The religion of Tibet, even of today, can be best understood through an understanding of its past. It we will give our attention to the remotest past of Mankind we will find the existence of some sort of religion. Though the religion of that primitive age is not really a religion from the modern scientific point of view which defines it as the recognition of man's dependence on God and a living up to the obligations that man's dependence on God imposes", i.e. a reawakening of man to his relationship with God and a binding of himself to God through bonds of service and love. The Fundamentals of Religion page 243.
The religion of that age was just a kind of nature worship. To the primitive people nature was unsurmountable. They were absolutely helpless before it. The natural forces were object of fear to them. So by various means they tried to please nature, hence the existence of religion. The origin of primitive religion from nature worship has been confirmed from the investigations of various scholars and this view is universally accepted.

To the Tibetans the nature was no less wild than to any other primitive people. Tibet, the land of snow as the people of that land liked to call it was a land surrounded by high mountains. The icy walls of the highest mountains of the earth kept the 'Forbidden land' completely isolated from the rest of the world.

Living in a world like this, even today, it is difficult not to become dominated by it, and in those early days, when man was alone in the face
of such power, and still more defenceless than he is now, it is a small wonder that the land itself became his ruler. In those primitive days Tibetans had no other alternative than to submit them before those natural forces. Out of simple beliefs they took the natural forces as their Gods. The mountains, rivers, rocks, trees etc. are their dwelling places. They were very powerful, the good and badness would depend on their whims. So they would try to keep them pleased by various religious practices in order to secure help and avert harm.

In that same state of nature a religion originated throughout the whole of Inner Asia, East and West of Turkestan, Mongolia, Manchuria and also in some adjacent places. All these religions were some sort of animism and shamanism 2 bearing 2. Animism - is the belief in the existence of spiritual beings. The subject may be divided in
different names. In Tibet it took the name bon or pon. But the question is, what is the nature of this

2. (cont.) the following forms, (i) Worship of the souls of men and animals manifesting itself above all as worship of the dead (Necrolatry) (ii) Worship of spiritual beings who are not associated in a permanent way with certain bodies or objects (Spiritism) (iii) Worship of spiritual beings who direct the permanent or periodically recurring phenomena of nature (Naturism). So animism is an attempt to explain in a rational way all the facts of the universe. It is the religion and philosophy of all uncivilised peoples. It predominates at the commencement of all the historical forms of worship.

Shamanism. Shamanism is the name given to the native religion of the Uralic peoples from Bering straits to the borders of Scandinavia. Weakened through the progress of Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. It still exists even among the tribes professing these faiths. The primitive religion of these tribes is polytheism or polydaemonism with strong roots in nature worship and generally with a supreme God over all.
Bon religion of the Primitive Tibetan people. Scholars engaged their whole hearted endeavour to reveal its real nature, but unfortunately, both the Tibetans and other than Tibetans scholars have failed in this task. All that we have learn from them is vague and fragmentary. Some opine that this form of religion is still existent among some of the Tibetans and in some barbarous tribes of Himalayas, but their real nature has changed a lot due to the influence of Buddhism on it. Again in that Primitive age i.e. before the seventh century B.C. the Tibetans had no written language, so the then Bon followers recorded nothing about their religion, that could have help us to reveal its real nature. Even the Bon Pos that are existent today are quite in the dark about their origin and beliefs. To day Bon Pos are those says Schlagintweit who neglected to embrace Buddhism upon its first introduction.

3. Like other primitive people the Tibetans of Bon age had no written language. We shall see in course of our discussion how script was invented and introduced into Tibet by one of the wise ministers of Sron-btsan-agam-po, Thom-mdi-Sam-bho-ta.

Therefore our knowledge about the real nature of the Bon religion is still inadequate. Let me now quote here some opinion of few scholars which will help the reader to form at least a fragmentary knowledge about the nature of Bon religion and with this we shall have to be satisfied because of the dearth of authentic documentary evidences.

Scholars like Rockhill preferred to claim that the word Bon - Po is derived from Punya, one of the names of the Swastikas or Worshippers of the mystic cross Swasti, which in Tibetan is called Gyun-drum. This view was not acceptable to Mr. Waddell who frankly admitted that it was unknown. S. C. DAS, a noted Tibetologist merely described it as that which was fetishism, demonworship and propitiation by means of incantations, he also writes that Bon is a Shamanism which was followed by Tibetans before the introduction of Buddhism and is still existent.

5. See F. N. 28 of this chapter.
What is evident from the above (discussion about the nature of the primitive religion of Tibet) may be stated in the words of Halmut Hoffmann as the Tibetans of those days were apparently subject to the powerful and formidable nature of their natural surroundings; their nature rooted and nature dominated religions ideas revolved reverently and submissively around the powers and forces of their wild high land landscape whose divinities were reflected in the idea of numerous good and evil spirits the Tibetans thought to see all around them. Almost all these varied spirits are still alive today in the beliefs of ordinary Tibetan people and this was Bon religion.

Historically, choskyi-nima 7 divided this Bon religion into three stages. According to him the final stage is reformed stage (bagyur-Bon) and the other two are corrupted Bon (khyur Bon) and wild Bon.

7. Choskyi-nima is a Tibetan scholar. His works have been translated by S.C.DAS present ref. is from S.C.DAS translation in J.A.S.B. 1881 - Page 198.
(rdol Bon) primitive Bon religion is contained within these two later mentioned Bon. That is why the two form (Khyor and rdol) i.e., corrupted and wild form of Bon religion interests us most. Again the middle stage of Bon religion gives us little clue to its original nature because it borrowed its ideas freely from Hindu ideas, particularly from Saivism and Saktism.8

The above opinion is confirmed by the fact that when the 8th King of Tibet grig-btsan was assassinated, not knowing how to perform the funeral rites, invited few Bon priests from neighbouring countries who were in touch with Hindu ideas. They performed the funeral ceremony in their own way. Since then the Bon doctrine came

8. Saivism Saktism - In orthodox Hinduism the religious instructor bestows consecration (diiksa) on his disciple by informing him of the deity to be worshiped. The name of the deity given to the disciple is the root formula. If this root formula contains
into existence in an amalgated form with Hinduism. But it is very difficult to say exactly when and in what way this amalgamation took place. Even from a description we do not know anything more.

Let me now discuss Bon religion in detail, it will include within it Bon practice, Pantheon, Rituals and Literatures. It has already been described that Bon is a nature rooted religion. It divided the nature into three regions, Heaven, Earth and the under world, each with its own two classes of beings. Gods and demigods, Humans and Animals, Hungry ghost and Demons or Hell beings. (Into all these worlds all the early beliefs of the Bon were incorporated). The under world is peopled with spirits who live in water.

S.(contd.) The name of Siva he is a Saiva.
So saivism means considering Siva as the supreme being similarly Durga - Kali, Tara or Tripura Sundari is Sakti.
rocks, trees and so forth. The water spirits are in from usually of serpents and they live at the bottoms of lakes, guarding secret treasures, juniper trees are also highly popular as abodes of certain spirits. Some spirits held the same names as the mountains, rocks or waters they are believed to inhabit, certain forms of sickness are named after the spirits who were believed to cause them.

Then all around, as are 'Iha' temporary Godly spirits who again are to be propitiated, they are - guardians of passes and dangerous passages and each such place is marked by a labtse, a mound of stones to which each passerby adds a stone or a prayer flag even to day. These spirits have accumulated good deeds over the ages, and because of this are able and are willing to help humans. Some spirits appears in the form of insects, and can exert malignant influences when aroused. To guard against these influences the old Bon devised spirit traps. These were crossed pieces of wood around which a whole
net work of coloured thread was spun, forming very
definite and complicated patterns. These were thought
to attract the spirits and at the same time trap
them. They are widespread throughout Tibet till now.

The Bonpobas i.e. followers of Bon religion
were not only satisfied in pleasing the nature -
spirits. They went beyond this. The Bon-po-bas
of rdol-Bon’s age became acquainted with the powers
to keep the forces of nature at a safe distance.
They developed some rites which had demonstrated
some powers of their own. But these rites were
very risky in nature from the point of the practi-
tioner himself. The slightest mistakes could bring
disaster on the practitioner. There are innumerable
examples of those who have fallen victims to the
power they courted, becoming insane or fatally sick.
It was logical development, however, once man began to
learn how to deal with the spirit world, and properly
conducted, it brought to man the powers he had formerly
I sought only to flight.\(^9\)

We learned different interesting stories from primitive Bon scriptures about the performance of such powers, the following story is one of them and worth mentioning.

Once being challenged by the kind to show their powers three leading exponents of Bon religion demonstrated the following. The first one performed the rites to the Fire God, then sitting on his sacred drum be rode into the sky where he discovered hidden things. Another performed a rite which gave him the power to cut iron with a feather the third repaired to cemetery with evil spirits and demonstrated his mastery over them by the use of magical knives. The next important thing of the old Bon religion is the sacrifice of lower as well as higher even human beings. These characteristics have been described in

\(^9\) Collin Turnbull.
detail by Chinese observers. In these sacrifices, sheep, dogs and monkeys were the victims, where as in great annual sacrifices held after every three years, horses, donkeys and human beings were offered to the Gods of the three regions. Animal sacrifices played an important part in the official state ceremonies. It was so deeply rooted in the Tibetan people that this practice was in vogue even in Buddhist age inspite of its opposition.

As an alternative of living animals representation of Yaks and sheep and wooden carvings of deer heads were used to offer. From the Mi-la-ras-pa10 chants we learnt that when an important

10. Mi-la-re-pa - was one of the four chief disciples of Mar-pa. He lived an ascetic life. He is frequently called cottonclad Mi-la, because he used to wear only cotton garments in the snowy mountains. He was above all a poet, his name is a household name in Tibet. His songs and biography are very favourable to all Tibetans.
Bon-po fell ill in the 11th century the evil demons were propitiated by a veritable hecatomb of hundreds of Yaks, Goats and sheep. In more recent times travellers in Eastern Tibet have reported that followers of the Bon religion are still using the blood of cocks to conjure peace.11

The Bon text gzer-myig 12 provides us with a equally realistic description of Human sacrifice. In order to bring about the recovery of a sick prince one of his subjects had to be sacrificed to propitiate the demon. The text reads the Sooth sayer seized the man by the feet while the Bon-po took his hand. The Black Han-dha then cut open the life orifice and tore out the heart. The two, the Sooth sayer and the Bon-po,

11. See Helmut Hoffmann. The Religions of Tibet.

12. Gzer-myig means key for memory, which is actually a bon-text containing the life history of Gshen-rab, a prominent Bon-priests.
them scattered the Blood and flesh to the victim to the four corners of the Heaven.

Scholars are unanimous in this regard that the old Bon-po has had a deep concern with death rites. This started for the incident of the death of their 8th king Gri-grun-btsan-po, who failed to go back to the Heaven like his seven other predecessor, because he fell victim before the black magic and his heavenly ladder was cut down by his minister with whom he engaged himself in a duel. As already observed, that due to absence of right men to conduct his funeral rites, his son invited some priests to perform

13. Heavenly Ladder. There was a belief among the ancient Royal Tibetans that they have come down from the Heaven and after death they will return there with the help of a ladder and that has been called heavenly ladder.
the rituals and from then on it was in vogue in Tibet.

The Bon-pobas codified all the chief rites and laid down three hundred and sixty ways of Death, four ways of preparing graves and eighty one ways of taming evil spirits. The details of all these texts are lost, we have fortunately come in touch with the names of these rituals. The motive of the primitive Tibetans behind these rituals were to prevent the returns of the dead. But as the notion of rebirth 14 crept in, the burial rites took on a

14. Re-birth - This conception is one of the basic element in Buddhist Philosophy. All Buddhist unanimously belief that mans life is full of suffering. And suffering again is due to our birth, and birth again is due to our inclinations to wards object. The end of all Buddhist is to stop this Re-birth.
different significance. Unlike modern Buddhism, Bon-religion did not offer the bodies of the dead in sacrifice to other living beings. If anything, it sought to preserve the body. Other rites began to appear, (and perhaps they were as heretical as they are now) rites that sought to prolong the life of the practitioner by extracting the life force from a living human being. This almost certainly was a debasement, for however primitive the early Bon-po-ba may appear, their efforts were at least directed towards the safety and betterment of mankind as a whole and not just for their own benefit. 

The death rite became a protective ritual, it became part of an elaborate ceremony to ensure

15. Collin Turnbull.

page - 125.
proper rebirth. Buddhist to day in Tibet burn effigies in ritual exorcisms such as the Driving out of the Gods of Evil.

With the passing of the old year, one of the major events of the Lhasa Monlam, but practiced throughout the country. It can only be said that it is almost identical with the Bon custom of making an effigy of the dead person using rice paper for the face. It is a rite full of symbolism and it culminates in the burning of the effigy, having first endowed it with all the bad deeds of the dead person. In this way, the dead person is thus enabled to escape the consequences of his actions. The thought is Bon, no doubt but who borrowed the ritual and from whom we do not know even to-day.

16. Mon - lam. Lam means year. Mon - lam is a festival of new year. It is a very important festival in Tibet.
When Buddhism entered in Tibet there was a great deal of mixture of Buddhist and Bon practices. Bon was too deeply in the nature of the people or that for them to get themselves out of it was very difficult, no matter how faithfully they took the new religion. While Buddhism was ready to incorporate some of the old Bon practices and adopt some of their beliefs, the rejected and outlawed others. At the same time the Buddhist teachers jealously guarded certain of their own scriptures for the fear of perversion they might suffer at the hand of Bonpo has.

While the ancient Bon had a highly complicated ritualistic system, its religious architecture seems to have been very modest and restricted. There are no reports from the earliest times concerning actual temples or perhaps monasteries, such as were built by the hundred by the laiwait in later centuries.
With the development of Bon religion monasteries and priesthood also emerged in Tibet. These were certainly modelled after the lamaist fashion. Monks take the same 253 number of vows. The difference lies in the nature of some of the vows. In Buddhist regime the Bon monasteries enjoyed the same status with their Buddhist counterpart. The Bon-po-bas received education from the Bon-monasteries though they had the liberty to get Buddhist or lamaist education if they would so like. The only references is to spiritual shrines of quite modest nature such as are mentioned frequently in the history of the kings according to Bon tradition.

A great host of priests and sorcerers were devoted to the Bon service, though what all their functions were we can only vaguely guess now a days. There are references to several Bon-po-and earthly Bon-po, Bon-rje (High priest) and Lha Bon-po
(God Bon po), who obviously concerned themselves with divine ritual, whilst, according to the royal raba, the sgrung and Iden seem to have concerned themselves with funeral rites and occult and oracular matters.

However the gshen were the most important and the most frequently referred to of the Bon-priests. The word gshen, which also appears in the name of the mythical founder of the later systematized Bon religion, i.e., of the modified form of Bon-religion, originally referred to the shammans, but was later also used for Bon priests who were not shammans.

There is no denying the fact that a religion without a literature is no religion at all. So the Bon - pa - bas had their literature though it was an emergence of the third or final stage of Bon - religion. This stage is known to us according to chos kyi - ni - nas division as bgyur Bon stage i.e., the final reformed
stage of Bon religion.

But it may be recalled in this connection, that writing was introduced into Tibet almost with Buddhism, so it is very difficult to say which scriptures are genuinely Bon, and which are derivations of stolen Buddhist scriptures. It is possible that the bulk were taken from Buddhism, carefully disguised and adapted to suit the purposes and faith of the Bon-po-ba.

Since Buddhism was trying so hard to suppress the Bon religion, such genuine Bon scripture as came to be written down were written in secret and concealed places. There is a tradition that many of them still remain hidden until now and from time to time they are being discovered. Usually the discovery is of a relatively new manuscript, alleged to have been copied from the original. This is in accordance
with the Bon teachings that time to time teachers will come back to take the teachings out of hidings and spread them once again among the people. But it also makes it easy for any usurpulous person to try and put over whatever he wishes in the guise of being one of these teachers. The three texts are known together as khar Bon, are almost certainly translations of Buddhist texts made by the Bon-po for their own ends. The first was a translation made by Shuubaba Ngongpo. Having hidden them in an appropriate place he then discovered them and began to teach from them as that they were original Bon teachings. The second translation was made in the reign of king Trisang Detsan, a king who in his missionary zeal made a law that all Tibetans must accept Buddhism. A prominent
scholar viz, Gyalwa Changchob, refused, and was punished. In retaliation the scholar secretly worked with the Bon-po-ba and furthered translation of Buddhist texts. These had to be hidden, for the king issued an order that any person found working any such translations be killed. These works were later known as Bon Tsera (Hidden treasures of Bon). The last of the three translations was in the time of the king Gland Darma,17 Szam, who was himself.

17. Gland-Durma is considered in Tibetan history as the greatest enemy of Buddhism. Being the eldest the eldest son of the king he was deprived from his throne by the Buddhist minister due to his anti-Buddhist activities. But latter on he achieved it by killing younger brother Ral-pa-can. Ascending the throne he launched his anti-Buddhist
apraoticing Bon, during the period of his great anti Buddhist activity. "At this time shagur Luga called together all Bon-po-ba to a place called Teryal Drolag, for the translations of as many texts as possible. In translation these names were changed and so were some of the meanings. The Yuba Gyeba became the Kham chen; the Yum Nyishu Ngapa became the Kham k chung and so with many others.

17. (conti.) activities and tried his best to uproot it from Tibet. He compelled the Buddhist monks to fly out from the country; he turned some of them into butchers and killed many persons who were favouring Buddhism. He destroyed many Buddhist monasteries. In a word he left no stone unburned to destroy Buddhism. But fortunately for Buddhism he was at least killed by one of his subjects.
These two were both hidden and later produced as genuine Bon scriptures\textsuperscript{18}. These translations were not so dangerous i.e. harmful because even in the hands of the Bon priests the basic thoughts of Buddhism\textsuperscript{19} remained the same.

The Bon-"po" has also taught the impemanance of existence, consequences for bad deeds of imps thoughts the six virtues, the six ways of salvation

---

\textsuperscript{18} Collin Turn Bull,

\textsuperscript{19} Basic Thoughts of Buddhism - Every religion has some basic characteristics with the help of which it is known and is distinguished from others. Similarly, Buddhism has some fundamental elements, they are e.g. pratitya samutpadavda, dvadasanidana, paramitas, dvasabhumi, nirvana or makti etc.
and the ten stages of perfection (Dasaabhumi), of a Changchub senpa and the three personal exist-
tences of Buddha. The Bon-po has only disliked the tantrik teachings of saint Padmasambhava, and curiously enough the Buddhists also wished to keep these teachings out of the Bon hands.

The centre of this movement in Tibet was

20. Padmasambhava - The great Buddhist sorcerer of Jambudvipa. He stepped in the Tibetan soil at the request of the king to tame the Demons or evil spirits of the land of snow which were disturbing in the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet. His role has been discussed in the 4th chapter in detail.
Shang-shung, a place situated about a hundred miles north of Lhasa. The Bon are also believed to have found a special type of Tantricism called lamed school.

Bon are divided into two sects, white and Black. The while Bon-po-bas are much eager to come in terms with Buddhism. Bon-po generally worship shenrab mipoche as the Buddhists worship the Guru Rinpoche. Shenrab or shen-rab-mi-boe is regarded as the man who first proclaimed the religious gospel. There is great amount of doubt about the historicity of that person. Scholars opine that he is purely a mythical figure and

21. Zhang-Zhung. Or Shang-shung, is situated in the eastern part of the country. It was the main centre of Bon-religious activities. The first step to give the Bon-religion a modern shape was started from this part of the country.
his life history has been pained in the manner of Buddha as in the Mahayana texts. The name itself actually mean "the most excellent of the shamans". However sheurab may or may not be a mythical figure or he may be a person or group of persons who developed the Bon religion as padma the padma -
ism in Tibet while Bon - po - bas even think that Guru Rin - po - che was born not of a lotus, as the Hindus claims but as a man and a Bon in shang shung.

These Bon - pos teach mystic contemplation, meditation and the performance of correct ritual and the lea
ding of a correct life. They also have their scriptures like their kyaddzog which teach tantric pract-
ices of possession and exorcism. It was tantricism that made it easy for Buddhism and the Bon religion to come to terms with each other.

Quite opposite were the Black Bon -po - bas they

like to abandon the refinements and moderating influence of Buddhism and which still practice rites relating to basic primal powers. During the reign of the last Gyalwa rinpoche, the 13th, an edict had to be passed against the Black Bon-po-ta who were terrifying certain villages with their practices. We learn from the reports of various explorers of Tibet that Bon is still existing in the Tiplon sail (eastern and North Eastern parts of Tibet).

The present form of Bon religion differs widely in nature with its primitive shape. In this connection we may refer to the chos-kyi-ni-mus division of the three stages of Bon religion, and the existing stage is no doubt the final or reformed stage of Bon religion. Bon and Buddhism never run as two water tight compartments. So we cannot distinguish where Buddhism ends and Bon begins or vice versa. In Tibet Buddhism also borrowed so few
the Tantric elements into it from Bon religion to suit it to the Tibetan soil and as a result Lamaism 23 developed. Similarly the Bon imported intellectual elements into their primitive shamanist Taoist 24 religion and the final or agur-Bon originated.

Here is a pertinent question what made Bon religion to survive even in this present age? Like other primitive forms of religion it would have also decayed. But actually the case is quite different, ? But obviously there is no definite answer yet available. But a clear analysis of the whole situation may give us some clue to the answer.

23. Lamaism - is a special form of Buddhism that that was in vague - in -Tibet. Lama or bla - ma means Guru.

24. Sgur - bon. Final or reformed stage of Bon religion which is the product of the mixture of Bon religion with Buddhism.
We have already seen that Bon is a primitive religion which is a Tibetan copy of Shamanism and too much akin to the Taoism of China. It is simply a kind of nature worship and exorcism. We also know that like other primitive the Tibetans also adopted that form of nature worship to get rid of the wild nature. So we can surmise that Bon acted as a weapon to fight against the wild nature. But with the emergence of Buddhism, rationality also developed in the primitive Tibetans.

25. Taoism. It was also a primitive form of Religion too much akin to Animism or Shamanism. This form of Religion was prevalent in China at the age when Bon was in Tibet. Taoism is one of these teachings of China, the others being confucianism and Buddhism. Like confucianism and unlike Buddhism, it claims to be a native growth.
i.e. rational explanation of the natural problem was discovered and Bon was replaced through an appeal to the intellect instead of to the emotion as the former did. But the emotional appeal of B.K. is not totally lost still now. So it is found to survive even today. Again, in spite of the intellectual appeal of Buddhism Bon remained still the weapon in a different restricted sense.

We have already seen (we shall also see in the second chapter) that the appeal of Buddhism in the Tibetan soil came through the medium of the Royal family, i.e., Buddhism was honoured with royal patronage. But the local aristocrats

26. Royal patronage - means favour shown by the Royal family to a foreign religion for their own soil. Buddhism, also got this sort of favour by most of the Tibetan kings. Historical discussion of this Royal patronage to Buddhism has been done in detail in the third chapter of the work.
opposed to it. They favoured Bon religion. And the cause behind it was nothing but political. They had great influence in the state affairs. So we may say that this favour of the aristocrats to the Bon-po-bas was no doubt a great boost which kept it alive in the land of snow. They even succeeded for several times in ousting Buddhism from their land. The final Triumph went in favour of Buddhism but Bon also survived. Thirdly, one more reason for the survival of Bon religion in Tibet is that the primitive elements of that religion i.e., demon worship, exorcism and the various rituals to please the forces of nature and at last the Tantric elements, were somehow or other attractive or inevitable to a great number of Tibetan Barbarians. They were so much absorbed in the primitive elements of their religion that the intellectual appeal of the foreign religion, Buddhism, could not create any permanent influence to the rationality of the large number of them. And perhaps through them Bon is still surviving.
Lastly, the Bon religion of Tibet, might may be a form of Shamanism Taoism, became the National religion not only of the Land of Snow, but of the whole region, therefore a religion oriented Nationalism originated among the Tibetans. And as we find to happen, in modern civilised nation an aversion towards foreign religion, so may have been happened in the case of the Tibetans and out of that aversion to the foreign Religion they hesitate to reject their primitive form of religion even knowing its inferiority as compared to Buddhism.