

## **Dumping the Jewel in the River: Renewing and Perpetuating the Memory of Bhutanese Statehood in Punakha Domchoe**

*Sonam Kinga\**

### **Introduction**

Theatrical re-enactments of historical battles characterize some local festivals in western Bhutan in contrast to the largely Buddhist mask dances that are performed during such festivals elsewhere in the country. They serve as medium of recording, renewing and transmitting the memory of historic moments in the life of spiritual and political leaders. For example, the festival of Nangkar Dog (*snang-dkar bzlog*) in Chang village, Paro is dedicated to commemorate the victory of Phajo Drugom Zhigpo over his spiritual adversary called Lama Lhapa (Zangpo, 2003). Lo-ju (*blo-'gyur*) is another festival celebrated every three years in villages of Wangdue Phodrang. It is 'an articulate narrative of the events leading up to the formation of the Drukpa state by conquering hostile forces...' (Chophel, 2003, p.85). Punakha Drubchen (*spungs-thang sgrub-chen*) popularly known as Punakha Domchoe (hereafter *domchoe*) theatrically re-enacts a historic battle that the Bhutanese fought against Tibetan forces in 1649. Dochula Tshechu is a very recent innovation that recounts Bhutan's military operation in 2003 against Indian militants (David & Samuel, 2016).

The *domchoe* is one of the most important festivals celebrated in the first month of the lunar calendar. It begins with fifteen days of sacred prayers and mask dances inside the congregation hall or *dukhang* ('*du-khang*) of the magnificent

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\* Inaugural Fellow, Royal Institute of Governance and Strategic Studies.

Punakha Dzong, which was built by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (hereafter Zhabdrung Rinpoche) between 1639-40. Known as Goenwang Drubchen (*mgon-dbang sgrub-chen*), it is followed by three days of martial performances by people dressed as traditional militia called *pazangpas* (*dpa'-mdzangs-pa* - hereafter *pazaps*) to commemorate and re-enact the military victory in 1649. Both folk and mask dances are performed during the *domchoe* alongside the *pazaps'* performances. The most significant episode of the *domchoe* with which it concludes involves immersion of multi-coloured sacred substances used as base of the mandala made for Goenwang Drubchen. This moment of dumping of jewel in the Mochu (*mo-chu*) river and three days of *pazaps'* performances record and renew the memory as well as transmit the narrative of that historic victory to both the performers and the audience. The focus may be that particular battle but the overall narrative of the *domchoe* recounted through songs and dances also record, perpetuate and transmit the memory of the founding of Bhutanese state by Zhabdrung Rinpoche. In this article, I examine how this narrative is constructed and re-told in Punakha Domchoe. I argue that this local festival has transformed into a state-sponsored national ritual that serves important political objective of keeping alive, perpetuating and transmitting the memory of the founding of Bhutanese State.

### **“The Admonition of the Thunderbolt Cannon-Ball”**

“The Admonition” is the only study available on the *domchoe*. Aris (1976) wrote this as part of the paper that also discusses another festival but his primary focus was the translation of a text read out during the *domchoe*. In a biography of Zhabdrung Rinpoche (Dorji, 2008, pp.184-185), the introduction and celebration of the first *domchoe* is mentioned briefly. This is nonetheless important as it specifies the year, 1649, as the year of introduction introduced. Many materials concerning the *domchoe* provides different years.

Another recent work is a personal narrative of the festive experience of *domchoe* and a touristic record of the dances and performances (Greenspan, 2015). It does not pretend to be a

scholarly examination of the *domchoe*. In Bhutan, a primary school reader with colourful illustrations about the *domchoe* was first published in 1992 and subsequently revised (Royal Education Council, 2017). It is a short handbook for Grade III students and contains the main contours of the narrative of the *domchoe*. The Punakha district administration also published a book which lists various programs of the three-day *domchoe*. Another book contains various traditional songs that relate to the *pazaps*.

Since Aris' work is the only serious academic literature available, it is useful to revisit it and establish the need for my own enquiry and analysis. I will point out some important gaps in Aris' work. First, his discussion on the proceedings and analysis of the *domchoe* is very short. The bulk of his work, as was intended, is the translation of the text, "The Admonition of the Thunderbolt Canon-Ball". Although this is very important work, its brevity calls for a more detailed ethnographic study.

Two, Aris summary also misses some important events that precede the *domchoe*. One noteworthy omission is the one-day festival of Yuesakha Domchoe performed in the community of Kabjisa. It is seen as the prelude to the events at Punakha. We also do not find references or discussions on the lyrics of the sword dances as well as dances performed by *yangpon* (*dbyangs dpon*) which reinforce the meaning and purpose of the *domchoe*.

Three, we do not get that sense of martial seriousness established through the setting up of battle camps, posting of the scouts for vigilance as well as the battle itself which are consciously woven into the performed narrative of the *domchoe*. It is not just the activities within the *dzong's* precinct that must be considered but those outside as well. Aris do not discuss them except for the event on the last day relating to the procession to dispose of the "jewel."

This paper seeks to provide more ethnographic and ritualistic details of the proceedings. Aris' framework is the celebration of

New Year festivals in Bhutan and Tibet. The *domchoe* in Punakha and the festival of *Lomba* (*lo 'ba'*) in Paro are discussed in the context of New Year celebrations. The context for my study is the use of local festival and performative theatres as means to record and transmit historic military battles which inform the process of formation of the state of Bhutan.

### **Zhabdrung Rinpoche and the Founding of Bhutanese State<sup>1</sup>**

In order to situate the *domchoe* in its historical context, I begin by discussing important historical events associated with the founding of Bhutanese State through the life of its founder, Zhabdrung Rinpoche, who was born in 1594 at Druk Jangchubling in Tibet. At a young age, he was recognized as the reincarnation of Kunkhen Pema Karpo, one of the foremost masters of Drukpa Kagyu (*'brug pa bka' brgyud*) School of Buddhism. However, his claim to reincarnation was contested by another person known as Gyalwa Pagsam Wangpo, who enjoyed the support of the powerful Tsanpa ruler. Attempts to reconcile differences between them failed. Relationship worsened over the years. In one incident, Zhabdrung Rinpoche had got into a boat at a place called Tagdru by the river Tsangpo. He was forced out of the boat by attendants of Pawo Tsugla Gyatsho (1568-1630), the third incarnation of Lhodrak Pawo. The moment he was forced out, his followers unsheathed their knives and engaged Lhodrak Pawo's attendants. Two of them were stabbed to death. The boat capsized drowning some others.

Tsang Desi repeatedly asked Zhabdrung Rinpoche to compensate Lhodrak Pawo for loss of lives. Zhabdrung Rinpoche clarified that facts of the matter do not deem him liable to pay compensations. Tsang Desi then threatened Zhabdrung Rinpoche with dire consequences if sacred relics like Rangjung Kharsapani were not surrendered to him for disobeying his order.

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<sup>1</sup> I have drawn most of the materials in this section from Dorji, Sangye (2001), *The Biography of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal*.

What is Rangjung Kharsapani? When Choeje Tsangpa Gyare Yeshe Dorje (1161-1211), the founder of southern branch of Drukpa Kagyu School was cremated, twenty-one images of Avalokitesvara, Buddha of Compassion, are said to have emerged from his twenty-one vertebrae. Rangjung Kharsapani is believed to have emerged from the twenty first vertebrae and is revered as the most sacred among them. His successive reincarnations, of which one was Kunkhen Pema Karpo would possess this sacred artefact. It is the most important relic which is relied upon to authenticate the reincarnations of Drukpa hierarchs.

In 1616, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal fled Tibet for Bhutan with this relic. After he had left, Tsang Desi forcibly took over his monastic estates at Druk Jangchubling and Zhika Gardong. He again wrote to Zhabdrung Rinpoche asking him to send back those precious relics which he had taken along. Zhabdrung Rinpoche responded with a strongly-worded letter which infuriated Tsang Desi. He appointed a general to lead an invasion of Bhutan and eliminate Zhabdrung Rinpoche. Despite initial success, the invasion was repelled and the general killed. The invasions, however, did not stop. The second invasion was launched in 1634 and another one in 1639.

By the time of the third invasion, Zhabdrung Rinpoche had firmly established himself in western Bhutan. Around 1627, he issued a declaration promulgating the founding of Palden Druk Zhung, the Buddhist Government of Bhutan. A decade later, he began the construction of Punakha Dzong, which served as the capital and political base of the new state. By 1640, peace was established with Tsang Desi, who declared that “all the people and patrons of Lhomon Khazhi<sup>2</sup> are under the authority of the state of Palden Drukpa.” Other polities in the region such

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<sup>2</sup> Bhutan was known by this name then which literally translates as [Country of] Lhomon with Four Approaches. The identity and the location of the four approaches have changed over time. The most popular references are Dungsamkha in the east, Dalikha in the west, Tagtsekha in the north and Pasakha in the south.

as the Kingdoms of Patan, Batgaon and Kathmandu in Nepal, Derge in Tibet, Cooch Behar and Ladakh also accorded recognition.

Peace with Tibet was however, short-lived. By 1642 the Gelugpas defeated Tsang Desi with the support of Mongols and established the government of Ganden Phodrang. Urged by his followers, Zhabdrung Rinpoche dispatched a peace envoy to Lhasa. The response of Desi Sonam Choephel, the secular ruler was conditional. He conveyed that Zhabdrung Rinpoche was welcome to take over his monastic estates in Ralung but must reinstate monastic estates of Lam Kha-nga<sup>3</sup> (*blam kha-nga*) in Bhutan. He also suggested that he should be the overlord of both Zhabdrung Rinpoche and Lam Khanga. This was an unacceptable proposition. The peace envoy returned. This was followed by correspondences between Zhabdrung Rinpoche and Desi Sonam Choephel deploying messages and symbols of aggression and hostility. Having won military victories in Mongolia, Do, Kham, Ü and Tsang, Desi Sonam Choephel was confident of defeating Zhabdrung Rinpoche. So, he dispatched a military campaign against Bhutan in 1644. The Tibeto-Mongol forces entered Paro in western Bhutan through Phari.

Sensing such an invasion, Zhabdrung Rinpoche had already raised Bhutanese militia from Shar, Wang and Paro valleys. They were encamped in Paro Tshongdue. The invasion was repelled. The soldiers were let to return after stripping them of their weapons but twenty-one generals were taken to Punakha and held hostage for two years. In order to avenge this humiliating defeat and bring Bhutan under Tibetan control, a far greater invasion was launched in 1648. One unit was deployed to Punakha through Gasa and another through Phari to Paro. Suffice it to mention here that the Tibetan camp at Paro was stormed and thousands of Tibetans killed. The Tibetan general, Nangso Norbu escaped to Phari.

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<sup>3</sup> Lam Kha-nga was an alliance of lamas of five other Buddhist schools whose influence and material patrimony began to dwindle after Zhabdrung Rinpoche's arrival. In a military engagement, they were defeated. But they kept seeking support of Tibetan authority against Zhabdrung Rinpoche.

The other unit deployed to capture Punakha Dzong camped near it. The Bhutanese forces were encamped inside Punakha Dzong. They suggested to Zhabdrung Rinpoche that it would be better to let Tibetans take Bhutanese hostage and sign an agreement since the invading force was really huge this time. Zhabdrung Rinpoche responded thus: "It is all right if men cannot engage the enemy. I will send my protective deities. Just keep open all the entrances to the *dzong*." His attendants were doubtful of the idea of opening up the entrances when the enemy was so close. But Zhabdrung Rinpoche instructed his men to exit through one entrance shouting aloud and enter the *dzong* through another entrance, and thus keep going around. Obviously, only one entrance was visible from the position of Tibetan encampment. So they were astonished at the never-ending soldiers leaving the *dzong*. It is said that the tantric prayers and rituals conducted by Zhabdrung Rinpoche had the effect of Tibetan seeing as soldiers even the hays in nearby paddy field as well as trees and shrubs growing near the *dzong*. Thus grew the myth of Bhutanese forces as divine soldiers or *sprul-pai dmag-mi* of Zhabdrung Rinpoche. The Tibetans had launched a siege of Punakha Dzong for three months. But by then, they had also heard about the fleeing of their general, Nangso Norbu to Phari. Disheartened at this, they also took to flight by setting their camps on fire. An unusual smoke billowed from the fire. As the soldiers fled, not seeing each other amidst the smoke, they found themselves in front of the Bhutanese forces, who engaged them. This unnerved them so much that they again took to their heels leaving behind weapons and food supplies.

After the victory over the Tibetans, Zhabdrung Rinpoche led the performance of prayer ceremony in gratitude to all the protective deities in the first month of Earth Ox Year of 1649. This was the first Punakha Domchoe. It was conducted for many days. Ever since, Punakha Domchoe had been celebrated annually to commemorate this important victory.

## **Goenwang Drubchen – Propitiating the Guardian Deities**

The first part of Punakha Domchoe called Goenwang Drubchen is really the propitiation of three important guardian deities of the Drukpa Kagyu School particularly Pal Yeshe Gonpo or Mahakala. The other two are Palden Lhamo and Gonpo Jarog Dongchen. It is said that Pal Yeshe Gonpo appeared in Zhabdrung Rinpoche's vision while in Tibet and offered him the entire Lhomon Khazhi as monastic estate. During his escape to Bhutan, Pal Yeshe Gonpo emanated as a raven and kept flying ahead to give directions towards Thimphu. The three deities are said to have pleaded with Zhabdrung Rinpoche in one of his visions to establish a Buddhist government in Bhutan. They swore to undertake and fulfill any task he entrusted them with. Hence, Zhabdrung Rinpoche mustered their support during series of Tibetan invasions. He had many visions of them during critical moments. His spiritual accomplishments were so advanced that he is said to engage in conversations with these deities as if they were humans. All the *dzongs* in the country as well as most monasteries associated with Drukpa Kagyu School in the country have temples called *goenkhang* (*mgon-khang*) dedicated to him and other tutelary deities. Therefore, Goenwang Drubchen is a propitiation ceremony to honour Pal Yeshe Gonpo and other tutelary deities, who are presented as Bhutan's national guardian deities. During Goenwang Drubchen, monks perform religious ceremonies, the Black Hat dance, and many other sacred dances in the *dzong's* congregation hall.

It appears that various resources were earlier mobilized from different parts of the country for Goenwang Drubchen. For example, a report from the people of Khoma in Lhuntse to the second King on their tax obligations mention the sort of in-kind taxes they had to pay for Punakha Domchoe.

To begin with, tax payer Taula is levied one shey of butter for Punakha Domchoe and Lhamo Domchoe (Thimphu Domchoe) and four shey of butter for Tshongjur. Further, on each trelpa (tax paying household) is levied five boobs (a boob of textile is the length of the textile sufficient for



the dress of a man or a woman) of textile for Punakha Domchoe and Lhamoi Domchoe...

Ugyen, a moringmo household of Khoma, pays two sheys of butter and four boobs of textile for Punakha Domchoe and Lhamoi Domchoe... (Ura, 1995).

Oral sources also refer to various taxes collected from different parts of the country. For example, cotton taxes were collected from central Bhutan for use as wick of butter lights for the *domchoe*. Today, no such taxes are collected. The state supports the conduct of the entire ceremony. This is one of the most important transformation in terms of mobilizing resources for the *domchoe*.

A defining characteristic of the Goenwang Drubchen is the non-stop performance of propitiatory prayers and ceremonies. Literally, the Chief Abbot and the monks do not sleep for fifteen days and nights except for an hour or two's recess. The following articulation by a monk in an oral ballad he composed in the seventeenth century concerning the *domchoe* captures the ordeal of having to persevere without sleep and with minimal food or beverages.

The celebrated domchoe of Punakha  
Resonates its renown everywhere.  
Inside the dzong, prayers were said for fifteen days;  
I starved through sixteen severe nights,  
But my pitiable condition gradually passed (Kinga, 1998,  
p.22)

Today, many people volunteer as patrons to periodically offer beverages and refreshments particularly at night to the monks.

### **Martial Performances during the *Domchoe***

#### ***Preparing for the domchoe***

The subsequent three-day festival after the Goenwang Drubchen is called *domchoe*, which largely features theatrical

military performances by *pazaps*. These performances take place in multiple locations inside and outside the *dzong*. The details of the *domchoe* I describe hereafter are based on my personal observations from 28th February to 2nd March 2012 and subsequent field works in 2017.

Only the people of the eight large communities of Wang (*wang mtsho-chen brgyad*), who were regarded as patrons of Zhabdrung Rinpoche, enjoy the privilege of participating as *pazaps*. These communities are Kabji, Toewang, Bjimed, Chang, Barpa, Toepa, Kawang and Mewang. They migrated earlier between Thimphu and Punakha depending on seasons since they had landholdings in both places. Hence, some communities like Kabji and Chang are called by the same name in Thimphu and Punakha. Even if the *domchoe* was held in Punakha, the only community participating from Punakha's administrative jurisdiction were from Lingmukha (see next paragraph). However, the delimitation of constituencies in 2008 for Bhutan's first democratic elections saw redrawing of boundaries. As a result, most of the communities which were traditionally part of Wang (Thimphu) now come under the jurisdiction of Punakha district. They are Kabji, Toepa, Bjimed (Shengana), Barpa and Toewang. Only Chang, Kawang and Mewang remain with Thimphu.

In 2012, there were 136 *pazaps*. Each community raises sixteen *pazaps* including a general called *zimpon (gzim-spon)*. They were led by the community leader called *gup*. Besides, there were thirteen *pazaps* from Lingmukha who join the others not as warriors but as bearers of standards and banners. It seems that there were traditionally 150 *pazaps*. The 34th session of the National Assembly held from April 29 – May 21, 1971 reduced the number of *pazaps* to 148. It is not certain when exactly the number was further reduced. It is a matter of pride for the families to have someone perform as *pazaps*. Children used to succeed their parents or elder siblings to perform during the *domchoe*.

Each of the eight communities is led by their elected leader called *gup* (*rged-po*). Traditionally, four communities of Toepa, Bjimed, Kabji and Toewang had leaders called *penlops* (*dpon-slob*) and four others, Chang, Barp, Kawang and Mewang had *dungpas* (*drung-pa*). These traditional offices were abolished by the Third King of Bhutan in mid 1950's as part of his administrative reform (Kinga, 2008, p. 237). *Gups* now assume their roles. They are dressed as senior monks for the duration of the *domchoe*. They and their *pazaps* are prohibited from sleeping with their wives during this time. It brings alive a customary practice when political leaders initially came from the monastery and those with lay background later took basic monastic vows and even took monastic names after assuming high public offices (Kinga, 2008, p.168). It is only the Lingmukha Gup, who is not required to don on a monk's robe. However, he is entitled to wear, along with his official *khamar* scarf, a sword during the *domchoe* to which he is otherwise not entitled.

Eight different encampments are set up in the vicinity of the *dzong* two days before the *domchoe*. It is a symbolic set up of battle camps. There used to be eight different locations for the eight communities, four on either side of Mochu River. Development imperatives in the last four decades have gradually encroached on their camp sites. Today, only Chang community has managed to hold on to their site. Three communities camp very close by each other at Thang Zang and four at Dzong Phaka.

Each encampment has tents for *pazaps*, *gups* and for battle banners called *tсандарс* (*btsan-dar*). Once the camps are set up, 'the rules of *pazap*' or *chayig* (*bca'-yig*) are read out by the *gup* in the afternoon. The nine rules stipulate code of conduct for *pazaaps*. Both the tents and *pazaps*' outfits consisting of head gears, swords, boots and an outer wear called *chari* are provided by the government. It must be mentioned that the practice of state providing battle robes and gears began only after 1971. Earlier, all the expenses including robes and gears

were the communities' responsibilities. The resolution of the National Assembly reads as follows:

In keeping with tradition, 150 Pa-Zangpa (heroes) from Tshochen and 18 from Lingmu came to Punakha Dzong annually for the ceremony of Gewang Dupchu, for which their expenses were borne by the public themselves. However, in view of the hardships thus suffered by the public, the Assembly resolved that henceforth the expenses of the Pa-Zangpa including their clothing would be provided by the Government. It was decided to fix the number of Pa-Zangpa including Gups and Zimpons to 148. The Gho, Hat, Shoes, Woolen shawls (chari) Tego and Khamar required as per tradition would be given by the government and should be kept with the Dzongda (National Assembly Secretariat, 1999, pp. 62-63).

All the outfits as well as tents are now kept with the communities. Only the *tsemdars* are kept in temples of respective communities. *Tsemdars* are insignia representing local deities called *tsen*. Appropriate rituals have to be conducted to receive, retain and return them. While some *tsemdars* are received only a few days before the *domchoe*, the one such as that of the Kabji community are received a month before the *domchoe* and returned only a month later. Although it is also referred to as *tsemdar*, the Kabji community actually receives their banner from Pangri Zampa monastery in Thimphu which is dedicated to Genyen Jagpa Melen (*dge-bsnyen jag-pa me-len*), a protective deity regarded as superior to a *tsen*. That is why the Kabji *tsemdar* has a golden knob on the top, a distinction that others do not have.

Traditionally, households with large landholdings would contribute about three *dreys* of rice and those with smaller landholdings would contribute either two or one *drey* of rice. The *gups* would collect the rice and meet all expenses for *pazaps* from these contributions. A few years ago, the government started to provide monetary allowances. "The *pazaps* are entitled to an allowance of Nu 4,500 each while the

gups and zimpons will receive Nu 6,000 from the government” (Dorji, 2012). The *gup* collects a few thousand *ngultrums* from each *pazap* and use them for collective expenditure. What was once a community responsibility has now become a state concern! The following day, the *pazaps* form a procession called *chibdrel* (*phyib-bral*) and walk to the bank of Mochu river to bathe themselves in a symbolic act of purifying defilements before performing in the *domchoe*.

### ***Deploying Pazaps to Keep Vigilance***

On the morning of the first day of *domchoe*, the *gups* of these eight communities receive an audience with the Je Khenpo. It re-enacts the moment of community leaders calling upon Zhabdrung Rinpoche, whom the Je Khenpo represents. As we will find later, they have been summoned to come along with *pazaps*. After they return to their camps, the *pazaps* don their battle gears, carry their *tsemdars* and enter the *dzong*. The entry is very quiet which contrasts with the thunderous war cries, noises and sounds of explosions that will characterize the *domchoe* for the next three days. The entry coincides with the performance in the courtyard of a mask dance called *mangcham* (*dmang 'cham*). This is a public performance of dances, and the dancers include almost everyone who perform the mask dances during the Goenwang Drubchen inside the *dukhang*. As *pazaps* wait for this long colourful dance to end, the *tsemdars* are tied along huge pillars of the section of *dzong* called *kapung* facing Phochu (*pho-chu*) river. The banner of Kabji community gets to tie their *tsemdar* on the first pillar.

Once the *mangcham* ends, they line up, unfurl their *tsemdars* and proceed to a temple inside the *dzong* called Kagye Lhakhang, where the Je Khenpo or his representative awaits them seated on a throne. The *gups* lead their *pazaps*, prostrate before the Je Khenpo and sit in rows for a *zhugdrel* (*bzhugs-'brel*)<sup>4</sup> ceremony. It is symbolic of the *gups*, *zimpons* (generals) and *pazaps* calling on Zhabdrung Rinpoche to receive military

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<sup>4</sup> Ceremonial serving of drinks and edibles such as fruits and sweets. See Penjore (2021) for a detailed description and analysis of *zhugdrel* ceremony.

instructions. The key instructions that the Je Khenpo reads are as follows:

Among the Lho[mon] patrons, the eight large communities of Wang are the chief among trusted patrons of our lama Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, who is the Supreme Crown of Lhojong. Today, we honour our Dharma Protectors by celebrating this *domchoe*. Yeshe Gonpo is the war god of all those who follow the virtuous path and destroyer of those who indulge in negative actions. The teachings of Lord Buddha in general and that of Palden Drukpa in particular are the source of peace and benefits in the world. The survival of the teachings depends on the Dharma Protectors. The *pazaps* of eight large communities of Wang and of Lingmukha have been blessed by Yeshe Gonpo as his support in human forms. From today onwards, externally you have to demonstrate heroism to overcome enemies. Internally, you have to persevere in whole-hearted support of the teachings. The chief and council of monastic body entrust you this responsibility. Moreover, you have to establish camps today at Dzom Phaka and Thang Dzong and [guard] the boundaries (*bka' bkyon rdo rje tho lum*, ff: 1-9. Translation Mine).

In addition, the Je Khenpo instructs them to enjoy in the evening by singing and dancing but abstain from quarrels and fights. He also commands them to stay away from drinking and always wear complete battle outfits.

The moment the instruction is given, *pazaps* rush out shouting war cries, whistling, yelling and exploding fire crackers to imitate sounds of gun powder explosion. The serene *dzong* is suddenly transformed into a war zone. As commanded, *pazaps* from each community rush to guard different locations around the *dzong* brandishing their swords. The generals mount their horses at the bottom of the stairway leading to the entrance of the *dzong* and gallop away followed by their *pazaps*. Again, each community had their own sites to guard although

encroachment on these sites sees some communities proceeding to shared places.



Photo 1: A general mounts his horse aided by *pazaps* of his community

At these sites or outposts, the *gup* and *zimpon* sit at the head of two rows formed by their *pazaps*. One of the *pazaps* called *yangpon* then stands up, holds up a bow and makes a gesture of shooting arrows thrice. Then he sings a song called *lengma* (*gleng-ma*) through a simple choreography. After that the *zimpon* performs a sword dance called *bey* (*rBad*). Then the *pazaps* leave for their respective camps where another *zhugdrel* ceremony is administered. Throughout the evening, they sing and dance.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Since the first day ends early, the district administration has organized a series of events in the late afternoon. These include competitions among the eight communities in singing, story-telling, wearing *pazap* outfits, etc.



Photo 2: A Yangpon performs the Lengma songs and dance as pazaps look on outside the majestic Punakha Dzong



Photo 3: A Zimpon performing the sword dance. He holds the sacred *tsendar* of his community.



### ***Preparing for Military Engagement***

The second day begins very early in the Kabji camp. Long before dawn, a monk propitiates the deity Genyen Jagpa Melen. The *tsendar* is lifted. Led by their *gup* and *zimpon*, the *pazaps* march upward to a village called Changyul singing a song called *legso* (*legs-so*). Blowing a war trumpet, yelling war cries, exploding fire crackers and simultaneously singing in chorus after the *yangpon*, the scene is reminiscent of *pazaps* marching to battle. At Changyul village, they conduct a libation ceremony called *marchang* (*mar-chang*), repeat the singing of *lengma* and perform the *bey* dance. The reason for Kabji *pazaps* stop at Changyul is due to the presence of a shrine in a house there dedicated to the deity they propitiate. The deity is called Goen Dragpa (*dgon brag-pa*). The *pazaps* would then sing and dance waiting for the dawn to break. Meanwhile, *pazaps* of four communities wait on the right side of Mochu river's cantilever bridge called *bazam* (*sba-rdzam*) and *pazaps* of the other three communities wait on the left side. The *bazam* is the strategic approach to Punakha Dzong. Till the Kabji *pazaps* arrive, the gates of *bazam* remain closed.

As dawn breaks, the *gup* and *zimpon* lead their *pazaps* towards the *bazam* singing war songs. They stand in front of the entrance of the *bazam* and break into a dance while *pazaps* of other communities shout asking them to open the gate and let them proceed. At an astrologically favourable time, the chief astrologer signals from the entrance of the *dzong* by waving a white scarf. The gate opens and *pazaps* cross the bridge. *Pazaps* of four communities take turns to sing at the entrance before crossing. They join *pazaps* of three other communities waiting across the bridge by the side of the *dzong*. All the *pazaps* then join and form a two-line procession. The *pazaps* of Kabji lead the procession. They go around the *dzong* once. *Pazaps* then form two groups of four communities each and sit at a short distance from the other. Once again, the *lengma* and *bey* dances are performed by each community taking turns. Then they return to their camps for breakfast.

Around 10 a.m., the *pazaps* enter the *dzong* again. In the courtyard, they form many rows. Traditionally they would be treated to a lunch by the governor of the fort. The tradition has however, been discontinued for many decades. They were served tea and snacks by the district administrator. The actual purpose of this lunch-line or *lto-gyal bcad-ni*, is for the governor to inspect the *pazaps* and see if their outfits are complete and in place. The *gups* introduce their *pazaps* as the governor walks by. It is meant to ensure the battle preparedness of the *pazaps*. After this the *pazaps* call on *Debi Sungkhorp* (*sDe-pai srung-'khorp*), a monk whose traditional function was to perform daily rituals for the civil ruler called *deb* based in Punakha Dzong. In the adjoining courtyard, he administers the *pazaps* a *zhugdrel* ceremony. Then he reads out another instruction from the same text that the Je Khenpo read out the previous day.

This time the reading recalls the life and deeds of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and the founding of the Bhutanese state. The narrative goes far back into history to trace the genealogical and spiritual lineage of Zhabdrung Rinpoche, and of prophecies concerning his life and undertakings. It also highlights his close association with the protective deities particularly Pal Yeshe Gonpo. The second part of the reading emphasizes the need for *pazaps* to be prepared for battle and for taking on the enemies fearlessly. They are told that various deities from their communities have been invoked to enter their physical beings. Therefore, they are like the deities themselves. They are instructed to overcome the enemy and return inside the *dzong* where thanks-giving ceremony to the protective deities and celebrations await them.<sup>6</sup> After this instruction, the *pazaps* leave the *dzong* for their camps.

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<sup>6</sup> See *bka' bkyon rdo rje tho lum*, ff: 10-31 for details.



Photo 4: The governor inspects the *pazaps*

### ***The Final Showdown***

On the morning of the third day, the *pazaps* re-enter the *dzong* and form two rows in the courtyard where they remain standing before the Je Khenpo, who is seated high up on a balcony. The eight *yangpons* take turn to perform *lengma* songs and dances. After they are done, the *Debi Sungkhorp* once again reads the same instructions to the *pazaps*, who are seated now. As soon as this ends, the Je Khenpo proceeds to Kagye Lhakhang, where the *pazaps* and their leaders had called on him the first day and received instructions. *Pazaps* of four communities follow him while four others assemble in the smaller courtyard in front of a temple called Machen Lhakhang. Traditionally, leaders of four communities who assemble in Kagye Lhakhang were the *penlops* and the other four leaders were the *dungpas*. The generals or *zimpons* of

these *penlops* wear battle helmets which were thus far kept in the *dukhang*. The four other generals continue wearing their conical headgear. The *bey* dances performed by the *zimpons* take place simultaneously in the Kagye Lhakhang and in the courtyard below.

As soon as the *bey* performance in front of Machen Lhakhang is over, *pazaps* of four communities exit through the side (second) entrance of Punakha Dzong whistling, exploding fire crackers, shouting battle cries and brandishing their swords. The generals mount their horses at the gate and ride across the *bazam*. They proceed to a location exactly opposite the site where the ceremony of ‘dumping the jewel’ would take place a little later. There they perform *bey* dances and simulate sword fighting.



Photo 5: A Zimpon performs in the Kagye Lhakhang

The *pazaps* of four other communities exit through the main (first) entrance. Their exit however is more dramatic. *Pazaps* of each community exit in twos or threes by performing *bey* dances first at the top of the stairway and then at the end. As they dance, war cries, explosions, whistling and noises fill the air. A huge crowd is already gathered in front of the *dzong* to

witness these performances. After the last *pazap* of a community completes the *bey* dance, the general follows with the same dance, rides his mount and gallops away. Then the *pazaps* and generals of other communities exit in similar manner. In contrast to *pazaps* of four other communities who exit through the side entrance and perform sword dances by simulating a fight, these other *pazaps* who actually take off for their camps are simulating departure to engage the Tibetan forces encamped elsewhere.



Photo 6: Pazaps take turn to perform on the stairway of Punakha Dzong

The four communities whose *pazaps* exit from the main entrance are Kabji, Chang, Bjimed and Mewang. The other four, Toepa, Barp, Kawang and Toewang exit from the second entrance. It must be pointed out that the Kabji community always exits first from the main entrance. Toewang and Mewang take turns every year to exit from the main entrance.

The entrances assigned for other communities to exit have always been fixed thus.

***'Dumping the Jewel'***

After the *pazaps* leave the *dzong*, the monks and officials of Punakha form a long and colourful ceremonial procession or *chibdrel*. The procession is a visual feast of monks wearing Chinese brocades of various colours, the religious musical instrument they play as well the fineries that the local people wear. All of them move towards the bank of Mochu river above the cantilever bridge. In the lead are *pazaps* from Lingmukha hoisting different banners. Towards the end of the line is a monk who carries the 'jewel' wrapped in a cloak. Another monk follows by holding a parasol for the 'jewel'. Behind him is the senior monk dressed to role-play Zhabdrung Rinpoche. He wears a large ceremonial black hat and robe. The robe has the imprint of the figure of Mahakala.



Photo 7: Colourful ceremonial procession of monks



Photo 8: The “jewel” concealed by a cloak

The Je Khenpo usually assumed this role although some other senior monks also take his place. The procession exits the *dzong* from the main entrance accompanied by melodious music played from religious instruments (*ser-sgreng*). Hundreds of people would already be lined up on the left bank of Mochu River to receive blessings of the lama and the jewel. More so, people receive blessings from headgear of Lingmukha *pazaps*. It is said that the metallic knob on top of the headgear of all *pazaps* contain pieces of cloth worn by Zhabdrung Rinpoche and therefore, revered as holy. At the exact site where Zhabdrung Rinpoche ‘dumped the jewel’ in 1649, the senior monk first performs a libation ceremony to propitiate the nagas. This ceremony is called *glu chog*. After that he throws

some oranges in the river in a simulated gesture of throwing away the 'jewel.' This event is called *nob chu shagni* (*nor-bu chug shags-ni*). Also thrown are multi-coloured granules of crushed stones or minerals which were used to form the base of the mandala during the Goenwang Drubchen. Many sacred national treasures are mounted over that mandala and covered to be secluded from public view. These are removed in the early hours of the third day of *domchoe*. The multi-coloured granular substances are swept by the Je Khenpo for disposal in this ceremony. People rush to sweep and retain whatever remains of those substances believing in their powers over influence and harm by spirits such as *glu* and *sa-bdag*. Disposing these substances along with the oranges are believed to appease the nagas and secure their blessings.



Photo 9: Dorji Lopen, the second most senior monk scoops the sacred substances from the mandala during the 2022 *domchoe* for immersion in the river. Source: Punakha Dzongkhag Administration.



It is believed that on this day, the nagas come to receive these blessed and sacred substances dressed in their best although their presence is not visible to human eye. To ensure that these are not snatched by earthly gods and eight classes of evils, the disposal of the substances take place surrounded by Dharma Protectors who are invoked by the Chief Abbot and divine forces that the *pazaps* represent. Even before the oranges are thrown away, young men strip off their clothes and sit by the river bank ready to dive after the oranges. The moment the oranges are thrown, they jump after them. The oranges are kept at altars in home as blessed objects.

“Dumping the jewel” re-enacts the moment when Zhabdrung Rinpoche supposedly pretended to throw away the sacred relic of Rangjung Kharsapani, the object of numerous Tibetan invasions. Oral sources talk about how the Tibetans were encamped at the open ground in front of Punakha Dzong called Thangzang (*thang bzang*). Since they were small in numbers, the Bhutanese forces had to strategize to convey a different image altogether. They exit (at the command of Zhabdrung Rinpoche) yelling and shouting war cries through the main gate which the Tibetans could see from their camps. However, they re-entered the *dzong* through the second gate, which was hidden from Tibetan’s point of view. Then, they again exit as before through the main gate and kept going in circles. The Tibetans were surprised to see endless number of Bhutanese militia leaving the *dzong* even after seven days. At the same time, Tibetan forces are reported to have heard loud terrifying voices near the shrine of Goen Dragpa in Changyul. They did not know whether it was humans or gods that made such loud noises. Meanwhile, Zhabdrung Rinpoche had sounded out that three militia from Zamling Jongsum (*‘dzam-gling gyong-sum*), Phu Ling-sum (*phu gling-sum*) and Dasang Ledpa (*mda’-sang slad-pa*) have not been summoned yet. He intended the Tibetans to hear this who were shocked that there seemed to be more reserves of militia when these were actually very small hamlets.

So it is said that the Tibetans decided to call for a truce. The following morning, five Tibetan generals and a small contingent of their forces went near the entrance of Punakha Dzong without wearing their battle helmets and also not carrying any weapon. They proposed a truce to the Bhutanese. It is said that a few shrewd Bhutanese then conveyed their intention to throw away Rangjung Kharsapani into the river since this was the cause of all Tibeto-Bhutanese conflict. Thus it was that the following day, a huge procession of monks led by Zhabdrung Rinpoche pretended to proceed and dump this precious jewel into the river as the *pazaps* stood guard in Thangzang.

Zhabdrung Rinpoche suggested that he was doing away with the root of all conflicts between Tibet and Bhutan. When it was done, the Tibetans (role-played by *pazaps* on the other side of the river) are said to have rebuked the Bhutanese for their senselessness in disposing Rangjung Khasarpani right before their eyes. It is said that the Tibetans returned thereafter. Instead of the relic however, Zhabdrung Rinpoche had actually dumped an orange as a decoy. Rangjung Kharsapani was hidden in the flowing sleeves of the robe that he wore. This relic today remains enshrined in Punakha Dzong as one of the most important symbols of Bhutanese statehood.

As Aris points out no written literature refers to the dumping of the jewel (p.618). References are only to the disposal of sacred multi-coloured substances. However, what has taken pre-eminence in the narrative of local folklore is the supposed dumping of Rangjung Kharsapani. This contrast between written record and folklore is difficult to reconcile. It shows different interpretation by members of the monastic community and the laity.

The procession then returns to the *dzong*. The generals also ride back, dismount from their steeds at the foot of the stairways leading into the *dzong*. They are carried by fellow-*pazaps* into the *dzong*'s courtyard. This moment of the generals dismounting with the aid of *pazaps* of their communities and being carried up the staircase and into the

courtyard of the *dzong* is very sensitive. The *pazaps* compete to demonstrate who can carry their own general first and without any untoward incident such as him falling off his mount in that crowded space with a deliberate cacophony created by the spectators to frighten the steeds and throw off their riders. The generals reportedly berate the *pazaps* if he is let to fall as it marks their incompetence. It is also deemed inauspicious for their own community. When all the generals and *pazaps* make it inside the *dzong's* courtyard, victory celebrations conclude the day and the *domchoe*.

### **Lengma Songs and Dances**

*Lengma* songs are sung and performed by a *pazap* from each community called *yangpon*. There are therefore, eight *lengma* songs. Most of the lyrics are similar to each other. They are derived from the main lyric called *lengma chungtshig* (*gleng-ma gzhung-tshig*). In fact, the main lyric and the *lengma* song sung by Kawang community is the same. All the *lengma* begins with the same quartet. Some end with similar quartet. Hence, there is very little variation in lyrics.

The primary meaning of the *lengma* songs is the statement by each community through these *yangpon* that they have come to witness the Goenwang Drubchen. The lyrics make reference to the order of the *deb* or civil ruler and those of the council of four senior monks who instructed them to come for the *domchoe*. Most of the *lengma* songs make reference to the *pazaps* having bathed to purify themselves before coming for Goenwang Drubchen. This must be the reason why the *pazaps* today bathe themselves on the day preceding the commencement of the *domchoe*.

As mentioned above, each *lengma* song is derived from the *lengma chungtshig*. This main lyric is in fact a brief biographical sketch of Zhabdrung Rinpoche. The first part begins with his birth in Tibet, leaving for Bhutan and entering it through Laya and Lingzhi in the north. Then it recounts how he established his first seat at Tango in north Thimphu, and where he propitiated Pal Yeshe Gonpo. The fact that he saw the

tutelary deities in meditative vision is also highlighted. This part ends by recalling the construction of Punakha Dzong as the temple or seat dedicated to these guardian deities, establishment of a monastic community in the *dzong* and enthronement of its supreme abbot.

The next part highlights *dzong* construction activities initiated by Zhabdrung Rinpoche. It makes references to three *dzongs*: Trongsa Dzong in the east, Dagana Dzong in the south and Gasa Dzong in the north. Each *dzong* was entrusted to the care of a protective deity. The *lengma* talks about how different offerings were mobilized from communities under the jurisdiction of each *dzong* and how they were delivered to Punakha. From communities in the east under Trongsa came offerings of *bamen dongkar* (*ba-men gdong-dkar*), a prized cattle breed, woven textiles consisting of well-known traditional patterns such as *sertha* (*ser-khra*), *martha* (*dmar-khra*) and *adang martha* (*A-thang dmar-khra*). From communities in the south under Dagana came offerings of ivory, cotton and vegetable dyes. From communities in the north under Gasa came offerings of yaks, woolen textiles and herbal incenses (Royal Academy of Performing Arts, pp.18-20). The last part of the *lengma zhungtshig* talks about how the representatives of the head of government, council of ministers and government officials receive the offerings. It ends with a prayer for the Dharma teachings to last forever.

### **Lyrics of the Sword Dance**

Each time a *yangpon* sings his *lengma*, the *zimpon* or general immediately follows with a sword dance or *bey*. There are many occasions when the *bey* is performed over the course of three-day *domchoe*. The ritual of performing a *bey* is the same. After the conclusion of a *lengma*, the *zimpon* - who is always seated along with the *gup* at the head of rows of *pazap* - moves towards the end of the row in slow choreographed steps. An attendant follows by holding and spinning the *tendar* above the general's head. He then makes gesture of folding his hand as a mark of respect and takes the *tendar* from his attendant. He gracefully unsheathes his sword and performs the dance.

The *bey tshig* (*rbad-tshig*) or lyrics of sword dance is quite short. Unlike *lengma* lyrics, the *bey tshig* of each community is different from the others except for the one that Toewang and Mewang shares. This is because the deity or *tsen* worshipped by each community is different whereas Toewang and Mewang worship the same deity. The deities of the communities are as follows: Kabji: Genyen Jagpa Melen, Bjimed: Pholha Dagpo Senge (*pho-lha bdag-po seng-ge*), Kawang: Genyen Dorji Dragtsen (*dge-bsnyen rdo-rje brag-btsan*), Chang: Chigchar Marpo (*gcig-car dmar-po*), Barpa: Gyem Jarog Dongchen (*mgonm bya-rog gdong-can*), Toeb: Jarog Dongchen (*bya-rog gdong-can*) and Toewang and Mewang: Dongkar Tsen (*gdong-dkar btsan*).

Each *tendar* is a physical support and manifestation of a community's *tsen*. The moment the general receives the *tendar*, the *tsen* is believed to infuse with his person. Thus when the *bey* is performed, it is the *tsen* himself performing it. The *bey tshig* are in first person narrative. Take for example the *bey tshig* of Kabji.

From the heart of the dance of the glorious horse,  
The rays that shine forth are those of the King of War God,  
The body of the glorious horse that dispels darkness,  
I am he, Genyen Dorje Dradul, conqueror of enemies,  
Leaping flames signal anger in my heart,  
I reduce to ashes assembly of four evils,  
And accomplish undertakings of the Lord's teachings;  
I am known as Genyen Jagpa Melen! (Royal Academy of  
Performing Arts, p.20)

The choreographed dance the general performs is simulation of the battle he fights as a divine warrior. Each *bey tshig* tells how a particular deity defeats the enemy. As divine warriors, they portray the enemy as enemy of the Dharma. The *bey tshig* tells about how the *tsen* vanquished the enemy and brought peace to the country.

### **Kabjips as the ‘Right Horn’**

It has been noted that among the eight communities of Wang, the *pazaps* of Kabji get priority in all the events associated with the *domchoe*. They lead the entry into the *dzong* on the first day. Their *tendar* has a golden knob and enjoys the privilege of being fixed on the first pillar of the *kapung* in the *dzong*. On the second day, *pazaps* of other communities have to wait on either side of Mochu *bazam* before they arrive. Then they lead the procession around the *dzong*. It is also them who lead the exit out of the *dzong* through the main entrance on the third day. The question obviously is why this privilege.

It is said that the Kabjips were the chief among patrons of the eight communities of Zhabdrung Rinpoche. Both Zhabdrung Rinpoche and his predecessors always stayed in Kabji when they came to Bhutan. The Kabjips also extended all possible support to them. Hence they came to be known as the ‘right horn’ whereas Barp was known as the ‘left horn.’ It is not clear why the latter was called ‘left horn.’

Unlike other communities who proceed directly to Punakha for the *domchoe*, the Kabjips have to perform a day of ritual one day before they join others in establishing their camps around the *dzong*. They celebrate what is called Yuesakha Domchoe. Yuesakha is a village in Kabji community, where Zhabdrung Rinpoche stayed in meditation for three months. The performance of *lengma*, *bey*, calling on *gup*, getting instructions etc. is a near parallel of what happens in Punakha Domchoe albeit at a smaller scale. One of the highlights of this *domchoe* is the performance of a dance called *Kabjipai zhey* (*dkar-sbyis pai gzhas*), a dance unique to that community. It is performed for hours on end.<sup>7</sup> As their *pazaps* proceed to Punakha the following day, people of hamlets along the way host *marchang*. At Changyul village, they have to worship and

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<sup>7</sup> At my request, the *pazaps* staged a short performance of this *zhey* in their camp on the night of 28th evening, 2017. Despite some similarities in lyrics and choreography with other *zheys* in the region, it has its distinct style, tone and choreography as well.

pay respect to the deity Goen Dragpa, a ritual they repeat in the early hours of the second day of the *domchoe*.

### **Conclusion: Punakha Domchoe as a National Political Ritual**

As we have seen, Punakha Domchoe re-enacts an important historical battle. It is preceded by Goenwang Drubchen, which is an annual prayer and ritual ceremony to honour Mahakala. Once the thanks-giving ceremony concludes after fifteen days, Punakha Dzong and its surrounding area are transformed into a theatre to simulate the final battle for the defense of the *dzong* against the siege staged by Tibetan forces. The three-day *domchoe* appears like a three-act drama. The simulated battle therefore, renews and perpetuates the memory of the 1649 battle, which was a crucial moment in consolidating the young state of Palden Druk Zhung. It signaled the beginning of a long hiatus from external invasion although Tibetans would resume their military adventures almost a century later. But this was the last battle Zhabdrung Rinpoche would fight in his life-time.

In re-telling the account of that battle to the audience who come to witness the *domchoe*, the memory is renewed and perpetuated. Grandparents and parents explain the background and significance of the *domchoe* to their children who may or may not be attending it. The audience is however, not the only target of this narrative. The *pazaps* who simulate the battle are as much a target of this ritual of memory-renewal as they are the agency acting out the narrative. This is because the *pazaps*, who were traditionally villagers, now come from various backgrounds. There were older *pazaps* who have been participating for as long as forty years. But then there were also students and civil servants, some of whom were participating for the first time. They have taken leave from offices and schools to represent their community in the *domchoe*.

The significance of Punakha Domchoe is however, not merely historical. It is an important element of contemporary state ritual. In the first instance, the three-day *domchoe* not only simulates that particular battle but involves narrative of the

whole process of state-formation and consolidation by Zhabdrung Rinpoche. The primary function of *yangpon* singing *lengma* songs before every simulated fight in the form of *bey* dance is to recount the life and deeds of Zhabdrung Rinpoche. In a way then, the *yangpon* uses the occasion to recall and narrate it to his fellow *pazaps*. This is not to suggest that he is the only person who knows about the life and deeds of Zhabdrung Rinpoche. However, he functions as the local-carrier of the memory of Zhabdrung Rinpoche's life in his community. This is further reinforced when *Debi Sungkhorp* reads the brief summary of his life on the second and third day of *domchoe*.

Bhutan is no longer a monastic state founded by Zhabdrung Rinpoche. The monarchy founded in 1907 replaced that state. However, Zhabdrung Rinpoche continues to be central to the conception and narrative of the Bhutanese state. Indeed, there are many texts, prayer ceremonies, monuments, statues, paintings and thangkas that honour and reaffirm his spiritual and political position in Bhutan. However, Punakha Domchoe is the only one that deploys the medium of folk theatre to do that. It is then a political ritual that reaffirms his centrality in the Bhutanese state. Punakha Dzong is the site for important national rituals that hinges on his persona. His mortal remains known as Machen (*ma-chen*) was embalmed and continues to lie in state in Machen Lhakhang of Punakha Dzong. His death anniversary, which falls on the tenth day of every third month, is observed as a national holiday. Regular meals are served every day by a designated chamberlain and his assistant as if he were alive.

Coronations of all Bhutanese kings take place in Punakha Dzong. The principle event of a coronation involves the Crown Prince receiving a set of five coloured scarves from the stupa in which the sacred remains of Zhabdrung Rinpoche is entombed. This act of receiving the scarves establishes the Crown Prince as the King. Again, all Je Khenpos received their scarves of office from Zhabdrung Machen as well. The royal weddings of the Fourth and Fifth Kings also took place in Punakha Dzong.



The queens received similar scarves to mark their enthronements.

Coronation and enthronement ceremonies take place after the reign of each monarch or tenure of each Je Khenpo. The *domchoe* is the only annual and regular ritual that brings to life the centrality of Zhabdrung Rinpoche in Bhutan's political life. In its organization and performance, it appears to be a local festival involving only the eight large communities of Wang. In its symbolism, historical significance and narrative however, it is a national ritual. By providing tents, outfits and accessories of *pazaps* as well as their allowances, and supporting the Central Monastic Body, the state has become increasingly involved in it.

Inventing political rituals in the form of theatrical performances is not limited to the monastic state of Zhabdrung Rinpoche. The appeal of this medium in reinforcing and perpetuating the memory of landmark historical moments has seen the modern Bhutanese state deploy it for the same objective. We have seen a revival of the usage of traditional outfits of the *pazaps*. The personnel of the armed forces wear them particularly during state ceremonies and celebrations. The influence of *pazaps* of Punakha Domchoe is starkly visible both in the weapons, war cries and choreography of performers of Dochula Tshechu. "The old *tsechu* festivals and the newly created Dochula event offer ways for a community and its ruling elite to embrace the power, politics and cultural needs of an extraordinary nation and its people in a rapidly changing society" (David & Samuel, p.32). Political rituals after all, are important constituents of any modern state. Bhutan is not an exception.

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