

# Symbolic Meaning of Disasters: Appeasing Malevolent Spirits through Ritualistic Practices in the Himalayan Community

**Dipendra Lama**

*Department of Anthropology*

*Tri-Chandra Multiple Campus, Kathmandu*

*Email: lamadipendra@gmail.com*

## Abstract

*This paper examines how a community affected by a flood disaster found unity and meaning through ritual practices, aiming to understand the complex nature of such catastrophic events. The floods that devastated Chame village in the central Himalayan region of Nepal between May and June 2021 prompted the local community to organize a four-day ritual designed to cleanse the negative influences and misfortune caused by the disaster.*

*By maintaining sacred spaces, engaging in worship practices, intertwining nature with personal and communal existence, constructing protective shrines, and performing various rituals, the community exemplifies the intricate relationship between nature and culture. This study is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted from June 2021 to October 2022, which included participation in the four-day ritual, informal discussions, and interviews with flood survivors, community leaders, and participants in the ritual practices. The findings reveal that disasters unveil a symbolic dimension that highlights the complex interactions among individuals, communities, nature, and culture. Rituals, in particular, emerge as a powerful force with significant implications for both individuals and the community, reshaping societal dynamics in the aftermath of disaster.*

**Keywords:** *Cosmology, Culture, Disaster, Nature, Ritual, Symbolism*

## Introduction

Disasters can stem from natural phenomena or human activities (Tamang et al. 2020; Oliver-Smith, 1996). In Nepal, the combination of geographical constraints, fragile

environments, sandy soil texture, and steep topography makes it highly susceptible to various hazards, exacerbated by heavy monsoon rains. These hazards include landslides, debris flows, floods, and glacial lake outbursts (Khanal, 2020).

On May 28 and June 12, 2021, Chame village in the central Himalayan region of Nepal experienced devastating floods that inflicted extensive damage on both tangible and intangible aspects of the community (Spoon et al., 2020). Fortunately, there were no reported casualties or injuries. The floods caused significant destruction, including the collapse of thirteen houses, damage to village shrines, agricultural lands, school buildings, roads, and bridges, and a transformation of the once-green landscape into a desolate expanse covered with boulders, mud, debris, and fallen trees. The floodwaters contaminated local water sources, creating shortages of food, shelter, and clean drinking water. In response, the Nepal government declared Manang district a high-alert area, labeling it as "unsafe."

Beyond the physical destruction, the flood also impacted intangible elements such as local art, rituals, knowledge, and belief systems, leading to increased fear, anxiety, trauma, and socio-psychological effects. In the wake of the disaster, Chame village mobilized both material and non-material resources. Material responses included the organization of temporary shelters, food provisions, and safety measures. Non-material responses involved prayers, offerings, and ritual practices.

This study, based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted from June 2021 to October 2022, focuses on Chame village, located in the central Himalayan Gandaki province of Nepal. Situated along the renowned Annapurna Circuit trail and near landmarks such as Tilicho Lake (elevation: 4,919 meters) and Thorong-la Pass (elevation: 5,400 meters), Chame village lies within the Marsyangdi River basin at an altitude of 2,700 meters above sea level. Home to approximately 1,200 individuals from various ethnic groups, including Lama, Gurung, Ghale, Dalit, Newar, and Tamang, the village predominantly practices Buddhism.

Chame village has a rich history encompassing social, cultural, economic, political, and geographical aspects. The indigenous Lama people speak Ke-lu, a Tibeto-Burman language, and maintain their own customs, rituals, festivals, belief systems, and traditional knowledge. The village's economy relies on tourism, agriculture, remittances, services, and trade. Notably, Chame features three monasteries and sixteen shrines, revered as protectors against natural disasters and malevolent spirits.

Annually, Chame village hosts numerous rituals organized by residents from different ethnic groups to foster harmony with their environment. These rituals aim to ensure timely rainfall, snowfall, better agricultural production, and a safe and livable environment. Rituals hold both material and symbolic significance, promoting well-being and maintaining the bond between people and their environment, similar to the Tsembaga people's ritual practices as described by Rappaport (2017). In October 2021, the community orchestrated a four-day ritual event, “Phurap, Chhogchhyo Sachhyu Bhumba” (Protecting Place), featuring “Jhinsaa” (fire dance), “Dolma Yuldok” (effigy tossing of malevolent spirits), and “Chhewang” (blessings for longevity). This paper examines how the flood-affected communities of Chame village conducted these rituals in response to the 2021 floods, aiming to safeguard their people and locality by appeasing malevolent spirits through offerings to nature and deities. Furthermore, it highlights how the community found unity and meaning through their ritual practices, revealing the deep interconnectedness among individuals, nature, and culture (Ingold, 2002). Such perspectives offer diverse interpretations of the disaster and its aftermath, encompassing natural, socio-cultural, and symbolic dimensions beyond its physical impact (Poudel, 2018).

## **Understanding Disasters: An Anthropological Perspective**

Different disciplines approach the study of disasters in varied ways. While mainstream disaster research often focuses on individual disaster events, anthropology emphasizes the processes and socio-cultural dynamics surrounding these events (Tamang et al., 2020; Oliver-Smith, 1996). Oliver-Smith (2002) defines disasters as encompassing both slow-onset phenomena, such as droughts and toxic exposures, and rapid-onset events, like earthquakes and nuclear accidents. This broad definition includes various forms of disasters, including floods, fires, tsunamis, epidemics, climate change, industrial accidents, and nuclear disasters. Disasters can manifest gradually or suddenly, affecting multiple aspects of human life, including social, cultural, environmental, economic, and political domains (Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 2002; Torrence & Grattan, 2002).

Garcia-Acosta (2002) views disasters as the result of hazards intersecting with vulnerable populations, considering not only physical vulnerability but also economic, social, political, and cultural dimensions. This perspective highlights that disasters impact various facets of society. Erika M. Hoffman underscores the importance of anthropology in disaster studies, emphasizing its holistic approach that integrates environmental, biological, and socio-cultural aspects. Anthropology's ability to

examine details within broader contexts, compare different societies, and explore themes of social continuity and change is crucial for understanding disasters (Hoffman, 2010).

Anthropologists have significantly contributed to disaster research through studies of events like Hurricane Katrina (Hoffman, 2002), the Sri Lankan Tsunami (Gamburd, 2014), and the 2015 Nepal Earthquake (Tamang et al., 2020). Oliver-Smith (2002) argues that disasters are perceived and understood differently by various groups and individuals, revealing the interplay between natural events, power dynamics, social structures, and cultural beliefs. This underscores the need to acknowledge the diverse interpretations and meanings assigned to disasters, shaped by societal values and religious beliefs. Anthropological research highlights the importance of culturally contextualized understandings of disasters and their responses, as well as their implications for risk generation and vulnerability mitigation (Lucini, 2014; Furedi, 2007). This perspective emphasizes the complex relationships between humans, culture, and the environment (Henry, 2005; Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 2002), and their influence on disaster dynamics.

Thornburg et al. (2007) suggest that studying rituals in disaster contexts reveals how they significantly impact people's experiences and responses to disturbances in their daily lives. Rituals are integral to everyday socio-cultural life and shape the worldview of practicing communities (Zunner-Keating et al., 2020). Rappaport (2017) views religious rituals as behavioral tools that help organisms adapt to their environment, maintaining the relationship between people and their surroundings. Rituals also serve as means of power production (Holmberg, 2009) and influence social life, though their exploration in disaster research remains limited. Understanding the role of rituals and symbols in disasters is crucial, as symbols convey multiple meanings, speak with various voices, and make multiple appeals (Womack, 2005). An anthropological approach to disasters provides comparative insights into symbolism, aligning with diverse social structures and values (Firth, 2013). The symbolic aspects of disaster remain largely unexplored in mainstream literature, highlighting the need for a more nuanced understanding of disasters.

Doug Henry advocates for a shift in disaster study approaches from viewing disasters as isolated and unpredictable events to examining how risks and disasters influence and are products of human systems (Henry, 2005). This perspective encourages examining disasters through a cultural lens to understand how societies perceive and react to

them. It emphasizes viewing disasters as integral components of societal systems rather than isolated incidents. Oliver-Smith (2002) also highlights that disasters are socially constructed and perceived differently by various groups, leading to diverse interpretations. Thus, understanding disasters requires recognizing both their physical manifestations and societal implications (Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 2002).

The literature on disaster studies indicates that disasters whether natural, technical, or human-induced impact multiple dimensions of human life, including social, cultural, economic, environmental, and political aspects. Consequently, anthropological contributions should be central to disaster theory, research, and practice (Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 2002). This role necessitates an examination deeply rooted in the specific context, location, and unique cultural attributes of each disaster, an aspect currently overlooked in existing disaster literature. Additionally, disaster research in anthropology must emphasize the interconnectedness between the natural and social worlds (Oliver-Smith, 2009), offering a comprehensive approach to understanding disasters rather than viewing them as isolated incidents (Poudel, 2018).

## Research Methodology

This study's fieldwork was conducted from June 2021 to October 2022, with several follow-up visits to ensure comprehensive data collection. The research utilized a range of qualitative methods within an ethnographic framework to explore the flood disaster's multifaceted impacts, including its symbolic aspects.

**Participant Observation:** The researcher engaged directly with the flood-affected community during and after the disaster. As a participant observer, the researcher was involved in the management and execution of a four-day collective ritual known as Phurap, Chhogchhyo Sachhyu Bhumba. This included specific rituals such as Jhinsaa (fire dance), Dolma Yuldok (effigy tossing), and Chhewang (blessings for longevity). The researcher closely observed the activities of ritual specialists—such as the creation of effigies, recitation of texts, and performance of fire dances—and documented each detail from initiation to closing ceremony. Observations were meticulously noted in field notes and supplemented with video recordings to capture the ritual's dynamics and significance.

**Key Informant Interviews:** To gain a deeper understanding of the ritual's significance, the researcher conducted interviews with various key informants, including ritual specialists, organizers, village elders, intellectuals, and social workers. These interviews

provided insights into the ritual's role in addressing the flood disaster's impacts on both individual and collective levels. The perspectives of these informants helped illuminate the ritual's meaning within the context of the flood and its significance to the community.

**Informal Conversations:** Additional informal conversations were held with seniors, ritual experts (such as Lama), flood victims, and other community members. These discussions offered valuable viewpoints on the ritual's importance and its connection to local beliefs and practices, especially in relation to the May-June 2021 flood.

The collected data were processed and analyzed thematically, integrating findings with relevant literature to develop a comprehensive understanding of the ritual's role and significance. This approach allowed for a nuanced exploration of how the community's symbolic practices and collective responses to the disaster shaped their experiences and recovery efforts.

## **The Ritual Practice**

In October 2021, Chame village conducted a four-day ritual to address the aftermath of the May-June 2021 flood. The flood had significantly impacted both the tangible and intangible aspects of the community. The ritual was organized by four local villagers Mada, Koto, Chame, and Talekhu and presided over by H.E. Tulku Jingme Tenpi Thinle.

### **Preparation and Organization**

The ritual's preparations involved extensive community participation and financial contributions. Villagers collectively raised over twenty-six lakh rupees from local residents and individuals residing both nationally and abroad. Contributions were gathered through the village's local institution, known as the 'hyulba', with each household contributing according to their capacity. In addition to monetary donations, essential items such as rice, lentils, flour, vegetables, and firewood were collected.

To prepare for the ceremony, villagers undertook various tasks, including constructing gates, decorating and painting the monastery, tidying the ritual area, and arranging for H.E. Tulku's arrival. A total of 34 Lamas were enlisted to participate in the ritual, highlighting the scale and significance of the event.

## Ritual Events

**Welcome Ceremony:** Villagers, dressed in traditional attire, gathered at the entrance gate of Chame village to welcome H.E. Tulku. Following specific protocols, they held Khada (white scarves) and incense sticks, awaiting his arrival. Upon arrival, Tulku was greeted with local songs and traditional dances and led to the monastery, where a white carpet adorned with marigold flowers was laid out. Tulku, accompanied by Lamas bearing instruments and incense sticks, walked across the carpet and entered the monastery, marking the beginning of the ritual.

**First Two Days:** The initial two days of the ritual focused on placing "Sachhyu Bhumba" (copper vessels wrapped in yellow cloth) in areas prone to landslides and floods. A total of 36 Sachhyu Bhumba were procured from India and strategically placed around the village. Tulku conducted 36 ritual sessions to consecrate these vessels, as per the villagers' belief in their protective properties.

**Third Day:** The third day featured the "Jhinsaa" ritual, a fire dance performed by four senior Lamas. This ceremony, characterized by the ignition of colorful flags and alcohol, aimed to pacify malevolent spirits and protect the village. In the evening, the "Dolma Yuldok" ritual was performed, involving the throwing of effigies made from dough to purify the village and its surroundings.

**Concluding Day:** The final day, known as "Chhewang" or "Wang," was dedicated to seeking blessings for an extended life expectancy for the villagers. This involved receiving blessings from various Lamas, with arrangements made to accommodate individuals of all ages and abilities. The day concluded with cultural dances, special performances, and Tulku's generous donation to the local institution and dance team.

## Post-Ritual Activities

Following the ritual, the Lamas were compensated for their services, and a grand farewell was given to Tulku and the other Lamas. The villagers meticulously documented the income and expenses associated with the ritual, sharing the details with the community via social media platforms, ensuring transparency and communal engagement.

This elaborate ritual not only aimed to address the immediate concerns arising from the flood but also served to restore communal harmony and reaffirm the village's connection to their cultural and spiritual practices.

## Viewing the Flood as a Divine Act

Disasters often evoke a range of interpretations and responses, influenced heavily by cultural and personal perspectives (Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 1999). In this regard Poudel, (2018) using emic perspective in his study among the people of Nhason valley of Manang district offers clear understanding of disasters like landslide as an act of god. Similarly, in Chame village, the May-June 2021 flood was perceived by many locals as a divine act, reflecting broader symbolic and cultural meanings. This shows disasters are not only linked with physical event but people relate disasters with supernatural power like divine act.

### Cultural and Personal Interpretations

**Divine Retribution:** The village head Lama attributed the flood to an increase in sins and a disregard for moral principles. He suggested that the accumulation of these sins led to divine retribution in the form of the flood. This view aligns with the broader cultural belief that natural disasters can be manifestations of divine displeasure or punishment.

**Sacred Space Violation:** A 70-year-old woman in the village argued that the flood resulted from the recent replacement of an old shrine with a new one without proper rituals or consultation with the Lama. She believed that this act of negligence had invited the disaster. Similarly, a 76-year-old woman connected water pollution and sacrificial practices near shrines to the flood, suggesting that disrespect for sacred spaces had angered the deities.

**Outsiders and Environmental Pollution:** Some villagers blamed external individuals for contributing to environmental degradation and pollution. For instance, a 75-year-old informant linked the flood to the disregard for village culture and symbols by outsiders. The pollution of the river due to animal slaughter and waste disposal was seen as a direct cause of the disaster. This sentiment was echoed by other locals, who felt that the influx of outsiders who disrespected local customs led to divine anger and subsequent adversities.

### Symbolic and Cultural Responses

These perceptions highlight the symbolic role of disasters in local belief systems. Disasters are not only physical events but also carry deep cultural and emotional



meanings. As Oliver-Smith and Hoffman (2002) note, disasters can serve as symbols that influence personal and cultural survival strategies, leading to cultural adaptation or preservation.

## Community Responses and Regulations

In response to the flood, Chame villagers implemented several measures to address the perceived causes and prevent future occurrences. These included:

- **Regulations on Natural Resource Use:** The village enacted rules to ensure sustainable use of natural resources, reflecting a desire to harmonize with nature and avoid further divine displeasure.
- **Preservation of Sacred Sites:** Efforts were made to protect and maintain the sanctity of sacred sites, including shrines and sacred areas, which are believed to offer protection from malevolent spirits and natural disasters.
- **Observance of Rituals:** Villagers re-emphasized the importance of timely and proper observance of rituals to maintain their connection with the divine and safeguard their community.

## Symbolic Lens and Cultural Values

The symbolic understanding of disasters is integral to how the inhabitants of Chame village interpret and respond to such events. As Hoffman (2002) argues, symbols play a crucial role in shaping a community's response to disasters and significantly impact collective behavior. The villagers' adherence to specific rules and their interpretation of environmental changes through a symbolic lens underscore the importance of cultural values and beliefs in shaping disaster responses.

The village's cosmology, reflected in their practices and sacred spaces, illustrates a deep-seated belief in the interconnectedness between human actions, sacred sites, and divine will. This perspective aligns with Zunner-Keating et al.'s (2020) notion of the 'supernatural,' where sacred sites and rituals are believed to influence both spiritual and material well-being.

By viewing disasters through this cultural and symbolic framework, the people of Chame village navigate the challenges presented by such events while preserving their cultural identity and belief systems.

## Local Perspective on the Nature-Culture Nexus

In Chame village, the relationship between nature and culture is not merely theoretical but an integral part of daily life. This nexus is vividly illustrated through various cultural practices and rituals that intertwine the physical environment with spiritual and cultural beliefs.

### Integrated Nature-Culture Relationship

**Sacred Sites and Cosmology:** Sacred sites like the Rishi Gumbu shrines play a crucial role in the village's cosmological framework. These shrines act as spiritual gatekeepers, welcoming positive influences and warding off malevolent entities. This practice underscores the belief that both benevolent and malevolent spirits inhabit nature, and managing these spiritual presences is essential for maintaining communal harmony.

**Rituals and Purity:** Rituals are central to preserving the nature-culture relationship (Poudel, 2018). Villagers perform various rituals throughout the year to uphold the sanctity of sacred sites and renew village shrines. These rituals not only reinforce cultural norms but also address environmental and spiritual concerns. For example, rituals aimed at maintaining purity in sacred sites reflect a deep commitment to preserving the connection between the natural and spiritual realms (Rappaport, 2017).

**Lungtaa and Symbolic Practices:** The practice of hanging Lungtaa (prayer flags) in natural locations such as bridges and forests illustrates the tangible expression of the nature-culture connection. By placing these flags in prominent locations, villagers seek to harmonize their lives with the surrounding environment and invoke positive energy. This practice reflects the villagers' belief in the power of nature to influence their spiritual and material well-being.

**Cultural Infrastructure:** The presence of numerous shrines, monasteries, and sacred sites around Chame village highlights the integration of cultural and environmental elements. These structures are not just physical artifacts but hold deep spiritual significance, serving as focal points for rituals that connect the villagers with their environment and cosmological beliefs.

## Symbolic and Practical Implications

**Symbolic Integration:** The integration of nature and culture is embodied in symbolic practices that shape the villagers' responses to environmental and spiritual challenges. These symbols and rituals help navigate their relationship with the environment and maintain cultural continuity.

**Cultural Continuity:** Ongoing ritual practices and the maintenance of sacred sites underscore the continuity of cultural traditions. These practices adapt to contemporary challenges, ensuring that cultural values remain integral to the villagers' lives.

**Environmental Stewardship:** The nature-culture nexus also reflects a form of environmental stewardship. By emphasizing the preservation of sacred sites and respectful interactions with nature, villagers engage in practices that promote both environmental sustainability and cultural preservation.

**Adaptations and Changes:** Recent events, such as the flood, have prompted adaptations in ritual practices and cultural interpretations. Villagers have implemented new measures to address environmental concerns, such as regulating animal slaughter and preserving sacred sites. These adaptations reflect an evolving understanding of how to maintain harmony between nature and culture in the face of modern challenges.

The nature-culture nexus in Chame village illustrates a profound integration of environmental and cultural dimensions. The relationship is reflected in rituals, sacred sites, and symbolic practices, highlighting how villagers perceive and interact with their environment in culturally meaningful ways.

## Nam Nangke and Nam Fyuke: Rituals for Rainfall Management

In Chame village, traditional rituals play a vital role in managing natural phenomena and aligning human activities with cosmological beliefs. Two prominent rituals, Nam Nangke and Nam Fyuke, illustrate the village's integrated approach to nature and culture, particularly in relation to rainfall.

### Nam Nangke: Invoking Rainfall

During the dry season and the onset of agricultural activities in spring, villagers turn to the sacred site known as 'Ne' for assistance in invoking rainfall. 'Ne,' located in the northern part of Chame village, holds significant spiritual importance and attracts

visitors from across the Manang district. On auspicious days, villagers perform the Nam Nangke ritual, which involves:

- **Offerings:** Lighting butter lamps, burning incense sticks, and presenting alcohol to appease the deities and request their favor.
- **Rituals:** Conducting prayers and chants aimed at invoking rain and ensuring a bountiful agricultural season.

These rituals reflect the villagers' belief in the interconnectedness of their spiritual practices with the natural world, underscoring the role of sacred sites in mediating human-environment interactions.

### **Nam Fyuke: Halting Rainfall**

Conversely, during periods of excessive rainfall, such as during the monsoon season, the Nam Fyuke ritual is performed to halt the rain. On one occasion, a 78-year-old woman approached a house owner during a period of heavy rainfall, urgently requesting the Lama's intervention. She believed that:

- **Intervention:** The Lama possessed the power to stop the rain through special texts and chants, despite acknowledging the ethical dilemma of challenging nature's course.
- **Ritual Request:** She implored village representatives to contact the Lama to perform the Nam Fyuke ritual to prevent potential harm from the excessive rain.

The urgency of her request highlights the villagers' deep-seated belief in the Lama's spiritual authority and the ritual's perceived efficacy. Within an hour of the request, the Lama conducted the Nam Fyuke ritual, and shortly thereafter, the rainfall decreased. While the cause-and-effect relationship between the ritual and the weather remains ambiguous, local belief strongly attributes the change to the Lama's intervention.

### **Cultural and Cosmological Reflections**

This instance of Nam Fyuke underscores the integrated nature-culture relationship (Ingold, 2002; Poudel, 2018). The villagers view nature and culture as interconnected, with rituals serving as a means to harmonize human activities with natural forces. The performance of Nam Fyuke illustrates the complex interplay between cultural

beliefs and environmental management, revealing how the Lama's role aligns with the collective needs of the community.

The ethical considerations involved in rituals like Nam Fyuke reflect broader cosmological views, where challenging natural processes is seen as a necessary response to immediate threats. This perspective highlights the cultural adaptability and resilience of Chame village's inhabitants in navigating their environment.

Nam Nangke and Nam Fyuke exemplify the ways in which Chame villagers integrate their cultural practices with environmental management. These rituals not only address immediate concerns but also reinforce the deep connection between their spiritual beliefs and their interactions with the natural world.

## **Capability of Rituals to Expel Harmful Forces Affecting Local Communities and Environments**

Rituals play a crucial role in expressing and reinforcing a community's worldview, belief systems, and lived experiences. Zunner-Keating et al. (2020) suggest that rituals reveal a great deal about these aspects, highlighting their importance in community life. Strathern and Stewart (2021) emphasize that "rituals instantiate the importance of repetitive actions as vehicles for the expression of values and goals within communities" (p. 1). This concept is vividly illustrated by the four-day ritual ceremony held in Chame village in October 2021, which included the rituals 'Phurap Chhogchhyo Sachhyu Bhumba,' 'Jhinsaa,' 'Dolma Yuldok,' and 'Chhewang.'

### **Rituals as Mechanisms for Protection**

The primary aim of these rituals was to offer prayers to the village deity, seeking protection from inauspicious elements and safeguarding against natural disasters and malevolent spirits. The villagers' conversations with Lamas, elders, and other community members revealed the deep connection between these rituals and their daily lives. The rituals demonstrate the villagers' reliance on their belief systems and symbolic practices as essential tools for navigating their environment and protecting their community from external harm.

### **Integration of Nature and Culture**

In Chame village, rituals are intricately linked with both nature and culture. The villagers' understanding of their environment is not seen as separate from their cultural

practices but rather as deeply intertwined. This perspective aligns with Ingold's (2002) view that nature and culture should be seen as an integrated system rather than a dichotomy. Furthermore, disasters are seen as complex phenomenon linked with nature-culture nexus and natural and human activities (Poudel, 2018). The rituals, which include specific practices such as the lighting of butter lamps, incense sticks, and offerings of alcohol, reflect the community's efforts to align their cultural values with their natural surroundings.

### **Resource Intensity and Community Impact**

The coordination and execution of these rituals require significant resources, both financial and in terms of time. For instance, the ceremonies necessitate contributions from the community, such as monetary donations and provision of essential items. These rituals are not only a response to immediate threats like natural disasters but also serve to uphold the community's cultural practices. The involvement of numerous Lamas and the extensive preparation involved underscore the importance of these rituals in maintaining the cultural and spiritual well-being of the community.

### **Rituals as Part of a Broader System**

The rituals conducted in Chame village are akin to practices observed in other cultures, such as the Tsembaga community's ritual use of domestic pigs for specific purposes (Rappaport, 2017). In Chame, these rituals are orchestrated in response to perceived threats from both natural and spiritual sources. They are essential components of the community's strategies for protecting themselves and their environment. The rituals reinforce the villagers' connection to their environment and cultural heritage, illustrating the deep integration of their spiritual and material worlds.

The rituals observed in Chame village serve as crucial mechanisms for addressing and mitigating the impact of harmful forces. They reflect the community's integrated view of nature and culture, highlighting the significant role of traditional practices in safeguarding against both environmental and spiritual threats. The considerable resources invested in these rituals further emphasize their importance in maintaining the balance and well-being of the community.

### **Conclusion**

The flood disaster that struck Chame village between May and June 2021 has been explored through the lens of rituals and symbolic practices. This study highlights the

significant role rituals play in fostering positivity and warding off detrimental forces that threaten both individuals and their environment. Rituals in Chame village are orchestrated in response to specific triggers, such as natural calamities, misfortune, or internal discord. They serve as vital avenues for individuals to forge connections, communicate, and illuminate aspects of the unseen world, ultimately contributing to the well-being of both individuals and the community.

Rituals hold deep cultural and symbolic significance in disaster response, functioning as a means of supplication to higher powers and expulsion of harmful elements that disrupt people and their surroundings. The four-day ritual organized by the Chame village communities in response to the flood demonstrates that the importance of disaster response extends beyond material interventions. This ritual underscores the need to recognize the symbolic dimensions of rituals to fully comprehend the interconnectedness between nature and culture.

Cultural traditions of venerating nature, conducting offering rituals, and the local perspective on their environment reveal the hidden dimensions of disasters. Symbolism plays a crucial role in understanding these events, encompassing people's perceptions, interpretations, and their relation to daily experiences. Limiting our comprehension of disasters to their physical or natural aspects alone impedes a full understanding of the symbolic dimensions embedded in the everyday lives of those affected. This broader perspective enriches our understanding of how disasters are experienced and addressed within different cultural contexts.

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