetan Medicinal Practice: Special Reference to Medicinal Plants and Tools

In *Sowa-rigpa*, for treating medical problems in humans there are four primary methods: diet, lifestyle, medication, and external therapies (Gonpo, 2008). However, this study focuses specifically on medicinal plant-based treatments.

Based on the idea of Tibetan medicinal practices, plant based treatment are well treasured owing to their natural occurrence. These remedies are identified through a process of trial and error and observation by the *amchis*, who are traditional Tibetan doctors. However, before they can be utilised, there are seven important principles that must be followed to use them in a final medicinal form. These principles include the plant's growth in its natural location, proper collection time, removal of harmful substances, proper drying, used at the appropriate time, correct amount of compounding, and mixture of compatible herbs (Gonpo, 2015). Once these principles are fulfilled, medicinal substances are converted into a variety of forms such as paste, pills, or powder (Hofer, 2014). The type of medicine used to treat various ailments depends on its taste, which can be sweet, wet, blunt, bitter, or cool. For instance, medicines with sweet, wet, blunt, bitter, and cool tastes are used to treat *tripa* problems, while those with rough and light, bitter and sharp, sour, and hot tastes are used to treat *baekan* problems, and medicines with smooth, heavy, salty, oily, sweet, and sour tastes are used to treat *loong* problems (Gonpo, 2008).



Figure 1.2 presents the image of the Treatment *thangka*, which illustrates the fifth chapter on treatments from the Root Tantra, *Vaidurya sNgon po*. The *thangka* primarily focuses on four principal stems of treatment: dietary regulation, behavioural practices, medicaments, and external therapies. The first stem, relating to dietary treatment, is divided into six branches concerning food and drink associated with the three bodily evils. It includes ten leaves representing *Loong* food and four leaves for *Loong* drinks; seven leaves for *Tripa* food and five for *Tripa* drinks; and six leaves for *Baekan* food along with three leaves for *Baekan* drinks, amounting to a total of thirty-five leaves. The second stem, which concerns behavioural practices, extends into three branches corresponding to the three evils, each containing two leaves, thereby totaling six leaves. The third stem addresses the nature, taste, and medicinal properties involved in expelling the bodily evils through medicaments. This stem comprises fifteen branches, including eighteen leaves on the nature and taste of medicines for the three evils, twenty-three leaves relating to drugs that expel the evils, and nine leaves associated with purifying medicaments, giving a total of fifty leaves. The fourth stem concerns external therapeutic treatments and is divided into three branches associated with the three evils, consisting of seven leaves in total. Overall, the *thangka* contains four stems, twenty-seven branches, and ninety-eight leaves. In terms of colour symbolism, the root is depicted in red, stems in yellow, branches in carmine, and leaves in black.



Fig. 1.2: Image of Treatment *Thangka*. Photo taken by the author at Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, in Gangchen Kyishong, Dharamshala, on 23/08/2022.

Medicinal Plants and its Use in the Treatment of Different Health Problems

- a) The scientific name of the plant is *Acorus calamus*, and its Romanised Tibetan name is *Shudag nagpo*. It is traditionally used to address health issues such as indigestion, dyspepsia, and fever. The root of the plant is the part utilised for these purposes.



Fig. 1.3: Photo taken by the author at *Sowa-Rigpa* garden, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Deorali, Gangtok on 28/04/2022.

- b) The scientific name of the plant is *Justicia adhatoda*, and its Romanised Tibetan name is *Vasaka*. It traditionally used to address health issues such as blood infection and fever. The leaves of the plant are the part utilised for these purposes.



Fig. 1.4: Photo taken by the author at *Sowa-Rigpa* garden, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Deorali, Gangtok on 28/04/2022.



- c) The scientific name of the plant is *Bergenia stracheyi*, and its Romanised Tibetan name is *Li Khatur*. It is traditionally used to address health issues such as cold and cough. The root of the plant is the part utilised for these purposes.



Fig. 1.5: Photo taken by the author at *Sowa-Rigpa* garden, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Deorali, Gangtok on 28/04/2022.

- d) The scientific name of the plant is *Terminalia belerica roxb* and its Romanised Tibetan name is *Ba ru ra*. It is traditionally used to address health issues such as blood diseases, indigestion, leprosy, vomiting and diarrhoea. The fruit of the plant is the part utilised for these purposes.



Fig. 1.6: Photo taken by the author at *Sowa-Rigpa* garden, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Deorali, Gangtok on 28/04/2022.

- e) The scientific name of the plant is *Koenigia mollis*, and its Romanised Tibetan name is *Eya-lo*. It is traditionally used to address health issues such as constipation. The stem of the Plant is the part utilised for these purposes.



Fig. 1.7: Photo taken by the author at *Sowa-Rigpa* garden, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Deorali, Gangtok on 28/04/2022.



- f) The scientific name of the plant is *Kantakari virginianum*, and its Romanised Tibetan name is *Kan takari*. It is traditionally used to address health issues such as flue, influenza, cold and cough. The stem of the Plant is the part utilised for these purposes.



Fig. 1.8: Photo taken by the author at *Sowa-Rigpa* garden, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Deorali, Gangtok on 28/04/2022.

- g) The scientific name of the plant is *Rubus ellipticus*, and its Romanised Tibetan name is *Gah-trah*. It is traditionally used to address health issues such as weakening of the senses, vaginal or seminal discharge, cold and cough. The inner bark of the stem is utilised for these purposes.



Fig. 1.9: Photo taken by the author at *Sowa-Rigpa* garden, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Deorali, Gangtok on 28/04/2022.

- h) The scientific name of the plant is *Rubus niveus thumb* and its Romanised Tibetan name is *Kan takari kapo*. It is traditionally used to address health issues such as cold and cough. The stem of the plant is the part utilised for these purposes.



Fig. 1.10: Photo taken by the author at *Sowa-Rigpa* garden, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Deorali, Gangtok on 28/04/2022.



- i) The scientific name of the plant is *Artemisia absinthium*, and its Romanised Tibetan name is *Khempa*. It is traditionally used to address health issues such as cut, wounds and swelling. The leaves and stem of the plant is the part utilised for these purposes.



Fig. 1.11: Photo taken by the author at *Sowa-Rigpa* garden, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Deorali, Gangtok on 28/04/2022.

- j) The scientific name of the plant is *Tinospora cordifolia*, and its Romanised Tibetan name is *Ley-Trey*. It is traditionally used to address health issues such as arthritis, gout and contagious fever. The stem of the plant is the part utilised for these purposes.



Fig. 1.12: Photo taken by the author at *Sowa-Rigpa* garden, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Deorali, Gangtok on 28/04/2022.

Tools and the Treatment of Different Heath Problems

Given below are the details of the names of different tools, which were used earlier in treating different disorders in Tibetan medicine.

1)





Fig. 1.13: Images of (a) **Golden Colour Tools** (b) **Silver Colour Tools**, (c) **Copper Colour Tools**. Photo taken by the author at Men-tsee-khang, *Sowa-Rigpa* Museum in Gangchen Kyishong, Dharamshala, on 23/08/2022.

- (a) the Golden colour tools are used to treat a lack of digestive heat, paralysis, both lung and cold disorders, epilepsy, insanity, dazed mental states, body aches and tumors.
- (b) the Silver colour tools are utilised to address lung and cold disorders, paralysis, epilepsy, tumors, weak digestion and dazed mental states.
- (c) the Copper colour tools are utilised for the treatment of paralysis, lung disorders, epilepsy, dazed mental states, tumors and weak digestion.

2)



Fig. 1.14: Below (a) **Brass Colour Tools**, Above (b) **Bronze Colour Tools**. Photo taken by the author at Men-tsee-khang, *Sowa-Rigpa* Museum in Gangchen Kyishong, Dharamshala, on 23/08/2022.

Below (a) the brass colour tools are utilised for the treatment of improving digestive heat, dazed mantel state, cold disorders, tumour, insanity, epilepsy and body ache.



Above (b) the bronze colour tools are utilised for the treatment of excess accumulation of fluid in the joints, insanity, cold disorders, body ache and to treat tumour.

3)

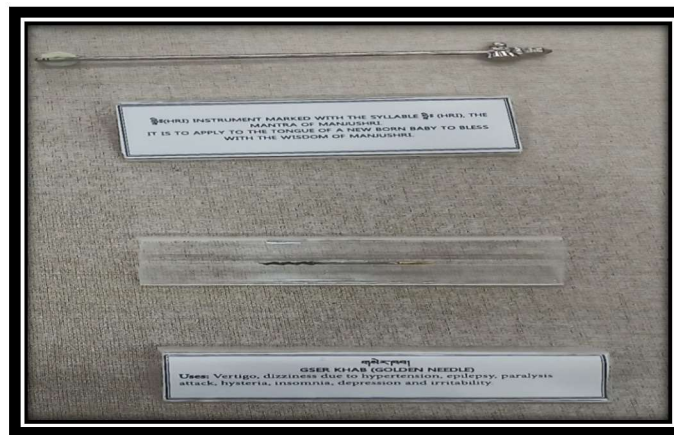


Fig. 1.15: Above (a) **Golden Needle Tool** and Below (b) **Tool inscribed with the Syllable (Hri), the Mantra of Manjushri**,. Photo taken by the author at Men-tsee-khang, *Sowa-Rigpa* Museum in Gangchen Kyishong, Dharamshala, on 23/08/2022.

Above (a) golden needle tool are utilised for the treatment of irritability, paralysis attack, dizziness due to hypertension, vertigo, epilepsy, insomnia, depression and hysteria.

Below (b) tool inscribed with the syllable (Hri), the mantra of Manjushri are traditionally applied to the tongue of a newborn infant to bestow the wisdom associated with Manjushri.

4)



Fig. 1.16: Right (a) **Venesection Blade** and Left (b) **Medicinal container and Medicinal powder measuring tool**.

Photo taken by the author at Men-tsee-khang, *Sowa-Rigpa* Museum in Gangchen Kyishong, Dharamshala, on 23/08/2022.

Right (a) the venesection blade is utilised for the treatment of hot and blood disorders.

Left (b) while the red pouch serves as a receptacle for the medicinal powder, the tool is utilised for the quantification of medicinal powder dosage.

5)



Fig. 1.17: Right (a) **Eye Presser** and Left (b) **Eye Blade**. Photo taken by the author at Men-tsee-khang, *Sowa-Rigpa* Museum in Gangchen Kyishong, Dharamshala, on 23/08/2022.

Right (a) eye presser is a hollow cylindrical instrument that is gently placed over the eyelids, applying slight pressure to protrude the eyeballs. It is utilised to immobilize the blood vessels surrounding the eyes prior to the process of bloodletting.

Left (b) eye blade is utilised for the removal of cataract.

6)



Fig. 1.18: Below (a) **Nasal Inhaler** and above (b) **Wooden rod**. Photo taken by the author at Men-tsee-khang, Sowa-Rigpa Museum in Gangchen Kyishong, Dharamshala, on 23/08/2022.

Below (a) the Nasal Inhaler is a therapeutic instrument consisting of a vessel in which medicinal herbs are heated to produce healing vapours. The vessel is fitted with a lid connected to two slender hollow tubes that gradually taper at the ends. These tapered tips are gently inserted into the nostrils, enabling the patient to inhale the medicinal fumes generated from the heated



herbs. It is mainly employed in the treatment of nasal and sinus-related ailments, helping to relieve congestion and other respiratory discomforts.

Above (b) this wooden rod is intricately carved with sacred mantras and was traditionally used for alleviating pain.

Tibetan medicine conceptualises health as a state of balance between mind, body and environment. Consequently, its therapeutic approach focuses not only on disease eradication but also on enhancing the overall quality of life. In Tibetan philosophy, a fulfilling life encompasses physical strength, mental tranquillity, ethical conduct, and compassion towards others. Tibetan medicine embodies a distinctive healing tradition in which medicinal plants, indigenous tools, ethical behaviour, and spiritual awareness collectively contribute to restoring harmony in human existence. Medicinal plants sourced from the Himalayan regions, such as Sikkim, exemplify the intrinsic connection between nature and healing, while indigenous tools preserve traditional craftsmanship and medical knowledge. Tibetan medicine posits that a fulfilling life is contingent not only on physical health but also on emotional equilibrium, ethical behaviour, and environmental harmony. In an era characterised by stress, consumerism, and ecological challenges, Tibetan medicinal practices remain profoundly pertinent as a means of achieving sustainable health and holistic well-being.

Buddhist Philosophy in Tibetan Medicine and their Perspective on Good Life



When discussing the true definition of a good life, opinions and viewpoints vary. Unfortunately, there is no universally accepted definition or term for this concept. It is subjective, and varies from person to person. However, mental health and good physical has always been considered a key indicator of good life. This notion is supported by Professor Lena Borell, who states, ‘the good life is envisioned as a time when physical and cognitive health is... relatively sound’ (Borell, 2023). Nevertheless, it is important to consider whether good health alone is sufficient to lead a good life or if other factors are also necessary. This sub-topic explores the concept of a good life according to Buddhist philosophy in *Sowa-rigpa* or Tibetan medicine.

In *Sowa-rigpa*, Buddhist philosophy holds a significant position in the healing of patients. Not only it is limited to the use of medicines, but spiritual treatments such as rituals, visualizations, prayers, and meditations also play a crucial role in the treatment of various disorders (Kunzang, 1993). According to Tibetan medicine, illness can be caused by factors such as anger, hatred, desire, and bad karma; hence, Buddhist teachings emphasise the importance of treating patients with love and compassion without discrimination based on their economic or social status, race, or caste (Yonten, 1991). It is also believed that attachment to the self and ego is the root cause of all suffering; therefore, patients are encouraged to abstain from such attachments (Jha, 2013). Traditional Tibetan healers, known as *amchis*, always trusted that their medical practices are infused with the blessings of Buddha, which they attribute to the treatment of three disorders: wind, bile, and phlegm. They also consider this practice not only helps increasing the patient's lifespan, but also realising the significance of achieving enlightenment for others benefits as well.



(Dhondup, 2009). Consequently, Buddhist philosophy has played a significant role in Tibetan medicine, teaching individuals not only to abstain from committing bad deeds, showing attachment to one's ego, or causing harm to others but also to strive for enlightenment and do well for all living beings.

Lastly, due to its scientific knowledge and teachings of Buddhist philosophy, Tibetan medicine has begun to spread beyond Asian countries and has reached Western nations, as previously mentioned. In Sikkim, although traces of Tibetan medicine can be found since the Namgyal Dynasty, its formal institutional development started with the establishment of the first institute of Tibetan studies, the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology. The development of *Sowa Rigpa* practices subsequently spread throughout Sikkim, as evidenced by the establishment of a *Sowa Rigpa* department at the S.T.N.M Hospital in Gangtok. The *Sowa Rigpa* department, which officially began its courses on August 24, 2017, recently laid the foundation stone for the construction of a 30-bedded *Sowa Rigpa* hospital in Deorali, Gangtok (sources: <<https://namgyalinstitutesikkim.org>>). Additionally, various private *Sowa Rigpa* health-care centres have been set up all over Sikkim.

Conclusion

Tibetan medicine is one of the world's oldest systems of traditional healing. It is founded on both science and art, with diagnostic methods that emphasised compassion, creativity, insight, and deep understanding. Furthermore, it embodies a philosophical approach rooted in Buddhist principles such as karma, ethics, and humanity. Unlike other healing systems which focus



primarily on symptoms, *Sowa Rigpa* addressed the underlying causes of the disease. This comprehensive system of diagnosis and treatment utilises a wide range of resources, including medicinal herbs. Tibetan health practitioners have historically valued the use of herbal remedies because of their natural ability to grow in various environments. In the earlier times Indigenous tools have been used to treat different health problems that are not commonly practiced today. *Sowa Rigpa* not only addresses mental health and physical problems concerning with the treatment of herbal medicine, meditation, and prayer, but also emphasises the importance of treating patients with love and compassion, without discrimination. According to the Buddhist philosophy of Tibetan medicine, abstaining from negative actions, such as engaging in bad karma or showing hatred towards others, is crucial for a good life. Ultimately, the practice of *Sowa Rigpa* teaches individuals to strive for enlightenment and to do well for all living beings.

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