

**Wayo, Wayo -
Voices from the Past**

དཔལ་འབྲུག་ཞིབ་འཇུག་ལྟེ་བ།

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CONTENT

<i>Ha: The Bon Festival of Gortshom Village by TASHI CHODEN</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Goleng Roop- A Cult of Feast Offering by LHAM DORJI.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Wamling Kharpu: A Vibrant Ancient Festival by DORJI PENJORE</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>Goshing Chodpa by PHUNTSHO RAPTEN</i>	<i>72</i>
<i>A Brief History of Chendebji Village and Lhabon Celebration by SONAM KINGA.....</i>	<i>105</i>
<i>Kharam - The Cattle Festival by KARMA GALAY.....</i>	<i>117</i>
<i>Khar Phud: A Non-Buddhist Lha Sol Festival of Eastern Bhutan by UGYEN PELGEN.....</i>	<i>125</i>

HA: THE BON FESTIVAL OF GORTSHOM VILLAGE*

TASHI CHODEN **

INTRODUCTION

The people of Gortshom village celebrate a series of festivals of which *Prichoed*, characterized by the offering of flowers, is celebrated in the fourth month to mark the beginning of spring. As harvests begin, *langchoed* is celebrated in the ninth month. A distinctive festival, *lha* (hereafter 'Ha' as pronounced and known in Gortshom), is celebrated in the sixth month to propitiate local gods and deities. According to local belief, this is done in order to seek protection for crops and livestock against natural calamities. Unlike other festivals, Ha is not an isolated celebration. Various activities are observed at different times of the year either in anticipation of, or as follow up to the festival. The Ha celebration in Gortshom is a part of Bon tradition. This particular tradition belongs to the Bon Kar¹. The communities along the valley of Kurichhu (a

* I attended the *Ha* celebration in Gortshom village under Metsho Gewog, Lhuntse from July 18-20, 2002. I would like to acknowledge the hospitality, support and co-operation of the people of Gortshom, in particular our host Ap Tashi Dorji, and Aum Dekimo, Tshampa Rinchen Namgyal, Aum Sonamo and Gup Kezang.

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¹*Bon* practitioners are of two types: The *Bon kar* and *Bon nag*. *Kar* means white, and they are those who do not engage in animal sacrifices. *Nag* means black, and refers to those engaged in activities such as black, magic sorceries and animal sacrifices. In Bhutan, *Bon nag* was replaced by the introduction of Buddhism.

river that descends from Kulagangri and flows through Kurtoe region) observe varying versions of Ha in different months. For example, it is celebrated in Thidangbi in the fourth month, Jarey in the fifth month, Metsho in the sixth month, Zhungkhar, Nyabi and Takela in the seventh month, Jang in the eighth month, and Ney in the ninth month. It is also known by different names such as Kharphu in Thidangbi, Ha in Metsho and Jarey, and Chha in Ney. It is believed that this monthly progression of Ha celebration starts in the plains of India in the first month and concludes in the mountains of Tibet in the 12th month. An interesting aspect of the villages and communities that celebrate this festival is that they are all located on the left side of Kurichhu.

HA CALENDER

Annual Activities

Month	2	5	6
Day	18	10	10
Activity	Tsanchoed	Hagshe	Ha

Activities in the Sixth Month

Day	Activities
1st	Prepare Machhang
6th	Prepare Gazang Chhang
9th	Preparatory works for Ha. Bring sangshing and darchoed.
10th	Ha
11th	Hai Lan or Lanchhen
12th	Dued choed
13th	Dudkilan or Lanchhung
14th	Phag chham

The days for activities are not always followed strictly. Since paddy is planted during the sixth month, the Ha celebration may be postponed to the 18th day if plantation has not been completed. The calendar of the actual celebration of Ha is no longer followed through the five days as shown in the table. While duechod is conducted on the third day, the tradition of performing Phagcham (dance of hog) has disappeared altogether.

HAI TSAWA: HOSTS OF THE HA

Some sixty years ago, Gortshom comprised of only two households from which offshoots grew into newer households over time. One of the original houses was a three-storied structure called Thogpa. The other smaller house was called Wogpa.

The first household that separated from the main Wogpa family is called Khimsar (new house). The next household that branched out is called Lagtang (arm extension). Both the Khimsar and Lagtang later expanded into more households. Similarly, the Thogpa household split into smaller households such as Ta Dzong, Frangchen and Dulibi. While the old structure of the original Wogpa house is still intact, the house of the Thogpa was demolished many years ago.

Members of these households, originating from the Thogpa and Wogpa, are the tsawa who take turns hosting the Ha celebration every year.

ROLE OF HA BON

The Ha Bon, a Bon practitioner, was traditionally the custodian of the Ha festival. Sangay, the last Ha Bon (locally known as Meme Ha Bon) was a follower of the *Bonkar*

tradition. In the absence of any successors, his death some forty years ago marked the beginning of a decline in the Ha tradition in Gortshom. While the village gomchen has taken over some minor roles, people conduct the whole proceeding of the festival guided by memory. (The term Ha Bon will continue to be used throughout the article, although it should be understood that it is now the village gomchen who actually carries out the rituals for Ha).

With the beginning of the Ha month on the first day of the sixth month, the Ha Bon undergoes dietary restrictions by refraining from eating meat, fish and eggs. The tsawa invites him for the celebration beginning on the 9th day.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE FESTIVAL

Preliminary Preparations

A month before the actual Ha celebration, the thogpa and wogpa households make offerings of sang (incense of fresh fir branches) and tshog (offerings of food, drinks and fruits) in anticipation of the Ha. This is called Hagtshe (early date) and the date corresponds to the 10th day of the fifth month, the day on which Ha is celebrated in Jarey Gewog. Offerings are laid out on broad green leaves on the rooftop. Farmers believe that the failure to make offerings at this time brings about destruction of crops by strong winds.

On the first day of the sixth month, the tsawa boil and ferment 10 drey² of wheat to make machhang. They also grind about five drey of wheat to make torma (ritual objects made from

² A unit of measurement (measured by a circular container with one open end).

kneaded dough) out of flour. As the wheat is put inside a cauldron of boiling water, the person must recite verses of wayo (see section 6). It is recited again when yeast is applied and mixed with boiled wheat. On the fifth day, the tsawa contribute six drey of wheat to prepare the gazang chhang, necessary for offerings during the Ha festival. At the time when the wheat is put in the cauldron to boil, and when yeast is applied, it is unacceptable for persons coming from a house of sickness, birth, death or marriage to arrive. Since these instances are considered inauspicious or sources of impurities, the tsawa immediately holds any such person responsible should the fermented grain and brewed spirit thereafter be of inferior quality. Such a situation is believed to portend inauspicious Ha, meaning that threats to crops cannot be ruled out.

Sang Collection

Early in the morning of the ninth day, the thogpa and wogpa households send a man each to the other side of Phrang Phrangla, (a mountain overlooking Gortshom and a few other villages of Metsho Gewog), to collect branches of Wangshing. They cut down two or three young fir trees, and lop the branches and leaves to be carried down to the village. It is believed that the sight of a white bird (lha) perched on a fir tree, is confirmation that the lha has descended to earth. Before they reach the village they have to stop halfway, and leaving the branches, go to another place to cut down three tall and slender bamboos to be used as flagpoles during the Ha. Once they reach the summit of the mountain carrying the fir branches and bamboos, they recite the verses of wayo aloud. This is a signal to the villagers below that they can no longer enter their fields to work for the day. This restriction against working is called lan. By then, the farmers would have

already stocked an adequate amount of vegetables. The two men descend the mountain, occasionally shouting wayo wayo. On hearing them, the people down in the village respond with wayo wayo. As they near the village, wayo wayo is recited more frequently. Upon hearing the very first wayo recited by the two men from the top of the mountain, the tsawa who have been listening open the machhang fermented on the first day. Each of the tsawa holds the lid of the pot containing fermented grain on either side. The Ha Bon holds it in the middle, and they open the container together. A depression on either of the tsawa's side forecasts their misfortune; misfortune for the whole community is indicated by a depression in the centre, while the absence of any depression is taken as a sign that there will be no misfortune at all.

Preparation of Halong - Site for Celebration

The two men go directly to a small clearing shaded by a towering cypress tree. This site located above Gortshom village is known as Halong, the traditional site for the Ha celebration. Before the arrival of the two men, the tsawa clear the area, make two or three small terraces for the following day, and install a small oak tree with three-pronged branches in the ground at the side of the central terrace. The three branches are bound with a creeper to create a resting place where offerings can be placed during Ha.

Upon arrival, the two men unload sang at the Halong, and take the three bamboos to the house of the tsawa. They walk down to the village, taking a handful of fir branches as gifts to every household. Chhang³ is offered to them in return. Each

³ Spirit distilled from grains and fermented with local yeasts.

family keeps a fir branch over the fireplace to be burnt during tsen choed in the second month. This tradition of visiting every household and drinking is popularly called chhangkor.

(In the past, the Ha Bon would go to the Halong to perform a ritual. If it rained the ritual would be performed in front of the tsawa house, facing the Halong. The Ha Bon would then return to the tsawa's house. His return was a symbolic gesture of receiving the lha home. The major ceremonies for the Ha were performed in either the thogpa or wogpa household depending on their convenience and mutual agreement).

For the ritual ceremony in the evening, a drey of paddy with a dadar⁴ in it is placed over a bakur⁵, also filled with paddy. Then a thro⁶ belonging to the thogpa and filled with singchhang⁷ filtered from the gazang chhang, is decorated with butter yaden⁸. No other ritual objects such as torma are made.

The Ha Bon starts reciting the Sangrab, a Bon scripture. This continues until midnight. The two men, who went to collect fir branches earlier, are seated next to him. The young men and women of the village also join them. At certain points in Sangrab recitation, the Ha Bon stops for the two men and others to recite wayo. Among others, the Sangrab narrates the

⁴ A ceremonial arrow adorned with a scarf.

⁵ A container made from woven cane.

⁶ A small pot made either of copper or clay.

⁷ An alcoholic beverage filtered directly from fermented grain.

⁸ Butter decorations shaped like horns and usually placed on the edges of pots or cauldron filled with alcoholic beverages used for ceremonial occasion.

story of the theft of fire from the realm of demons in order to light sang that has been collected for the Ha celebration.

THE HA

The following morning, the Ha Bon goes around the village visiting each house. In every household he is served chhang and a bangchung⁹ full of keptang¹⁰. This is known as dromzar. After breakfast at the tsawa's house, he makes two ritual torma, one each for the thogpa and wogpa. The torma is made from wheat flour contributed by the tsawa. Unlike ordinary ritual torma, there is no butter decoration. They are adorned with flowers, known as Halong Metog.



The ritual torma made by the Ha Bon is adorned with flowers

⁹ Dish made of bamboo and used particularly for eating and packing meals.

¹⁰ Circular and flattened kneaded dough sautéed in oil. Every family makes keptang for the festival.

Ha: The Bon Festival of Gortshom Village

The Ha Bon makes small effigies of goat and sheep. Another ritual object is drangzhey, a small circular dough with a depression filled with milk, grounded garlic and sliced chilies. (In the past, the Ha Bon would make a tsengi torna for himself - this is not made anymore). Another prayer ceremony is performed, and at noon everything is taken to the Halong in a procession formed by the people in the village.



Procession to Halong, the site for Ha celebration

The first person carries sang, followed by three people carrying three bamboo flags put together from pieces of plain cloth in colours of blue, red and white attached to each bamboo. Next in line are those carrying various ritual objects made earlier in the day. The Ha Bon follows the procession while making offerings of grains and drutor. He wears a bundle of white yarn around his head; others wear wreaths made of ferns or artemesia. As the procession moves, the Ha

Wayo, Wayo - Voices from the Past

Bon recites prayers. When he stops, the procession also stops, and all others recite wayo. This goes on until they reach the Halong. There, the persons carrying the flags run around thrice as fast as they can. They then stand above the Halong, flag in hand and repeatedly recite wayo. Sometimes they compose verses on the spot, making fun of the tsawa for not remembering to offer them chhang (even after continued and repeated recitations).



Persons carrying the flags and tshog recite verses of wayo above the Halong

The Ha Bon makes offerings called Hai Wannyer, propitiating all the spirits and deities of cliffs, valleys, streams and mountains in the vicinity of Gortshom and neighbouring villages. First, the Ha Bon's photsen such as Lhatsen Karpo of

Phrang Phrangla, Yonten Dorshe and Gonpo Dorshe of Pelphug, and Thratsen Marpo of Tirphub are propitiated. They are followed by deities of local places such as Sherab Zangpo of Kempaphu (the cliff adjacent to Gortshom), Ludi Lubtsen of Samburung (the small valley below Kempaphu in which a rivulet flows), Thekar Gyelpo of Trashigang (a steep cliff located at the end of Gortshom), Latsa Karpo of Lawa, Terda Dra of Charcharmey, Thongdang Kara of Rodpagang, Lawa Dragpa of Tsangpho, Kingkhar Zangmo of Rulibi, Rangthang Gormo of Milabambo, Drongkher Gupa of Dung, Drangpo Janzan of Nor, Dzamling Wangmo of Tashobra, and Jamo Gormo of Shokang.

The Ha Bon is received at a small shack, built for the day, below the cypress tree. Torma and other ritual objects are displayed on the make shift altar or the terraces made the previous day. This is followed by offerings of tshog on the terraces. Once the tsawa have made their offerings, the rest of the people from the village also make offerings of food and drink. After this, the tsawa prostrate before the altar.

While some people start to sing and dance, others remove leaves from the fir branches, and bend twigs in the shape of horns dyed in different colours. They then approach the Ha Bon requesting names for their cattle. The horns are put into a small container filled with rice in which an incense stick is burnt. The Ha Bon then gives out names for the cattle. If the cattle has Ha as part its name, it is believed to be a gift of lha (for example Hajan and Hachimo). The names with tsen are believed to be gifts of tsen (for example, Tsenjan), and names with yang are believed to be gifts of goddess Tsheringma (for example, Tshering Yangjan). The latter and other such names are given for those farmers whose cattle usually do not live

Wayo, Wayo - Voices from the Past

long. Meanwhile, some of the fir branches are burnt, and the remaining distributed to every member of the Gortshom households. Those who do not get any try to snatch some from others, as it is considered important to get at least a small twig, for these are required during tsen choed in the second month.



Some of the fir branches that were collected before the Ha are burnt at the Halong; the rest are distributed amongst all households of Gortshom.

The tshog, filled up in two baskets on either side of the halong, is then distributed amongst the people assembled there. The Ha Bon takes the tshog on the right while the tsawa take the tshog on the left. Late in the afternoon, the people walk up to the Halong where the Ha Bon stretches out a white kabney on the ground, while others uproot the flagpoles. Then everyone starts singing nyojang, a farewell song, as they face the mountain above the village.



Men uproot the flagpoles late in the afternoon before bidding farewell to the lha

This is a symbolic gesture of bidding farewell to the lha. After this, people return to the village. Some carry flagpoles and other small tress uprooted from around the Halong. They then go for chhangkor in every home, where, if they are not served chhang, they make a total mess inside. Chhangkor carries on throughout the night accompanied by brief bouts of singing and dancing wherever they are offered chhang.

LANCHHEN, LANGCHHUNG AND DUECHOED

The following day is observed as lanchhen (the greater lan). No one is permitted to work in the fields. It is believed that hai lan (restrictions of god) affects crops for twelve years if the restriction is violated. The day after lanchhen is lanchhung (the smaller lan) or dudkilan (restrictions of evil spirits); restrictions are still in force. Once again two persons, usually women, from thogpa and wogpa households go early in the

morning to villages above Gortshom such as Tigchung, Singyebee, Tshobrang and Changshing Pogpa to make collections (dulang) of maize, chhang, cheese, butter and small amounts of money, all of which are to be offered during the duechoed that evening¹¹.

Duechoed is characterized by rituals and ritual objects that are a combination of Bon and Buddhist practices. These objects are elaborately decorated with thread-crosses¹². Tshog is offered and then distributed among people witnessing the event. An interesting aspect of this ritual is the divination of good or evil fortune for the tsawa for the year. There are two parts of the ritual that are both intended as divinations. The first involves keeping two cups of chhang in front of the gomchhen performing rituals. After the tsawa make prostrations, and a brief prayer ceremony, the gomchhen throws a few grains of rice in the air. Some of the grains fall into the two cups. At the end, the number of rice is counted to determine the fortune of the tsawa. In the second part of the ritual, a phuta¹³ is filled with singchhang, and a chogtse¹⁴ is placed on the floor. A standing person releases the phuta from

¹¹ Unlike the *Ha*, *duedchoed* is observed by other villages located below Gortshom. However, performance of rituals in Gortshom are separate from those of other villages.

¹² Thread-cross: two sticks whose ends are connected with coloured thread to form, after many windings, a sort of diamond-shaped cobweb. This ritual is to deal with curses, calamities and malignant spirits. The use of thread-cross dates back to pre-Buddhist times, when the original function is to act as demon trap. The evil spirit are supposed to get caught in the thread like tike in the ancient Bon funeral rituals.

¹³ Another unit of measurement. Approximately, four average *phuta* of rice would measure one *drey*.

¹⁴ A small wooden table on which are usually kept scriptures and other religious items.

Ha: The Bon Festival of Gortshom Village

his or her forehead after saying prayers. If the phuta lands on the chogtse without falling upside down, good fortune is indicated.

The last day of the Ha celebration is held on the 15th day of the sixth month. The last ceremony involves a performance of Phagchham. The tsawa make a torma purely out of butter. This takes place at a mani (stupa) located a short distance away from Khinyel Lhakhang. Once the torma is prepared, the Phagchham dance begins with the dancers moving towards the lhakhang, as the torma is carried under maple boughs. This dance, unique to the community, is followed by the Pholey Moley dance, which marks the conclusion of the Ha celebration.



Khinyel Lhakhang, one of the oldest lhakhangs in the country

Khinyel Lhakhang is located on the traditional route or *jalam* between Bumthang and Lhuentse. Referred to as Mon Tamnyen Lhakhang in scriptures, this lhakhang is believed to have been built soon after the construction of Paro Kyichu Lhaknag and Bumthang Jampa Lhakhang in the 8th century. This lhakhang is located about ten minutes walk from Gortshom and caters to the religious and spiritual need of the people of Gortshom and other neighbouring villages.

However, the tsawa must observe tsen choed on the 18th day of the second month. While other households offer tshog and burn incenses (the fir branches saved from the Ha celebration) in their houses, the tsawa invite one or two gomchen and go to a specific location up the mountain above the village. There, they offer tshog and serkem¹⁵. Several small branches of trees are cut and their leaves lopped. They are then implanted in the soil criss-crossed into one row. This fence is a symbolic restriction against entry into higher reaches of the mountains. This restriction called ridam (closure of mountain) is enforced in order to prevent trees from being cut, hunting, and other forms of human encroachment on the mountains. It is believed that such activities provoke the mountain spirit into releasing wind, rain and hailstorm. This is dangerous to farmers at that time of the year, especially in the third month when land tilling and seed sowing commence. With this ritual, the next two tsawa of thogpa and wogpa take over as the host for the following year's Ha celebration.

THE WAYO COUPLETS

The singing of wayo verses is an integral part of the Ha celebration. Its different versions are sung in communities

¹⁵ Offerings of grain and alcohol.

along the Kurichhu valley where Ha is celebrated. The exact meaning of the word wayo could not be explained by anyone in Gortshom. The proper reference to wayo recitation in Kurtep is 'wayo bo' meaning 'call wayo'. The expression wayo wayo bjing is the refrain recited after recitation of wayo couplets. All the couplets have specific metres and rhythm, and each couplet is a self-contained unit.

Earlier, there may have been many couplets, but now people are able to recite only a few of them. Owing to the oral nature of its record and recitation, most have been forgotten. Although people are able to recite the wayo phrases, there is no chronological order of recitation. After the refrain wayo wayo bjing, people recite any couplet that first comes to their mind. This, however, may not necessarily mean that there was a lack of order in the recitation earlier.

Most of the couplets contain lewd and ribald phrases and expressions. The symbols and images used are mainly of male and female genitals. These expressions echo the spirit of Ha celebration, which is the absence or shedding of inhibition of sexual behaviour. The expression *zhag sum Ha bang ngo me tsha* ཞག་གཞུམ་ཧ་བང་ངོ་མེ་ཚ། echoes this spirit. This is repeatedly emphasized in other phrases and couplets.

The following couplets, written in Dzongkha, are a transcription of the Kurtep original. Hence both the spelling and grammar are inaccurate.

ལ་ཡ་ལ་ཡ་བྱེད།།

ལུ་འི་དཀར་ཆག་མ་གཞང་ལེག།

མདའི་ནག་ཆག་མ་གཙང་ཤིག།
ས་གཞི་ཐམས་ཅད་ལོ་ལེགས་ཤིག།
ཡུལ་མི་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ཆགས་ཤིག།
ང་གིས་སྐབ་རྟེ་མཐ་འི་ལོ།
ལྟ་བུ་ཀྱི་དབང་སོགས་སུ་ས་འི་ལོ།
ཞག་གསུམ་ཨ་མའི་སྐོ་མ་བསྐྱམ།
ཞག་གསུམ་བུ་མའི་སྐོ་མ་བསྐྱམ།
ཨ་མ་གང་སོལ་ཆར་ཆར།
བུ་མོ་གང་སོ་བྲག་ཆར་ཆར།
ཡུར་ཨ་བོ་མ་བརྟོ་ཤིང་ཤེ་ལོ།
མོང་བུ་མ་བུ་དྲ་གཏིང་ཤིང་ལོ།
མཛེ་གིས་རྟུ་མ་བབ་བར་བཏོ།
རྟོ་བོ་འི་མཛེ་ལོ་ཤིང་གི་མཛེ།
ཤིང་གི་མཛེ་ལོ་ཆག་རྟུ་ལོ།
རྟོ་བོ་འི་རྟུ་ལོ་ཐུགས་བའི་རྟུ།
ཐུགས་བའི་རྟུ་ལོ་སྐྱེ་ག་རྟུ་ལོ།
རྟོ་བོ་འི་ལྷོད་རང་སྐྱགས་མ་ཡེངས།
རྟོ་བོ་ལོ་སྐྱ་གུ་ལྷོད་འི་ལོ།

English Translation

Wayo Wayo Bjing
May not the hills raise white obstructions,
May not the valleys raise dark obstructions.
May all the lands enjoy good year,
May all the village people receive blessings.
I am not speaking these words,
They are said by lha Jain.
For three nights, the mother does not close the door,
For three nights, the daughter does not close the thigh.
Mothers are spattered with pus,
Daughters are spattered with blood.
Do not dig waterways, cleft lipped lady,
Do not pull the drill, deep holed lady.
The phallus is implanting a target in the vagina,
The target is not implanted, the penis is.
The Bonpo's phallus is a wooden phallus,
The wooden phallus never breaks.
The Bonmo's vagina is a leather vagina,
The leather vagina never wears.
Oh Bonpo, do not let your mind go astray,
Others are taking your Bonmo away.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HA

While Ha celebration is definitely an occasion for festivity, the people of Gortshom believe that its larger purpose is to ensure the well-being of their crops and livestock. For them, well-being is associated with soil fertility, timely rainfall, healthy crops and cattle, and bumper harvests. This well-being in turn depends upon the harmonious relationship between farmers and natural forces personified as spirits and deities inhabiting different places in the locality. The people believe that they sustain this relationship by propitiating these spirits and deities on time all the year round, particularly by making

offerings to the lha (gods) through Ha celebration, tsen through tsenchoed in the second month, and dued through the duechoed consecutive to the Ha.

Heavy winds, hailstorm and rainfall, locally interpreted as expression of anger of these gods have reportedly affected crops in the village. The people are convinced that the failure to propitiate these spirits, either on time or by observing purity, provokes the wrath of the local spirits. Thus, if the Hai tsawa for a particular year fail to host the Ha celebration or delay it, the villagers hold them responsible for any damage to crops in the village. While this has served as a social mechanism of ensuring the continuity of the tradition, it is increasingly losing ground. For example, people no longer adhere to restrictions against working on lanchhen and lanchhung.

CONCLUSION

The proceedings of the Ha celebration no longer take place as described above. In the absence of a Ha Bon, all his earlier roles are left out. Some of the roles have been taken over by the village gomchhen. For example, the gomchhen makes the tormas of the thogpa and wogpa. However, the tsengi tormas made by the Ha Bon for himself is no longer made. Since there are no ritual or prayer ceremonies either at the halong or tsawa's house, the gomchhen performs a serkem at the halong during the Ha celebration. In contrast to the observation of lan for two and half days, only half a day is observed.

The Ha celebration in Gortshom is a declining tradition, which began with the death of the last Ha Bon. While older generations have been able to sustain the tradition, observing celebrations through their experiences and memory, the

younger generation can only experience and understand a limited part of the tradition that has given Gortshom community and neighbouring villages a sense of purpose, unity and festivity.

Appendix: Guru Rinpoche and the Bonpo

The version of the legend as narrated in Gortshom by Tshampa Rinchen Namgyal

One day, a disciple of Guru Rinpoche happened to witness a Bon funeral service. Everyone attending the funeral heard the corpse talking about his family and relatives. This alarmed the disciple who immediately went to inform the Guru. The Guru gave him his gold dorje (vajra) and instructed him to point it at the corpse. If the corpse still spoke, then it would be the shinpo (soul) of the deceased. If not, it would have been a Jungpo (an evil spirit) that spoke earlier.

The disciple went back to the cremation ground, and pointed the dorje at the corpse; it was silent. This upset the people at the ground who went after him. They were angered by the fact that his presence and action prevented the corpse from speaking. From afar, he again heard the corpse speak. Once again, he pointed the dorje, and again the corpse fell silent.

The disciple described the incident to the Guru, who then had a Bonpo in audience. Since it was known by then that rather than the corpse, it was a jungpo who spoke, the Guru said to the Bonpo, "This person should have a sang ming (sacred name). Address the corpse by his sang ming. If you have given him one, he will respond."

The Bonpo went to the corpse and said, "I have given you a sang ming, tell me what it is!"

The corpse replied, "I don't have a sang ming, you did not give me one. In fact, I am not even here at this moment. I am out there by the edge of the lake."

This proved that it was not a corpse but a jungpo who spoke earlier at the cremation ground. The Guru miraculously moved the soul of the dead person into a worm that was inside the cow dung lying on a hillock behind where the Guru lived. Taking the worm on his lap, Guru liberated the entrapped soul.

Guru Rimpoche then said to the Bonpo, "Things cannot be left as they are, you and I must take up a challenge against each other to decide whether Bon or Buddhism should flourish hereafter. Whoever arrives first on the peak of Gangkar Tse (Mt. Kailash) at the first rays of the sun shall be the victor, and his religion flourish." The Bonpo gladly accepted the challenge.

As Guru Rimpoche went to sleep that night, the Bonpo set off. He carried a drum. Every time he hit the drum, he traveled at the speed of the sound of the drum, and to the extent where it could be heard. Meanwhile, Guru Rimpoche continued to sleep. This worried his disciples. They appealed to him to make a start, but he said, "Wake me up when it is dawn." His disciples were becoming increasingly apprehensive and implored Guru to hasten when it was dawn. But Guru instructed them to wake him up when the first rays of the sun made their appearance. They woke him exactly at that time. In an instant, he was on the peak of Gangkar Tse, having ridden on the very rays of the sun that first hit the peak. The Bonpo had actually arrived earlier, and was about to seat himself on the flat stone when Guru, through his miracle, made him lose his balance and toppled him. When he stood up, Guru was already seated on the throne.

Guru said, "Now that you have lost, let me know whether you will put up the pillars or the roof." The Bonpo chose the latter. Again, Guru miraculously erected four stone pillars, and the Bonpo followed by putting the roof on the foundation.

Ha: The Bon Festival of Gortshom Village

"Although you have lost the contest and Buddhism is to flourish hereafter, your achievements are nevertheless remarkable. Therefore, Bon will at least be entitled to a month in a year in different communities", Guru declared.

Thus the tradition of celebrating Bon festivals once a year in different communities began thereafter.

GOLENG ROOP- A CULT OF FEAST OFFERING

LHAM DORJI^{*}

INTRODUCTION

The people of *kheng* in Central Bhutan observe numerous festivals and rituals as a part their rich tradition. These serve as the context of folk practices in divination, offerings and beliefs in local deities. Roop is a traditional communal ritual of villages in the middle *kheng* under Nangkor Gewog, and is celebrated in the 12th month of Bhutanese calendar. The dates and exact modes of celebration vary from village to village. Roop literally mean 'together' because the community celebrates it collectively. The rituals involve *kartshog* or white offerings consisting of feast, libation and fumigation offerings to local protecting deities, gods and goddesses of seed and legendary founders of Bon. Absence of animal sacrifice confirms *Roop* as Bonkar practice. The villagers of Goleng celebrate Roop to worship deities, who in return provide them protection, happiness, good harvest and productive livestock.

This account gives a short historical background of Goleng community and villages nearby that celebrate similar rituals. Then it describes Roop calendar, rite performers, categories of *tshog* (ritual offerings) and offering spaces. Lastly, it provides an account of festival, and roles and powers of Bonpo.

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A SHORT BACKGROUND OF GOLENG

Goleng is a village in Nangkor Gewog, located opposite to Yebilaptsa hospital, overlooking Mangdechu River. It is two hours walk up from the Tingtibi-Gomphu motor road head and is connected by a suspension bridge over Mangdechu. It is located at an elevation of 1120 meters above sea level. There are 35 households in the village and in 1990 consisted of 281 people.



Goleng village: The Land of Wheat

The word *go* in *khengkha* is wheat and *leng* is land. Wheat farming was the main crop in the village. At present, the farmers practice a complex farming system, which includes cereal, cash crops and livestock. Farmers have both dry land and wetland farming. The villagers migrate to lowlands during paddy seasons. Another interpretation of 'Goleng' is a village where every regional and communal observance

including *chodpa* and *Roop* were first initiated. In this case, the literal meaning of *go* is construed as 'beginning' in *khengkha*.

Present stratification of the village into three main types of households suggests the existence of families of different authority. The *Dung* (honorary title for the noble family) household came up after Meme Tsewang Namgay; a descendent of Tagma *dung* joined the village as a *magpa* (male spouse). It served as a principle tax-paying (*mathrel*) household. Intermarriage between a girl from an ordinary family and man from the *dung* household took place. At that time her brother was working with Pangtey *Pon*, nobility of Pangtey in Bumthang. He asked the *Pon* to exempt taxes levied on his sister living in the *dung's* household. Pangtey *Pon* granted his request. Due to this, the *dung* family members became skeptical about the girl's authority in the village, and they isolated her from the *dung's* household. They provided her a small plot for subsistence. She established a new household called Goleng *zurpa*, paying partial taxes to Pangtey *Pon*. *Zurpa* later changed to *mamai*, which literally means a natal household. Seven households existing today originated from the *mamai*. The members of households, which rose up the *mamai* play important roles during *chodpa*.

The *kudrung's* household is prominent in the village. The *kudrung* is similar to the present day *tshogpa*, used to coordinate collections of taxes from the region for the Shingkhar *Drungpa*, an official based in Shingkhar village in the upper kheng. Pangtey *Pon* appointed Shingkhar *Drungpa* as his lay agent in the region to collect taxes. The *kudrung* also coordinated distribution of salt to people in the region as gift from their landlords. For entire generations, only one Goleng *kudrung* served under the Shingkhar *Drungpa*. An intimate

relation existed between the *kudrung's* and the *mamai's* family. Probably, the *kudrung's* household would have been derived from the *mamai*.

VILLAGES CELEBRATING ROOP

Roop takes place not only in Goleng, but also in other villages like Dakpai, Buli, Kikhar, Tshaidang, Nyakhar and Zhobling under Nangkor *gewog*. Its proceedings vary from one social group to another, though its objectives are more or less the same. For instances, in Dakpai, every member of a family takes rests inside their house on the first day.

Variation in the modes of rituals and celebration from one village to another suggests adoption of Roop by different villages of *kheng*, giving different forms to otherwise conceptually similar Bon observances. For example, *Shu* is practiced in *kheng* Buli, *A-hoi* in Trong, *Kharipa* in Wamling, and *Gadhang* in Ngangla and Bjoka. The deities invoked vary from one community to another.

ROOP CALENDAR

It is a five-day annual festival from the 10th day of the 12th Bhutanese calendar month until 13th of the same month. The schedule of Roop is summarized below:

SCHEDULE OF ROOP

<i>Day</i>	<i>Activities</i>
9th day	Preparatory activities for the festival: Preparation of <i>tshog</i> , <i>puta</i> , feast offerings and house cleaning

10th day (<i>dham-lam</i>)	Bonpo offers <i>tshog</i> to the founder of Bon and god and goddesses of seeds. Offering rite is performed on the attic. Enforcement of restriction. Jokes and games followed by offering to <i>Rematsen</i> (local mountain god). <i>Kargyun</i> (divination and game using white barley flour)
11th day (<i>mang-lam</i>)	Dramatic performance by the village folks: a group of men move from one household to another as the visitors of <i>Lha Jajin</i> (Lord Indra in Hinduism). It is concluded with communal meal. <i>Jai Kha Phi</i> (Determining the victor in tug-of-war)
12th day (<i>Boleng-lam</i>)	Archery contest <i>Changkor</i> (drink round)
13th day (<i>Son-lam</i>)	Sowing the first seed by <i>Dung Ama</i> <i>Changkor</i> and merrymaking

The Bonpo performs rituals, while his assistants support him in preparing and arraying *tshog*. The Bonpo or any capable person carries out the recitation without using any texts. He mediates between the community and the supernatural world of god, goddesses and deities. His post is not hereditary. Any individual trained in basic bon ritual can assume the post. The local folks of all ages participate in the ritual and merrymaking. Men and women play equal roles in the festival. Except in the offering ceremony in local temple on the 11th day, Buddhist monks refrain from Bon rituals and celebrations.



Farm tools displayed with tshog

The ritual foods: *merbachan* (fried and beaten rice), boiled rice, small cakes of *nam*, cheese, *tshogpala* (wet fish), sliced ginger, *puta*, *nagpa* (fermented rice) and water are offered. If available, all kinds of cereals are offered. Farming equipment such as spades, knives, sickles and axes are displayed next to the offerings. *Merbachan* is usually wrapped in banana leaves, while other ritual foods are offered on plates and banana leaves.

Kaktong (bamboo containers) are filled with *changkoi* (fermented rice) as another form of libation offering. The number of *kaktong* varies from six to 13 depending upon the size and status of a household. Conventionally, the households of the *dung*, the *kudrung* and the *mamai* must offer 13 *kaktong* of *changkoi*. The *dung*'s household prepares a separate *phorgola tshog* consisting of fermented beer, grilled maize and flower.

Four category of offerings are as shown below:

Category of Tshog	Purpose
<i>Jambay Shinjey tshog</i>	Offered to <i>Jam Shinjey</i> in the local Buddhist temple
<i>Phorgola tshog</i>	Offered to Rematsan, the local deity
<i>Dhampala tshog</i>	Offered to Toenpa Shenrab, Ama Gunglhai Gyalmo, Sonmo Apa Gojayla and Ama Deleg Dolma, Yulha and Zhibdag
<i>Mitshimla tshog</i>	Offered to local spirits: <i>lhanday, sonday, dud and jaiipo</i>

Tshog are placed in three categories of offering space:

Space	Officiator	Deities worshipped
Attic	Bonpo	Toenpa Shenrab and Amai Gung Lhai Gyalmo
Attic	Bonpo	Sonmo Apa Gojayla and Sonmo Ama Deleg Dolma (god and goddesses of seeds)
Ground	Bonpo	Rematsan and Kibalungtsan
Temple	Buddhist priest	Jambay Shinjey

DAYS IN ROOP

The preparation for Roop begins from the early morning of the 9th day of 12th Bhutanese month. People clean their houses and household paraphernalia, bustling about with great excitement. Cleaning houses and utensils removes evil,

while pleasing deities of worship. *Putta*, which is boiled and spiced noodles are cooked from barley flour. *Tshog* are prepared during mid-day of 9th day. Normally, chaste men are involved in its preparation. In case a woman gets involved, she must not be pregnant. Contamination of ritual foods displeases the deities. Some men set off early to catch fish from the river below the village to include them as sacrificial elements of the offering. Pine splinter (*wan*), chili powder and animal fodder sufficient for three days are stored.

DHAM-LAM

Dham-lam is celebrated on 10th day of 12th month. *Dham* in local dialect means seal and *lam* means a break. The day signifies the dominance of the community over any creature that damage crops. It refers to supernatural protection of crops from pests and weeds. The offering ceremony starts from midnight of the 9th day and continues until the evening of the 10th day. The Bonpo invokes deities capable of empowering him to forestall likely damages of crops caused by animals, plants and diseases. Each household is considered as a ritual unit. The rituals customarily start from the *dung's* house. After the *dung's* house, the Bonpo performs the same rite, first in the *kudrung's* and then in the *mamai's* households. A group of young men and women follow him.

Before the offering ceremony, the members of a household must take a catnap and wake up only when the Bonpo's retinue reaches the house. They must refrain from taking food and drink till the conclusion of rite in their house. Swallowing even one's spit is said to deprive the Bonpo of magical powers.

Tshog is offered in attic space normally used to store maize and mustard. The Bonpo consider it as a pure place where their contact with deities is easier. *Sang* rite or burning of aromatic plants is performed to create a ladder of smoke for Shenrab and associated deities to descend from the sky to feast on the offerings. The other fundamental purpose of *sang* rite is to eliminate impurity and contamination, and to clear the sky for gods and goddesses. Ama Gunglhai Gyalmo (mother of Shenrab) or the queen mother of sky is invoked from the attic.



Bonpo offering tshog on the attic (10th day)

The Bonpo's assistant and housewife array four types of *tshog* on *remang* (bamboo mat): *Jam Shinjey tshog*, *Phorgola tshog*, *Dhampala tshog* and *Mitshimla tshog*. The Bonpo wears *gho* and *kabney* (white scarf) and sits cross-legged in the attic facing the

temporary shrine. The offering begins with *sang* rite and libation offering. He recites the following verses:

སངས་སངས།
ལྷ་གོང་རྒྱལ་ལ་བོ།
ཡབ་རྩོན་བ་ཤེན་རབས།
གོ་ལིང་གཏུང་ན་རུབ་བཀོའད་ན་ཙ།
ཤར་ཏྲིང་བ་ན་ལ་འི་བ་བཀོའད་ན་ཙ།
གནའ་ལར་གཏུང་ན་རུབ་བཀོའད་ན་ཙ།
རྟ་ག་མ་གཏུང་ན་མི་སིམ་བཀོའད་ན་ཙ།
རྫོག་ངང་ལ་འཁོར་ན་ག་རྣང་བཀོའད་ན་ཙ།
ཏ་ལི་བུ་ལི་དཔོན་པོ་ན་རྒྱལ་བཀོའད་ན་ཙ།
སྐྱིད་ལར་དག་བའི་དཔོན་པོ་ན་རུབ་བཀོའད་ན་ཙ།
སོན་མོ་ཨ་བ་གོང་རྒྱལ་ལ།
སོན་མོ་ཨ་མ་བདེ་ལེགས་རྫོལ་མ།
སོན་ས་བཞུ་ས་རོ་ཙའི་དེ་རའན་བ་ཙ།
དོ་སུམ་གོ་ལིང་རུབ་ཤེན་ཙ།
བསྐྱུ་བ་གནའ་ལྱི་བསྐྱུ།
ཐིམ་བ་ས་ཡི་ཐིམ་བའི་དུས་ཚོའད་ན།
བཀོའད་བའི་གསོལ་ལ་རྩའི་ལོ་ཤེན་ཙ།

ལྷགས་ཤིང་བྱེ་བྱེ་ མཉམ་ཤིང་དང་བྱེ་བྱེ་བཞེས་ཡོ།
གསོལ་ལ་སྤེའི་ལོ་མེ་ཅ །
རྒྱ་ལོང་ལེས་བྱ་ལ་རག་བ་ཙ།
མོང་ལོང་མོང་བྱ་ལ་རག་བ་ཅ །
གསེར་བྱ་ལ་རག་བ་ཙ།
ཚོགས་བཟང་ལོང་དཀར་མོ་བྱེ་བྱེ་སྤེའི་ཏ།
ཉ་ཚང་ས་ལོང་སངས་མ་བྱེ་བྱེ་སྤེའི་ཏ།
སི་ལིང་མོང་ལ་ལེག་མའན།
ཨ་ཆག་ལོང་ཅེ་བ་བྱེ་བྱེ་སྤེའི་ཏ།
ས་ག་ནམ་བྱེ་བྱེ་སྤེའི་ཏ་ཙ།
དུའི་སྤེའི་ལ་ལ་བཞེས།

English Translation

Obeisance to Toenpa Shenrab!
Who introduced Roop in Goleng *dung*,
Shu in Tali and Buli *Ponpo*,
Mitshim in Tagma *dung*,
Kharipa in Shar Tongpa¹,
Gadang in Nangla and Dogar Koche².
I devotedly invite you to this feast offering ceremony.

Homage to the great Ama Gung Lhai Gyalmo,
To Sonmo Apa Gojayla and Sonmo Ama Deleg Drolma,

¹ Possibly the villages in upper *Kheng*.

² Koche are believed to be the descendants of noble family of Cooch Bihar.

Wayo, Wayo - Voices from the Past

To Rematsan, Kibalungtsan and other guardian deities,
I faithfully invite you to the feast offering ceremony.

To you, I offer a variety of pure *tshog*,
Comprised of *sthogpala*, butter and *changkoi*,
I invite you to feast on these offerings.
Please accept any defilement I may commit by chance.

Birds from Tibet and India are arriving,
A sowing season has ultimately come;
In return for our offerings,
Give us protection against evils,
Save our crops from untimely damages.



Bonpo invoking the deities

Since the deities reject impurity in offerings, the Bonpo firstly offer apologies to them for any unintentional mistakes. He gets magical power through correct offerings and prayers to control weeds, birds and insects damaging the crops. Besides, he entreats for the well being of the family members.

He tosses a hexagonal shaped banana leaflet on the floor and pronounces individual's *lo* (animal sign) to prognosticate someone's health and fortune. The position of leaf determines the value of divination. It is considered auspicious if leaf settles on the floor with its posterior side up. The same divination is repeated thrice in case the leaf settles in a reverse position. An oracle of harvest is performed using the same method of divination. In the past, household abandoned shifting cultivation in a designated field if the divination produced inauspicious prediction. The ritual in the attic concludes once the oracle is performed for every member of the household.

After collecting a plate of *mitshimla tshog*, the Bonpo and his attendant descend to a room to recite *dhampala* chants. The *tshog* is distributed to the people assembled in the house. The rest of *tshog* are left on the altar covered with banana leaves and opened only the next morning. The Bonpo stands among the people of all ages and chants spell on beasts and field weeds. Then, people gathered for the ritual eats handful of *tshog* on which drops of *banchang* (brewed beer) are added. While shouting *dham dham* people jump up and down many times. Beating their feet on the floor is a symbolic act of crushing the field weeds and is actually said to repress the growth of weeds.

After the performance in a Central room, the group appears on a veranda to invoke local spirits to refrain from causing harm to people. The spirits (*lhanday, sonday, shinday, dud* and *jaipo*) possess intense passion for human foods and are capable of exerting malignant influences on people if they are not pleased with offerings. The Bonpo invites them to feast on a handful of *mitshimla tshog* thrown on the ground. Shrieks

and jumps follow his invocations. *mistsimla tshog* is wrapped inside a banana leaf and jammed under a stone at the base of a ladder. It symbolizes defeat of evil and protection of crops from animals and weeds. With this, the ritual is completed in one household. The attendant collects a plate of *tshog* from the house as the Bonpo's ritual fee in a bag. The housewife offers the leading performers a cup or two of *banchang* (locally brewed beer) before they leave the house. This is repeated in every household in the village until the sun rises the next day. The last household contributes oil and pepper and helps to fry *tshog* collected from the village for the visiting group. The housewife serves *tshog* on banana leaves to the ritual performers and other visitors as a communal meal. She collects the banana leaves used as plates after they have been thrown into the dustbin, and counts them. Many leaves indicate good fortune, health, wealth and good harvest in the family. With this, the first phase of the offering ceremony is concluded and the next ritual phase begins.

The Bonpo imposes restriction on certain activities likely to annoy the deities. He assumes authority to control various activities in the village and prohibits certain activities for the next two days like making unusual noises, tilling wet soil, meat consumption, Buddhist practices, and squabbles among the villagers. Buddhist priests and physicians of any kind are deterred from attending sick people. Bon rituals are conducted to overcome ailment of the people. The villagers stop outsiders from crossing the village boundary, as they believe that outsiders may hamper growth of crops. In the past, they used to stop even a powerful visitor, *Haptapa Garpa*, an official from the regional government who visited the villages every week, from leaving the village during the festival. The outsiders stay in the village till the third day.



Women stopping visitor from leaving Goleng

Except fish, which is cold blooded, the laity abstains from consuming meat because it is impure. Neglecting this restraint invites beasts and weeds in the fields akin to the animal's hair whose flesh or blood is consumed. For instance, if someone violates this rule of abstinence, and consume chicken, flocks of birds will devour the crops. Moreover, abundant growth of weeds as dense as feathers of birds will raze the crops. Fish is considered pure because it is furless and harmless to crops.

A provision of bamboo splinter to be used as a torch, chili powder and animal fodder sufficient for three days are stored before the rituals. Collecting fodder or grinding chilies during festival creates unusual noises, infuriating to *zhibdag*, god of soil. The villagers refrain from tilling wet soil, plucking green leaves or handling white paper or currency. The community and the Bonpo impose nine *drey* (a unit of measurement of grains) of rice, nine *tokshing* (a bamboo jar) of *banchang* (brewed beer) and nine pieces of *pagpa* (animal hide) on those who are in breach of noise-taboo.

At sunrise, a woman from each household assembles in the *Lhakhang* (temple) to offer a plate of consecrated *tshog*. Buddhist priests perform the offering ceremony. It is offered to Buddhist monastic deities. Meanwhile, the festivity begins in the village. People of all ages participate in a game of tug-of-war to amuse themselves and to test individual strength. The game is played either between a single man and two women or two men and four women. The women further humiliate the men if they lose the game. On the other hand, youngsters of both sexes wrestle and roll in a heap of five or six on the ground. Shrieks and laughter ring through the air while older people witness the game with amusement. With joyous yelling and laughter, two males or females knock a person of the opposite sex on the ground and splash him or her with *bangchang tipa* and rub his or her bottom on the *bangchang* exclaiming humorously, ' *dhai dhai theg, zon, sum; thuru rud, tshoro rud*'. This can be transliterated as, ' relax and relax, one, two and three, rub here and there'. It signifies comfortable livelihoods through abundant harvests. Knocking someone flat on the ground to rest his or her bottom on *bangchang tipa* suggests less work and more food.

In the past, this day used to be great fun for youngsters. Girls would descend to the riverbed to wash their clothes, unaware of the boys following them. Boys concealed themselves under bushes waiting for the girls to return in freshly washed outfits; then the boys would apply sticky dough all over their clothes. The girls would try to avoid them, but they would never escape the boys' trick.

Thong shar, or the harvest divination, is conducted before noon. An elder person in every house randomly sprays sticky

kargyun (pure buckwheat flour mixed with water) on the wall to create images resembling different cereal crops. If the patterns on the wall resemble ears of paddy, it indicates rich paddy harvest, and likewise with other cereals. After this, the whole community assembles in a field to participate in the first communal offering to Rematsan- a group of local deities residing in a mountain about two hours walk from the locale. The communities in middle *Kheng* worship them as their protectors and providers. Several deities like Apa (father) Sangchen Nourbo, Ama (mother) Sonam Dolma (mother), Bhu (son) Lekpai Jamtsho Bhumo, (daughter) Cheki Zangmo and Nama (daughter-in-law) Yuden Lhamo belong to the Rematsan group. *Phorgola*, a synonym of *mirgula*, is his other name. *Mirgula*, is a small hairy mystical creature with a repulsive body odour, believed to be the manifestation of a mountain god when incensed. To appease these gods, people perform timely offerings. During the drought, the Bonpo and Buddhist priests perform rituals in these mountain abodes to bring rain. Men escort the priests during the rain receiving ceremony. They howl at the foot of the mountain provoking Rematsan to bring downpour. They return home without halting on the way for fear that the rain may stop. They protect the community against evil, disease, and misfortunes and give divine help during regional archery tournaments.



Women arranging tshog for Rematsan

These deities are portrayed in different forms. Apart from their benevolence and protection, they are also capable of harming people. Any flaw and delay in offerings enrage them. They manifest themselves as human-like creatures locally known as *mirgula* or *phorgola*. Some people who encountered a *mirgula* say that its strong body odour creates a hypnotic state on humans and domestic animals, which allows *mirgula* to kidnap them and hide them in deep forest. A *mirgula* has to be ritually appeased before it will rescue such lost human beings.

It is obligatory for each household to be represented at this public ceremony. Unity and harmony in the village is considered imperative to appease the mountain gods. Beside physical presence, each household contributes to the *phorgola tshog*. However, the *dung's* household contributes additional libation offering, fried maize and *sampaka* flowers as special offerings. The ritual food is arranged on a temporary altar set up in the field, facing the Rematsan's residence in the

mountain. Bamboo tubes filled with brewed beer are placed on the altar. The number of tubes has to be equal to the number of participating households. Lettering a rhyme, "*dayo, dayo*", the Bonpo entreats the Rematsan to descend from their heavenly abode to the sacred altar. He invites them to participate and accept the communal offerings and requests them to reward the community with rich harvests. The participants individually entreat the Rematsen to expel evils and calamities from the village in general and family in particular. Every household tosses a small banana sheet on the ground to read its divination. They propitiate to the deities in case of bad omen. After the offering and divination, the Bonpo requests the deities to return to their habitat without inflicting harm. He flicks a few grains and flowers towards the altar and in four directions as send-off gifts. With this, the offering rite comes to an end.



Communal Offering to Rematsan

The participants then play a game known as *kargyun* (paste made with white and sticky wheat flour). It is smeared on everyone assembled in the field. Often, this smudging activity reaches its climax when a group of young people's clothes become hardly discernable. As the villagers leave the field, they each take a bamboo tube filled with brewed beer. They hang it beside the door of their house to read omens for harvests. Poor harvest is indicated if the beer evaporates within a few days. The Bonpo takes his portion of the Rematsan *tshog* as fee for performing the rite, but every household takes their sanctified *tshog* back home.

MANG-LAM

Primarily for amusement, men perform a sacred drama. It has been an indispensable element of the festival since its inception. *Manglam* offers them an opportunity to go around the village for *changkor* (drinks circuit). They form a group, designating themselves as regional dignitaries holding different posts and responsibilities. One of them assumes the role of *Pon* (king) and rest act as various servants under him. The *Pon* claims himself as a son of Lha Jain (lord Indra), descended from the abode of god to look after the welfare of the people. His retinue visits every household to find out and resolve problems of the people. Just offering food and drink to the visitors is said to bring wealth and fortune to the family, while evil is carried away with them. Because of this, every household welcomes them warmly. Before their visit, a person playing the role of *kudrung* (village coordinator) notifies the families about the extraordinary visitors. He instructs them to prepare extravagant hospitality for the guests.

Normally, the housewife receives the guests into the main room. They inquire about the farming activities and problems

in the family. The *Pon* accepts drink, food and other hospitality from the family. To demonstrate his authority, his attendant, wearing spectacles made from banana leaves and holding a pen resembling a phallus, reads a proclamation from the king of the gods. It is written on a small sheet of banana leaf stating: "the group is sent as the mission of god; it deserves fair hospitality from the family. In case any individual tries to offend the mission, the gods will punish him or her. The mission is ordered to inspect the families with genuine problem, and give them remedies. Serve them limited drinks with no second share. Each household must compulsorily contribute *dhamchangla* (a flask of drink that is preserved especially for this occasion) and a plate of *mitisimla tshog*".

After reading the testimonial, the attendants collect *dhamchangla* and *mitshimla tshog*. They oblige the housewife to sign on a banana sheet using the pen that resembles a male organ in order to verify her contributions. Phallic-like pen and green banana leaf symbolizes fertility and rich harvest. They knock her down on the floor. She accepts the joke though sometimes it can be painful. The *Pon* liberally uses filthy language and goes to the extent of inquiring the marital status of women in the house. He pretends to offer one of his servants as potential spouse. In the meantime, his attendants oversee the household's condition; and take note of the supports it requires.

A physician in the group asks her about the diseases in the family. He prescribes chili powder against stomach disorders and putrefied cheese for the eye ailments. His presence in the house can eliminate diseases and illnesses and spells on the family by local spirits. Before leaving the house, the *Pon*

presents the housewife with a piece of well-knotted banana leaf representing paper currency. Using white paper and currencies, instead of banana leaf, is believed to invite weeds in the field. *Zhibchepa* (inspector), his deputy and servants visit the houses later to investigate the benefits and gifts the *Pon's* entourage has conferred on the family. The family receives them warmly.

The *pon* and *zhibchepa* groups congregate in the last house where the housewife serves *mitshimla tshog* and *dhamchangla* to everyone gathered in the house. The villagers gather on the ground next to the house for amusement and dance. In the mean time, a tug of war is held, and an event called *jaikha phi* (deciding the winner) begins. The match is between men and women of the community and almost everyone participates in this event. A victory by women symbolizes good harvest. If the men turn out to be the victors, the women make an insulting remarks against the men saying: "You men are always doomed to live on poor harvest, and eat less all the year round". However, the women's group tends to dominate the game, irrespective of their strengths. After this game, the Bonpo withdraws the restrictions imposed on the community. The dances and the songs continue till late into the evening.

BOLENG-LAM

Boleng in local dialect is a private plot cultivated for one's personal subsistence as opposed to cultivation for one's household consisting of extended family. In the past, people paid in-kind taxes to their *pon*, The *pon* exempted taxes on farm produce of *boleng* fields. Due to this, the farmers highly valued harvest from their *boleng* fields. They devoted a day of festival to pray for the good harvest from their *boleng* and to celebrate it. Men play archery for the whole day to pay tribute

to deities. The archery contest is held between teams consisting of younger and older men. At the same time, women go on *changkor* to different houses, in a group or two. Drink parties go on till late evening.

The event is not celebrated as lavishly in the past. The big communal picnic in the archery ground is no longer held. Young girls do not participate in songs and dances on the archery ground. Need for lavish outlay of pigs and contribution in terms of rice, vegetables and *churma* (beer) has discouraged the people from participating in it. In the evening, the archers gather in a house to organize yet another feast. The losing team contributes meat, vegetables and drinks, while the victors contribute rice. They dance until midnight!

SON-LAM

The final day of the festival marks the beginning of the sowing season. *Son* means seed. The people celebrate the day to consecrate sowing activities. *Dung ama* (housewife) first lays her hands on seeds and sows them in her field. After her, the whole village participates in the seed sowing ceremony. It lasts for a few hours. While the songs and dances continue in some houses, the majority of people gradually resume their normal agriculture activities.

BONPO'S ROLES AND POWERS

Bonpo controls any incidences likely to cause discord in the community or undermine ritual norms. The deities are pleased if peace and harmony reign among the people. Any kind of conflict and disharmony in the community in the first three days leaves the deities angry and vengeful, defeating the purpose of offerings. The Bonpo therefore imposes the

offenders a fine consisting of *bangchang*, rice and animal hide. A ban imposed on Buddhist practices and rituals for three days restricts the Buddhist priests from attending to any sick person. Only the Bonpo can invoke gods and summon spirit to treat illness.

He must observe a certain level of chastity to attain magical evocation. He refrains from having any alcoholic beverages till he completes offering rituals in three important houses: *Dung, kudrung and mamai*. Any mistake or shortcoming in the performance of rituals in these three households exhausts his power to summon deities in the remaining households. Other than lavishing him with food and drinks, he is not entitled to any fees for his services. He is neither exempted from public works nor from making contributions during certain community events.

CONCLUSION

Roop have been celebrated in *kheng* for as long as people can remember and it defined the convictions of the community. It has enlivened folk belief in the worship of deities, and reinforced the symbiotic existence of man and nature. It has acted as a break from the monotony of farming activities, and has also raised the sense of communal existence. The *Roop* has, in its own way, given the people of Goleng a strong sense of cultural identity. But in recent years, Bon practices have gone through various alterations, and their significance has declined. Bonpo are no longer enthusiastic to take part in rituals and worship of their deities. People discourage them from Bon practices.

The system of worship and offerings has undergone modifications because modern farming practices are gaining

popularity. For some, weeds are not an outcome of devils' hands, nor can deities repress them. Modern chemicals prove to be more effective. An increasing number of wild boars in the fields is no more considered as vengeance of local deities, but an outcome of rapidly growing forests. The complete halt of shifting cultivation no longer excite them to conduct divination using banana leaves. With so many missing elements and gradual change in the belief system, the days for existence of such practices seem to be numbered. Should we at this juncture consider it as important part of our culture or let it fade away under new influences?

rice harvest, one month before a Buddhist mask dance festival called *chodpa* (*mchod pa*) introduced during the early 1940s (?).

In Wamling, *kharpu* starts when *karma mindru* (six-sister stars) and the moon are at the same position.³ The duration depends on the astrological divination and community work. It is not known who first introduced the festival. As in other regions, village-elders trace the origin of the festival to the days of the formation of earth and sky (*sachag namchag*).⁴ The festival was started when the village came into existence, and it is possible that first settlers brought the festival from wherever they came from. However, it is difficult to know the period of the first settlement.

The meaning of the word *kharpu* of Wamling is unclear. The village-elders assume that *kharpu* is a corrupted form of the word *karmo*, meaning 'the white one'. The Bon practised in Wamling in the past was believed to be a *bonkar* or *karchö* (white dharma), involving no animal sacrifice while propitiating Lha 'Ode Gongjan. Some people think *kharpu* refers to a white *gho* and crown worn by a Bonpo, a Bon priest, during the celebration, and hence *kharpu*, (*kharti* in Kheng dialect meaning white).⁵

³The moon always precedes *karma mindru*, but every day the latter slowly catches the moon until they are in one position, mostly on the seventeenth or eighteenth day of every month.

⁴*Sachag Namchag* means 'antiquity'.

⁵Ugyen Pelgen in "A unique Bon festival in eastern Bhutan", KUENSEL, Vol. XVIII, No. 11, March 22, 2003, writes that the people of Tsamang in Mongar also celebrate a Bon festival called *mkhar phud* (a festival of first offering) in honour of the deity *zhes gsungs guru bzhes*. Wamling *Kharpu* coincides with the first rice harvest, and rice offering to Lha 'Ode Gongjan is an important part of the celebration.

It is possible there could be some higher reasons for propitiating Lha 'Ode Gongjan, but most people give three reasons related to a farming society: for health and fertility of man and cattle, for protection from epidemics and disasters, and for timely rainfall and bumper harvests in the following year. But these original intents and purposes of kharpu have submerged amid the facade of social gathering and communal festivities.

THE VILLAGE ORAL ACCOUNTS OF THE COMING OF BON

There was no religion in Monyul. Its people spoke a different dialect and wore a different cloth. The first religion to appear was Bon and it spread during the prosecution of Bon in Tibet. Guru Rimpoche annihilated and subdued powerful Bon deities and their patrons, while the moderates were exiled together with all their retinue to Monyul with certain rights and privileges enjoyed there. *Lha, tsen, dud, shendre, jaipo, don...* all came with them. They resided in Monyul, drawing sustenance from the Monpa. When any need for daily subsistence arose, they afflicted the local people with illness such as headache, body wounds, mental disorder and other syndromes. The people in turn offered *tshog* of rice, meat, cheese, eggs, and *churma*,⁶ *bsang* and *sur* to restore their health. The offerings were considered rewards promised by Guru Rimpoche as sustenance for agreeing to become exiles.

The branch of Bon which spread to Monyul was *nagchö* (black dharma) involving animal sacrifices. For example, when a mother faces difficulty in giving birth, Aum Jomo is propitiated through a Bon ritual called *tsertsan* in which a cow

⁶ Kheng term for *arra* or locally brewed alcohol.

is sacrificed and its head offered to Aum Jomo. A Bon priest shouts:

Amai! Laso! Wa! Amai! Amai!⁷

As promised, Aum Jomo is entitled to her livelihood through propitiation and she reciprocates by saving weak people and women, and lengthens lives of old people. Bon deities and the people who propitiate both benefit by returning each other's favour. *Paw, pamo, jomo* and many malevolent spirits are all a part of Bon. Bon scriptures also reached Monyul with them.

THE COMMUNITY PREPARATION FOR KHARPU

After the long months of farming season, followed by two month of guarding crops from wild animals, the anxious moment of *kharpu* arrives. Every family ferments enough *churma* for a community contribution and for entertaining guests.

In olden days, people travelled to the lower *kheng* (*mad*) to buy cotton, three or four months before *kharpu*. Until the middle of nineteenth century, the lower *kheng* cultivated cotton, and the people of the outer *kheng* contributed cotton tax to reciprocate gift of rock-salt from the court in Wangdichholing, Bumthang. The people also travelled as far as Tibet to buy and barter rock-salt for farm produce. They bought cotton with *baytam* or *sertam* coins or bartered with Tibetan rock salt, which was in turn exchanged for rice or chillies in Bumthang. Young people willingly made a long and

⁷The above verse is believed to have been uttered by Aum Jomo when her son was thrown to Monyul. The son fell at Kizom in Tang, Bumthang, making a sound TANG! So the place where he landed came to be called as Tang Kizom. (Personal Interview, Lhundup of Wamling village, 8 March 2003).

arduous journey to the lower *kheng* if the cotton was meant for weaving new *gho* or *kira* for kharpu. Once back, they helped their mothers and sisters spin yarn and weave clothes. In absence of other communal entertainments, kharpu is a long break from farm work.

MANGTING: A PRELIMINARY CEREMONY

The Bonpo makes a preliminary offering to Lha 'Ode Gongjan a week before kharpu. On the twelfth day of the ninth Bhutanese month, the Bonpo goes to *lhagor* (god's stone), also called *lhabrang*, in Kharibang⁸ and offers *churma* and *bsang* (incense). Bonchung⁹ and three to four *protalaolo*¹⁰ go with him singing AHOI¹¹. Kharpu has been traditionally celebrated in Kharibang beside the *lhagor*. The household of Wamling Gadpu (*gup*) is the traditional host of *kharpu*, and it contributes a *phaytangma*¹² of *churma* for libation. In this celebration, the Bonpo cleanses himself and the surrounding areas of any defilement by burning *sang* before making offerings. He also propitiates and makes offerings to local deities (*neydag zhidag*), and prays not to obstruct Lha 'Ode Gongjan's descent to Wamling. The main function of this *bsang* ritual, involving fire and fumigation, is purification of defilements (such as *grip*),

⁸ Kharibang is a small levelled-ground below the Wamling Gadpu's house in Krongmar centrally located near the community lhakhang. The lhakhang was built in 1918 over the ruins of old lhakhang. Its *nanngen*- statues of *rigsum goempo* (Chenrize, Jamyang and Chana Dorji)- was presented by the First King Ugyen Wangchuck.

⁹ The Bonchung, also called *artala*, is the Bonpo's assistant who always accompanies him.

¹⁰ *Protalaolo* is a group of both young and old people who sing A HOI.

¹¹ A HOI {ཨོཾ་ཧཱུྃ་} is a refrain sung during the *procham*.

¹² *Phaytangma* is a slender bamboo container for storage and serving *churma*. It has a capacity of one and a half bottle (1250 ml). A bigger one, *Matangma*, is double the *phaytangma*.

and a fragrant offering to the gods. It is believed that the gods withdraw their favours if the local environment gets defiled because of human activity and impurities. Purification of the surrounding and man himself is necessary to win back favours of estranged gods. The Bonpo ensures that Wamling is cleansed of any defilement of the previous one year before welcoming Lha 'Ode Gongjan.¹³

After the *Mangting* ceremony, the people are prohibited from doing any work¹⁴ or performing Buddhist rituals. It is believed that Lha 'Ode Gongjan had consented to descend to Wamling on promise that the village would be free of any sound or noise of disharmony, including the music related to Buddhist ritual instruments such as *roimong* (cymbals), *jaling* (oboe), *nga* (drum), and *dung* (horn) from the twelfth day to the end of kharpu. The sound of farm implements also frightens him. In olden days, people could not even chant their daily mantra. Most families conduct annual *choku* or *rimdro* before the twelfth day. Traditionally, three days in a month should be reserved for Bon practices, and Buddhism should withdraw from community life during the period.¹⁵

¹³ Samten G. Karmay, 'The Local Deities and the Juniper Tree: a Ritual for Purification (*bsang*)', in *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History, Myths, Rituals and Beliefs in Tibet*, differentiates between *bsang* and *gsang*. The former is purification through fumigation, while the latter is cleansing by sprinkling. 'If it is defiled, purify it with the *tshang* and incense; if it is polluted, wash it with the lustral water.'

¹⁴ Ploughing, digging, sowing, harvesting, felling of trees, collecting firewood, constructing houses, collecting cattle feed, carpentry, weaving, grinding... and even quarrelling and feuding.

¹⁵ Guru Rimpoche and a Bon master had a debate in which Guru Rimpoche won; however, Guru was so impressed by Bonpo's learning and miracles that Guru decreed that every year three days should be reserved for Bon practices. So Wamling kharpu was initially celebrated for three days (*baphu*, *phychung* and *lanthab*).

Earlier a group of elders watched with vigilance and fined anyone who did not observe this restriction. People take the best food and *churma* in great abundance so much so that there is a local saying, 'rice sticks even to a dog's tail during kharpu'. Time is exclusively meant for eating, drinking, dancing and merrymaking.

DESCENDING NIGHT OF LHA 'ODE GONGJAN

The Bonpo determines the night sky on which *karma mindru* will catch the moon, and makes a *kingkhor* (*kilkhor*-mandala) as a house of Lha 'Ode Gongjan. *Kingkhor* is made out of three pumpkins decked with *lhaloi mento* (marigold, also called *kharpoi mento*) and *dongdongmai mento*. He also decorates his home with those flowers.

At midnight, when the whole village is asleep (*me nyai khi nyai*) the Bonpo goes to Kharibang and offers *bsang* by burning *dungmai* (artemesia) and *jinseng* leaves (a species of rhododendron).¹⁶ As in the Mangting ceremony, Bonchung and *protalaolo* accompany him. Climbing atop the *lhagor*, he prays to Lha 'Ode Gongjan and invites him to Wamling, while the Bonchung and *protalaolo* hide on the ground floor of the Gadpu's house. The Bonpo makes a mental journey to the abode of Lha 'Ode Gongjan in the celestial realm following the ancient Kheng-Tibet caravan route. The route is now abandoned since the present route called *gangyam* (road along the river) was opened by a Tibetan hunter who arrived in Wamling from Tibet, led by a hunting dog, in pursuit of a prey.

¹⁶Rhododendron is called *jinseng* in kheng dialect

The mental journey, according to the Bonpo's recitation, starts from Kharibang *lhagor* to Kradibee and Mabrang in Wamling, to Tashithongleng, Ngangjai and Gogai Chorten in Shingkar village. From Gogai Chorten to Purjai, Shar Gizam, Melongpang, Bather Yumshar, Ura, Shaithang Ya, Tangsibi, Karma Kora, Tangchu Zam, Shigshig Kora, Gongkhar, Jalakhar, Chamkharzam, Kurjithang, Shabjethang, Natdeyfa, Goleng Kharsey, Tsampai, Brogpa Lujang, Monla Karchung, Longtod Tshachu, Lhalung, Jambailing to Lhasa/Samye. From Samye he travels to the mythical world of the god of Dungseng Garagera, Poo Angling Ungling, Magseng Banabuna, Doma Laplep, Mugpa Sabseb, Nebey Labey, Karma 'ang nga ying nga tod ning, Sergi Chorten, Ngügi Chorten, Lhai Sergo Yugoi Tengning, Serthri Nyulthri Tengdu followed by *namrimpa dangpa* to *namrimpa chusumpa*, and finally reaches at the abode of 'Ode Gongjan in heaven.

When he reaches 'Ode Gongjan, he sings:

ཨོ་ལྷ་ ཨོ་ལྷ་ འོད་དེ་གོང་རྒྱལ།

ཨོ་ལྷ་ འོད་དེ་གོང་རྒྱལ།

དང་སྤུ་མ་མའི་སྤང་བ་ཞེ

གསེར་གྱི་ལྷུང་བ་ལྷ་སྤྱི་མཚོ་ལགས།

ད་སྤུ་ཚེ་རང་གི་སྤང་བ་ཞེ

གཡག་གི་རྩོ་བ་ལྷ་ཏུ་མཚོ་ལགས།

O, Lha! O, Lha 'Ode Gongjan!

'Ode Lha 'Od Gongjan!

During the time of our forefathers

You were received in a golden horn;
Now during the time of sons
We are receiving you in a yak horn.

He explains that *lokhor lawa chunyi*¹⁷ and *shag khaipheytang chobgay*¹⁸ have passed, and Lha's descent to Wamling is neither late nor early. He entreats Lha to come to Wamling,¹⁹ and makes the following prayer:

རྫོན་ཤོས་རྣམས་ལུ་ཚེ་མུད་ན་ཚེ་གཞན་རོ་འབྱུང་ལོ།
གཞོན་རྣམས་ལུ་དེ་མུད་ན་དེ་གཞན་རོ་འབྱུང་ལོ།
ལ་ལ་དབང་མུད་ན་དབང་གཞན་ལོ་འབྱུང་ལོ།
གོ་ལ་རྫོད་མུད་ན་རྫོས་གཞན་རོ་འབྱུང་ལོ།
ཟས་ན་བཟུད་མུད་ན་བཟུད་གཞན་རོ་འབྱུང་ལོ།

Come to give life to the old,
Pleasure to the young,
Power to the speech,
Warmth to the cloth,
Taste to the food.

The Bonpo assures that Wamling is pure, free of any defilement related to birth, disease or death. He requests Lha

¹⁷ *Lawa chunyi* in kheng dialect means twelve cycles of waxing and waning of the moon, which is equivalent to one year.

¹⁸ Seventeen and a half score is 350 days, short of 10 days to make a year; but in Bon calendar it is one lunar year.

¹⁹ He defines boundaries of Wamling as *phu samai gi teng do, da namling gi tengdo, and chhu showang gi teng do*.

not to send disease and epidemics to man and cattle of the 60 households of Wamling.

The Bonpo recites the following verses:

རྗེར་ཐོག་འབྲུ་ལྷ་ལེ་གང་འབྲུ་ལྷ་གང་གཏོར་མ་གནང་ལོ།
འོག་ཐོག་ལོར་གྱི་གང་ལོར་ན་རྒྱུད་ལ་མ་གནང་ལོ།
བར་ཐོག་མི་གི་གང་མི་ན་ཡི་ལྷེན་ལོར་ན་ཚོ་མ་གནང་ལོ།
ཆར་རྒྱ་དུས་སྲུ་འབབ་ཏེ་སླི་ལོ།
ལོ་ཐོག་རྟ་ག་རྟ་ལེགས་ཀོ་སླི་ལོ།
ཆེ་བའི་གསུངས་ལམ་རྒྱུང་བའི་ཉལ་དུ་སླི་ལོ།
རྒྱུང་བའི་ལྷ་ལམ་ཆེ་བའི་གསལ་དུ་སླི་ལོ།
ཐོག་གི་སྲ་བ་ན་ཐམས་ཅད་ཉལ་དུ་སླི་ལོ།

Grains fill the upper storey, don't scatter them;
Cattle fill the ground floor, don't release accidents;
People fill the middle floor, don't release deaths and sickness on them;
Let the rains fall on time;
Let the harvest be always good;
Let children heed elders' words;
Let elders entertain children's request;
Let all listen to words of one.

Lha 'Ode Gongjan is assumed to have consented, and the Bonpo leads the way to Wamling, reciting the same verses in reverse order- starting from its abode in heaven up to Kharibang in Wamling. It is believed that Lha is carried on the

Bonpo's right shoulder. That night the atmosphere is so tense and frightening that people dare not come out of their houses. The Bonpo prostrates thrice before Lha and offers seat. He then wears a crown called *gora* or *theykor*,²⁰ and proceeds to his house, accompanied by Bonchung and *protalaolo*, singing A HOI.

BAPHU: THE OFFERING OF MILK

Baphu is celebrated on the second day to propitiate *norlha* (the cattle god). *Ba* in kheng dialect means cattle, and *phu* ('*phud*) means offering. The celebration is believed to multiply cattle, increase milk yields and avert diseases and accidents. Households owning cattle participate and contribute milk, butter and cheese for offerings. Even a man with one milking cow comes with a *jujai* (milking container) of milk as *phot* (first offering).²¹

A group of cow herders must volunteer to be the host (*tsawa*). People identify one of the community *tsamdo* (pastureland) and allow the *tsawa* to graze their cattle a month before *kharpu*. The *tsamdo* the *baphu* is celebrated in is traditionally called *tshersa*. Unlike other festivities, *baphu* is celebrated in *tsamdo*, away from the village. The *tsawa* do not churn milk of the preceding one month and accumulate it for use during the *baphu*. Having grazed the community *tsamdo* it is their responsibility to serve as much milk to any number of people who would gather. Milk is collected in many *zom* (container for milk storage and churning), while cheese balls and butter are stored in *tanglup* (cane container). One of the hosts goes to

²⁰It is made of rolled white threads with a red thread stripe in the middle.

²¹Big or small, it is only herder's interest to contribute milk and butter for offering to the cattle god.

the Bonpo (indirectly Lha 'Ode Gongjan) and invites him for *baphu*.

The *tsawa* makes a makeshift double-decked altar supported by four posts. Offerings are laid on altar: one *phok*²² of butter is placed between two butter lamps, surrounded by eight cheese-balls. Flowers adorn the top of each post. Children tie many small, round stones with a nettle thread and tie the other end of the thread to the posts, like cattle. Below the altar, a huge quantity of rice is offered on banana leaves. Rice is surrounded by milk offered in many *juzom* (milk churner).

Traditionally the *tsawa* had to contribute ten *bre*²³ of rice, one *matangma* of *churma*, one *phok* of butter and 15 balls of cheese. Almost all family members go to *baphu*, taking two *phuwa*²⁴ of rice and one *phaytangma* of *churma* as *tektsho* (support provision) to *tsawa*. It is customary for some rich families to take one *matangma* of *churma*.

Around nine in the morning, the Bonpo comes with a retinue of *protalaolo* singing A-HOI. The *tsawa* light incense, and receive the Bonpo with *churma* and *bangchang*. The Bonpo then makes offerings of milk, butter and cheese to *norlha*, while people are seated around the altar.

Rice and milk are then served. People drink as much milk as they like. Some people take home their share of milk in containers such as *jarken* (jerry can), bottle or *kadung*²⁵ brought for carrying *churma* and *bangchang*. The *tsawa* send milk to old

²² One *phok* of butter is equal to 5 *sang*, 1 *sang*=333 gms.

²³ Or *dre*, a measurement of volume roughly equivalent to 1.67 kg.

²⁴ A measure of four *phuwa* is equivalent to one *bre* or *dre*.

²⁵ Cane containers for storing and serving *churma*.

people who cannot make it to *baphu* through their relatives. It is compulsory to invite people of neighbouring villages for *baphu*. Guests or any stranger are treated to fried cheese.

The Bonpo then conducts *chaglata* (or *phyagtala*) divination to find out whether cattle will multiply to a particular individual or household. He makes a cone-shaped cup by folding a square banana leaf and switch it with a needle-size bamboo splint. He makes a prayer to the *norlha* and then throws the cup into the air. If the cup lands upright, it is considered good; upside down is bad. The Bonpo recommends Bon rituals like *kharam*, *forgula*, *nawan* and *ainingmeme* to negate bad luck or curses. He gives names to small stones tethered like cattle to altar posts; they are named after cattle like *karjan* (white), *maarjan* (red), *sanjan* (spotted), *brangjan* (white neck) etc. One interesting observation about the cattle (*jatsham*) christened by the Bonpo is that their names bear a suffix- *jan*, after Lha 'Ode Gong-*jan*. Stones are later taken home and this is supposed to bless households with many cattle.

The day ends with offering of *dha* (money) to the Bonpo who reciprocates with a prayer for the welfare of people and cattle. Parents offer *dha* on behalf of relatives and children living in other parts of the country. In the early 1980s, *dha* ranged from Nu 1-5 on average. Today the minimum amount is Nu. 5. Money collected is shared (not equally) between the Bonpo and Bonchung. The Bonpo and *protalaolo* return home in procession, singing A HOI.

NAWAN CHANGPA

Nawan Changpa is held at the night of *baphu*. This is normally a domain of teenagers who stay awake the whole night. In this ceremony the Bonpo propitiates different *lha* and *lhamo* (gods

and goddesses) residing in every parts of the house and in household tools and implements. It is believed that gods and goddesses reside in farm tools, water storages (*khelezang*), boxes, doors, window, storage boxes, ovens (hearth), *tshanta*, ladders, ladles, pots, pans, and granaries. For instance, the *goilhamo* (goddess of doors) is supposed to have protected inhabitants by closing it to enemies and opening it to friends. The Bonpo thanks *goilhamo* for her service and offers *tshog* on behalf of Lha 'Ode Gongjan.

A group of boys (age 15-20) go directly to the Bonpo's house after *baphu* to participate in *nawan changpa*. The Bonpo wakes up at midnight and after a short prayer, sings A HOI. The boys wake up and join him. The Bonpo starts offering *tshog* (banquet) to many *lha* and *lhamo* residing in the house. The *tshog* mainly consist of *changpa* (*zaw*) mixed with cheese, butter, salt, maize flour, garlic, onion, *chawa* (*sichuan* pepper), chilli, meat.... placed on a square banana leaf. Some of household items and *lhamo* propitiated are:

1. *Thek* (quern or hand-mill) for *thekilhamo* (goddess of hand-mill);
2. *Khelezang* (water storage) for *khelelhamo* (water goddess);
3. *Tshanta*²⁶ for *tshanta drupzhilhamo* (goddess of square *tshanta*);
4. *Ko* (door) for *koilhamo* (door goddess);
5. *Thab* (oven) for *thabgilhamo* (goddess of oven or hearth);
6. *Khopsengka* (attic ladder) for *khopsengkailhamo* (goddess of attic ladder)
7. *Nyersang* (store) for *nyersanglhamo* (goddess of store);
8. *Zot* (storage box) for *zotgilhamo* (goddess of storage box).

²⁶*Tshanta* is a square cane-mat placed on a wooden frame hung immediate above the oven or hearth. Grain, meat and other farm produce are dried on it.

The Bonpo recites various prayers while making offering to different *lhamo*. When he offers to the goddess of door, his recitation runs:

དག་ར་བ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་

གཞི་བ་ར་བ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་

Close it if enemies approach;
Open if friends come.

After the offering, the boys eat and scatter *tshog*, shouting, *nan!*²⁷ The host gives *changpa* to the Bonpo and his followers. The Bonpo is entitled to two *phuwa*, while the Bonchung gets one. Every boy gets a small cup of *changpa*.

Starting from his house, the Bonpo, accompanied by the boys, go from house to house, singing A HOI. He repeats the same propitiation ceremony in every house. It would be already dawn when he visits the last house. Every boy collects a minimum of five *phuwa* of *changpa*. The group accompanying the Bonpo increases as some boys join the group when it visits their houses.

PHYCHUNG: THE OFFERING OF RICE

Early in the morning, the head of a rooster is buried in the middle of the main village road - on a junction of three roads leading to the upper village (*gonpai*), lower village (*pam*) and Kharibang. The ceremony is called a burial of *grom*. In olden days, a rooster was beheaded for its head. But Bonpo Dorji later stopped the practice by substituting it with a rooster's

²⁷'Full' meaning it should be full.

head made of flour. Today the head of roosters either killed by *jidangla* (weasel?) or hawk is preserved for the occasion. Whoever brings a rooster head is entitled to two *bre* of rice even today. If there is no rooster head, it is made with dough kneaded from maize flour. People are prohibited from stepping on the spot where the rooster's head is buried. A violator is fined one *bre* of rice as per the village rules. Travellers of other villages take longer routes and avoid the way. The burial is meant to negate the community's curses accumulated in a year.

After burying the rooster's head, people gather around another *lhagor* behind the community lhakhang. Meme Cita Dorji destroyed the *lhagor* that is located on his land; however, the ceremony continues to be held on the same spot. A large carpet woven from cane, normally used for drying grain in the sun, is unrolled on the ground. Every household brings two *phuwa* of rice and one *phaytangma* of *churma* as offering to Lha 'Ode Gongjan. The Bonpo recites a prayer and scatters rice over the bamboo mat, and sprinkles *churma* with his finger into the air. After the offering, one village elder is appointed as *lhamin* to lead the ceremony.

The lhamin takes the rice and *churma* offerings of every family one by one, and utters a prayer. If the offering is from a particular family, Sonam Dorji and Sangay Choden for instance, his recitation runs:

མག་པ་བསོད་ནམ་རྩེ་ལོང
ལའི་ཚང་སངས་རྒྱ་ས་ཚོས་སྐྱོན་ཚེ་རེང་རྩོ་སྒྲི་ཡོ།
རྒྱ་ལོར་ལོང་ཨོ་ལེས་པའི་དོ་སྒྲི་ཡོ།

སྐྱུག་པ་ལོང་ལ་ཚེ་རུ་མ་སྤྲི་ཡོ།
ཡུའི་དུ་ཚོད་ལ་བབས་ཏེ་སྤྲི་ཡོ།
ལོ་ཐོག་ཀ་ཅན་ལེགས་ཀོ་སྤྲི་ཡོ།
ཨོ་ཀའི་སྒོལ་ལམ་ལེ་ཨོ་ཚེ་ལོང་ལ་བཟུག་ལབ།
ལྷ་ལོད་དེ་གོང་རྒྱལ་གེ་ལེ་ལོ་ཙོ།
ལོ་ལོང་ཅ་བའི་དུད་ཚུལ།
ལོ་བཚ་བཟུད་ཏེ་དམ་ཙོ།

Let husband Sonam Dorji and
His wife, Sangay Choden live long;
Let their wealth and children multiply,
Let them be free of disease and suffering,
Let rain come on time,
Let there be a bumper harvest,
This is a prayer from Lha 'Ode Gongjan
dwelling in this kingkhor:
May He meet you at the same time next year in perfect health!

Lhamin then scatters rice into the air and shouts *O Laso! Jada*.²⁸
The crowd repeats *O Laso! Jada*. Lhamin teases everybody
irrespective of age or sex. An unmarried girl is 'paired' with a
boy; and they are blessed with love, sex, children and a long
married life. The Lhamin, who speaks obscene and derogatory
words, is blind to the presence of his relatives, even his
mother. This ceremony is meant to negate curses fallen on any
household or individual.

²⁸Khengkha swear word

During the day people are offered *churma*, and partake in celebration. The rice collected is distributed with a *lhabrela*. The Bonpo is entitled to 12 *lhabrela*, the host takes 12 *lhabrela*, and there is one *lhabrela* each to persons who made *lhabrang* and contributed the rooster's head. *Lhabre* or *lhabrela* (*bre* of god) is an old *bre* traditionally used for measuring rice during *kharpu*.

Cakes kneaded out of boiled rice in the shape of *norbu* (jewel) are placed on banana leaves as offering, besides butter and cheese. Incense burns throughout the event below the offering. The Bonpo divines the luck and fortune of every household in the coming year. He holds a cone-shaped cup made by folding a square banana leaf in his hand and makes a prayer that the cup should face up if luck is favourable, and down if luck is adverse. He then throws the cup into the air. However, the Bonpo keeps on praying and throwing the cup until divination is positive; but a person is made to prostrate three times every time the luck is bad. The lunch is offered to all people gathered for the festival. By evening many elders return home drunk.

LANTHAB: THE OFFERING OF WINE

Lanthab is celebrated on the third day after *phychung*. The number of days varies from two to three. Three divisions of the village - Gonpa (upper), Lampong (middle) and Pam (lower) take turns hosting it. It is usually held first at Gonpa, followed by Lampong and Pam.

In the morning the Bonpo and his retinue of *protalaolo* visit a house to offer *churma* to Lha. He blesses the house with health and wealth. That house also brings *bangchang* for the Bonpo who then offers it to Lha 'Ode Gongjan with a ladle made of

banana leaf. The *Protalaolo* shout A HOI at the end of every verse. The day is spent dancing a unique kharpu dance called *procham*. The Bonpo sits in the middle reciting prayers, while *protalaolo* make a circle around the Bonpo, and dance in clockwise direction.

Singing *lozey* is a part of kharpu. Earlier people did not know *lozey*, and it was only in the early 1980s that *lozey* was introduced. Men and women either praise or criticise each other through *lozey*. To some people, this new festival element is a big digression since the Bonpo's prayer and *protalaolo's lozey* are sung at the same time, followed by A HOI, and *lozey* easily overpowers the Bonpo's prayers. In the olden days, some men dressed up as women and danced *procham*. Now, even women participate in *procham*, and engage men in *lozey* competition and folk dance. People are prohibited from folk dancing during *baphu* and *phychung*.

Households contribute rice, butter, cheese, wine, chili, salt, and vegetables to host a lunch for the Bonpo and people from other parts of village who have gathered for the day.

One unique aspect of *lanthab* is the tradition for the whole village community to visit neighbouring villages, particularly Shingkhar, Khrisa and Radi. Led by the Bonpo, the people of Wamling go to Khrisa and spend the whole day dancing *procham*. People of Khrisa collectively host a lunch for the visitors. The following day, the people of Khrisa reciprocate with their visit to Wamling. In such cases, the *lanthab* at Pam is cancelled. Wamling entertains visiting guests in Kharibang and it is the Wamling Gadpo's traditional responsibility to arrange hospitality and co-ordinate lunch. Every household contributes provisions; the amount is determined by the

number of guests. Two communities dance *procham*, either jointly or separately.

During *lanthab*, people participate in a *changkor* called *ngagpala chomdu*. In Kheng dialect it means 'to drive away the cold': *ngagpala* means something that is cold (human body), and *chomdu* means to subdue or drive away cold (by drinking *churma*). Some elder people imitate the Bonpo and walk from house to house, accompanied by a retinue of followers. Hosts serve them wine. Young people soon follow them. Every household keeps from eight to nine *matangma* of *churma* for this occasion only.

FAREWELL TO LHA 'ODE GONGJAN

The last day of the festival is observed to bid farewell to Lha 'Ode Gongjan. People dance *procham* throughout the day, lifting the edge of their *gho* or *kira* to receive *tshe* (life) from Lha. The Bonpo offers *serkhem* and one *bangchung* of *zaw*. The farewell ceremony is a crucial part. It is believed that having once been invited, Lha 'Ode Gongjan must be sent back in a proper manner, lest disease inflicts the people and cattle, and crops don't grow well. An elaborate farewell results in bumper harvests, village prosperity and happiness and a life free of disease and sickness.

When the ceremony is over in the evening, the Bonpo takes off his crown and keeps it on *lhagor*. A group of young men jump over *lhagor* in turn. Anyone who can jump over the *lhagor* will not face any problems for a year. People wear expensive *gho*, *kira*, necklace, *zee*, *jaro*, *koma* and many other jewelleryes as gifts from Lha 'Ode Gongjan. The Bonpo recites same verses sung to receive the Lha. He sheds tears as Lha goes back to its abode in the celestial realm.

BONPO AND THE COMMUNITY

In Wamling, the Bonpo is not a hereditary post, though some sons have succeeded their fathers in the past. The community appoints any capable person as a Bonpo. In most cases the Bonchung is appointed as the Bonpo after his master dies or resigns. Like the village astrologer, he is exempted from community *woola* and services. Some of the Bonpo of the last century were Bonpo Meme Dawa Samdrup, and his son Bonpo Dorji, Bonpo Sangla, Ngedrupla and Kezang. It is said that while reciting Bon verses, Bonpo Dawa Samdrup's voice could be heard from most parts of Wamling. His son Dorji became a Bonpo for many years. He later resigned and went on a Buddhist retreat. His younger brother Kezang also became a Bonpo.

Some vestiges of Bon practices still play an important role in the community, side by side with Buddhism. The Bonpo is one of the most sought after persons in the village. His role in the community does not start or end with *kharpu*. He performs different Bon rituals like *kharam*, *jawrey*, *forgola*, *thama* (divination), *nawan* and *ainingmeme*. *Forgola* ritual is performed to keep wild animals away from crops. *Tshog*, an egg and a bottle of either *churma* or *bangchang* are required for the ritual. The Bonpo invokes and makes offerings to local *neydag zhidag* and give the charge of taking care of wild animals. If either a crow or other animals take the egg kept between four small branches of a tree, the offering is believed to have not reached *neydag zhidag*. The lost or strayed animals are also found through *forgola* ritual.

At times of sickness, people either consult an astrologer, the Bonpo or a local health centre. The Bonpo is mainly consulted if sickness is sudden. It is the generally held belief that if a

person falls sick, the culprit could be some *neydag* and *zhidag* who steal or sap a person's life forces. He performs rites and rituals to appease and propitiate local deities so that the health of sick persons can be restored. Wamling Bonpo were known to have seen with their naked eyes *shazakhandroma* (human-hunting beings or sky-farer cannibals), *mamo* and other *dud* (malevolent spirits) which affect people's well being. These beings are otherwise invisible to ordinary humans.

RELEVANCE OF KHARPU

The traditional functions of *kharpu* must have been purely spiritual. But its original purposes seemed to have altered over time. People look up to it more as communal congregation, and less of a spiritual event.

Kharpu has enriched the people's lives and traditions. For instance it is customary for children to visit their parents both near and far after the celebration. Even children and grandchildren who had long left their home villages to settle in distant places through marriages or other means come to meet their parents or grandparents, bringing rice and *churma*. The parents reciprocate with meals.

Kharpu gives people a sense of assurance for their health and well-being. The invitation of Lha 'Ode Gongjan is believed to appease local *lha*, *klu*, and *tsen* who in turn bestow blessings on the village. People's interest in *kharpu* far surpasses *chodpa*, since the latter was introduced much later in the village, and the performance of Buddhist mask dances of the *chodpa* can be witnessed elsewhere in the country. But *kharpu* is a different festival rooted in the village's culture, tradition and collective memory, a tradition that evolved with generations of people, drawing on their strengths. It was there before they were

Wamling Kharpu: A Vibrant Ancient Festival

born, and the people feel the responsibility to hold on to it. Even today, kharpu is as vibrant as ever, with strong community participation. But one dilemma the people of Wamling faced with is who will succeed Bonpo Gembola. The community has yet to decide on his successor, and no one is willing.

GOSHING CHODPA*

PHUNTSHO RAPTEN**

ABSTRACT

Most villages in the country have local customs and rituals that have been practiced over many generations. The Lou-chu of Sha valley, Kharam of Chali, Kharphu of Banjar in Mongar, Chodpa, Roop and Kharphu in the Kheng region are a few examples. However, most of them are gradually being discontinued as people who practice them die or move from the villages.

This paper attempts to study and document the celebration of Goshing Chodpa in the lower Kheng region. It discusses the history and origin of Chodpa, types of Goshing households, local invocation rites, and their influences on the local people.

INTRODUCTION

Chodpa (literally meaning offering) is an auspicious festival of the people of Goshing in the lower Kheng. It is celebrated every year from the fourteenth to sixteenth day of the tenth

* This paper is based on my personal observation of Goshing Chodpa and interviews with the villagers of Goshing community during the proceeding of the festival from November 29 to December 2, 2001. I would like to thank Goshing Gup Pema, krongpa Apa Doto, Druba, Sangye Yidup, Konyer Sangye Lhendup, Bonpo Phub Thinley, pamo Rinchen Sudanla, Gadpupa Tshewang and many other people of Goshing for their information. I also like to thank Karma Ura for editing this paper and Kesang Tshering, Research Assistant, CBS for his assistance.

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Bhutanese month. The people of Goshing also observe two other festivals: the *Buedpa* is celebrated on the twentieth day of the first month, and the *Derchu* on the eighth day of the fifth month to propitiate local deities. Although these festivals include Buddhist rites, mask and folk dances in many parts of Kheng, the invocation and propitiation of regional and local deities and spirits by Bon priest and pamo are very common in parts of lower Kheng such as Ngangla and Goshing.

People believe that mountains, lakes, streams, cliffs and forests are abodes of spirits and deities, which can be friendly or harmful to human beings depending on one's actions. Pollution or disturbance through any human actions provoke them to cause illness and harm. Shamans (pawo/pamo) and Bonpo are known for their knowledge and skills in harmonizing relationship between humans and those spirits. During *Chodpa* they play an important role as intermediaries between human beings and the spirit world. They appease spirits through rituals, and subsequently promote human health and well-being. They also exorcise evil influences, carry out divinations, and suggest possible remedies.

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF CHODPA

It is not known how and when *Chodpa* came to be celebrated in Kheng. Invocation recitals by Bonpo and pamo make references to its existence predating Zhabdrung's arrival in 1616.¹ The oral sources trace it to the time of *sacha namcha*- the formation of earth and sky. *Chodpa*, as celebrated in Goshing,

¹ཞབས་བྱུང་བོད་ནས་ཕྱོད་ཚོ་ལ་བྱས། ཕྱི་བརྟེན་ལ་ཕྱོད་ལོ་ལོ། ལམ་གདུང་ཀར་ཕྱོད། ལ་དེ་ལྷུང་། ལྷ་མ་རང་ལྷ། དང་བོ་ས་མའི་མཛེན་པའི་ལྷུང་བཏུག། When Zhabdrung came from Tibet, his horse faced the direction of the south and saw Khar Dungkarpong, La derithang and Chu morongchu as prophesied by forefathers.

came from Ngangla. In the olden days the people of Goshing had to carry goods from Ngangla to Gomphu, walking for two full days each way. The settlement at Goshing began on places where porters established transit camps on their journey. It was Apa Tashi who replicated Ngangla Chodpa in Goshing, and three generations (*skye rab*) have passed since then. Therefore, characters and significance of Bonpo, pamo and Gadpupa (a character in *Chodpa*) are similar to that of Ngangla Chodpa.

PROCEEDINGS OF CHODPA

On the thirteenth day of the *Chodpa*, lama, *lopen* and lay monks congregate at Goshing Krong and prepare ritual cakes. They perform Buddhist rituals from the fourteenth to sixteenth day of *Chodpa* in the lhakhang, which was built in 1916. On the fourteenth, the Bonpo from Budizhi, pamo and her assistants from Lichibi, and Gadpupa from Lingmapong meet at chorten Bumpa, which is near Goshing lhakhang, and together they perform a purification rite by offering *bangchang* and *arra*. They conduct a *Sa-kor* ritual in the evening on the same day. The next day, the Gadpupa dance is performed in the lhakhang, followed by invocation of Tsanchen Ama Ringlamo after sunset. Ama Ringlamo is the chief local deity of Goshing and Panbang. *Chodpa* concludes on the sixteenth with blessing and Namda duetshey (Tashi molem) conducted by lama, *lopen* and lay monks.

TYPES OF GOSHING HOUSEHOLDS

The people of Goshing are divided into three groups of *threypa* (taxpayers): *threypa cheywa* (big taxpayers), *threypa barma* (medium taxpayers) and *threypa chungwa* (small taxpayers). As the names suggest, the household division is based on the people's tax paying capacity. Population strength

and lineage also determine the division. The *threypa cheywa* has the largest tax paying capacity and rank of nobility compared to the *threypa barma*, which has the medium tax paying capacity and middle ranked people. *Threypa cheywa* includes people from Zuri, Bumtangpa, Breyilha, Ngalong and Jarpa, and *threypa barma* includes Jeyragpo, Yugi and Jarpa. *Threypa chungwa* is inferior in all aspects. It includes Zurpupa, Jeyragpo, Khalingpa, Golingpa, Thrunghungpa and Montangpola. It must be noted that Jarpa and Jeyragpo also referred in other *threypa* are not of the same lineage. *Threypa cheywa*, *barma* and *chungwa* are also known as the *Breyilha*, *Jarpa* and *Lamanpa* respectively. This social division is also prevalent in Ngangla.

POST OF KRONGPA AND PAMPA

Every *threypa* appoints its representatives, known as krongpa and pampa, on the third day of the twelfth month. Their terms last for three years. Krongpa² sponsors and coordinates *Chodpa*, *Buedpa* and *Derchu* for three consecutive years. Krongpa is assisted by pampa who contributes in kind, labour and money for the festivals. All *threypa* have traditional houses at Goshing Krong (the festival site) built by the respective *threypa*. It is mandatory for all krongpa to stay in their respective krongpa houses at Goshing Krong for three years. But pampa can stay in their villages.

It is also customary for any individual to serve first as pampa before becoming a krongpa. The tenures of the krongpa and pampa of a particular *threypa* end on the same day. The Krongpa resigns and hands over his responsibilities to the pampa, who then is automatically promoted as a krongpa.

² Also known as Krongpa Apa

Eventually when every krongpa resigns, he or she would have served for six consecutive years. It is the most challenging and onerous task a person shoulders for his or her *threypa*. It must be noted that krongpa and pampa of all *threypa* are not appointed in the same year.

Every krongpa and pampa possesses one silver coin called *betam karp*. The face of the coin bears an inscription དགའ་ལྷན་ལོ་བྱེད་ ཕྱོགས་ལས་རྣམ་རྒྱལ། on one side and eight auspicious symbols (Tashi Tagye) on the other side of the coin. When a krongpa resigns from his post, he hands over his *betam karp* and a symbolic *khadar* (ceremonial scarf) to his successor. Similarly, a pampa gives his *betam*, along with a bottle of *arra*, to his predecessor to appoint a new candidate in his (pampa) place. A man would be appointed as a pampa on the basis of a mutually agreed chart drawn by *threypa*. The outgoing krongpa hands over the pampa's *betam* to a new pampa. The acceptance of *betam* symbolizes the occupation of the post. Oral tradition says that Zhabdrung gave these *betam* as a gift to his host and if any candidates refuse to assume the post of a krongpa or a pampa during their turn, ill luck and misfortune will befall both the candidate and the village to which he belongs. Although there is no historical evidence of Zhabdrung's visit in the Kheng region, it is possible that Kheng nobilities from Tama Chogpa (lower Kheng), Nangkorpa (middle Kheng) and Phikorpa (upper Kheng) would have been patrons. On the day of his appointment, a new krongpa must host a big feast to all *threypa*. This was a very expensive affair in the past, costing seven pigs, one bull and a several *matangma*³ of *arra*

³ Container of *arra* and *bangchang*.

and *bangchang*. The quantity of meat has now limited to two pigs.

The krongpa of all three *threypa* have access to eleven acres of farming land registered in the name of the community lhakhang. They are exempted from local taxes and labour contribution throughout their term. But they are not free of certain disadvantages. Since they have to live in their respective krongpa houses located in Goshing Krong for three years, they have to abandon their own houses and farms in the villages. As a result, their farms often turn into bush-land, and the houses can be ruined due to lack of maintenance. It is quite difficult to farm the lands and maintain houses even after their return. It is because of these problems that some people prefer to appoint krongpa permanently, while others still favour preserving the tradition.

CONTRIBUTIONS BY KRONGPA AND PAMPA

Unlike the community sponsored festivals in other parts of Kheng, *Chodpa* and other festivals celebrated in a year in Goshing are organized and sponsored entirely by six people: three krongpa and three pampa. During the *Buedpa* festival, every krongpa and pampa contributes one *phuwa*⁴ of rice for *dru chum*, one bottle⁵ of *arra* for *serkhem*, two *bre*⁶ of flour for ritual cakes, one *sung* of butter, one cheese ball, one *phuwa* of sugar and one *bre* of maize for *tshog* offering. With the exception of maize, they also make equal contributions to *Derchu* and *Chodpa*. Moreover, one extra *bre* of flour and one *sung* of butter are given away for *Chodpa*, which is celebrated

⁴ *Phuta*.

⁵ It is interesting to note how bottle has replaced traditional *palang* indigenously made in Goshing

⁶ *Dre* is called *bre* in Khengkha. I have used *bre* in respect for Kheng dialect.

for three days. In addition, to facilitate propitiation of Ama Ringlamo by the Bonpo and pamo on the fifteenth day, every krongpa contributes one bottle of *arra*, two *bre* of *sip* (beaten rice), one *sung* of butter, one kilogram of ginger, three *bre* of rice and one *phuwa* of sugar. Krongpa provides food and wages for *lama* and lay monks, while the pampa supports the Bonpo's wages, pamo and her assistants.

It is interesting to note that Bonpo, Gadpupa, Gyalwagongma (guests invited from the locality) and pamo have hierarchical standing in the society. As the Bonpo belongs to *threypa cheywa*, the krongpa apa of *threypa cheywa* looks after him and lay monks during the duration of the *Chodpa*. The Krongpa apa of *threypa barma* looks after Gadpupa and Gyalwagongma, and krongpa apa of *threypa chungwa* looks after the pamo and her assistants. During the festival, it is a customary that every individual stay in their respective *threypa* house, and the respective krongpa apa must extend his hospitality to the people belonging to his *threypa*.

GYALWAGONGMA

Gyalwagongma, literally meaning luminous persons, is an honorary title given to people who are invited to preside over *Chodpa* and its ceremonies. It was once a tradition to invite the Khoche, one of the noble families from Joka or Ngangla, as Gyalwagongma to preside over *Chodpa*. Three krongpa then used to offer one slaughtered pig to Gyalwagongma as a sign of respect. This tradition was discontinued four years ago and the people appointed economically well-off persons or retired krongpa from their own community as Gyalwagongma, whose main role is to receive the Bonpo, Pamo and Gadpupa, to preside over their rituals during Sa-kor and invocation of

Ama Ringlamo, and to make necessary financial contribution in various rituals.



Gyalwagongma contributing cash to Krongpa

SA-KOR RITUAL

Sa literally means land and *kor* refers to circuit or circumambulation. It is, therefore, a territorial circuit rite. The Bonpo, pamo and her assistants together conduct *sa-kor* ceremony on the fourteenth evening in all three *threypa* houses: first at *threypa chungwa* (Lamanpa), then to *threypa barma* (Jerpa) and later to *threypa cheywa* (Breyla). During the ritual, they summon *lha*, *tsen*, *dued* and *neypo* residing in the mountains, valleys, lakes, forests, streams and cliffs of Goshing, Ngangla, Pangbang, Joka, Samrang, Tamshing and areas bordering Assam. They make special references to *chosung* of Tamshing, Somrang and Samrang villages of Bumthang, because they also worship them and summon for propitiation during their annual *chosung* ritual. They make

dough imageries of three *chosung*, *lama*, *yidam* and *khandro*. The *sa-kor* ritual continues until dawn. People believe that if their deities and spirits are appeased, they will be rewarded by averting misfortunes, rivalry, contempt, ailments and epidemics. During the *sa-kor*, Pamo invokes the blessing for long life and power as evident from the text of her recital below.

མགུ་ལ་ཚེ་མེན་དུག། ཚོ་བླ་གོ།

ཁ་ལ་དབང་མེན་དུག། དབང་བླ་གོ།

ལུས་ལ་རྗོད་མེན་དུག། རྗོད་བླ་གོ།

No life in head. I beseech for it.

No power in speech. I beseech for it.

No warmth in body. I beseech for it.

PURIFICATION RITE

The Bonpo and pamo perform purification rites on the fourteenth day of *Chodpa* to cleanse the environment before they invoke and welcome deities and spirits. *Bangchang*, chili powder and incense are offered during the invocation ritual. There is no blood sacrifice of livestock.



Purification rite of incense burning and arra offering by Bonpo, Pamo and Gadpupa

The Bonpo makes the following recital in most occasions. Different spirits and deities are invoked in every stanza between as the text below shows.

ད་སྲུལ་སྐྱབས་མགོན་ལྷ་སོགས་བུ་ཟླ།
བརྟན་པའི་ལྷ་སྲུང་སྐྱབས་བླ་མ་དཀོན་མཆོག་གསུམ།
བསམ་པར་བ། ཏམ་ཤིང་བ།
ཡབ་བྱམས་པ་ཤིང་རྗེ། ཡམ་གོ་མའི་ལའོར་དང་བཅས་པ།
ལའོར་ལ་བ་བཅུ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་དྲུས་བཟང་ན་བུ་ཟླ།
ལའོར་བྱེད་དང་བཅོ་བརྒྱད་ཀྱི་དྲུས་བཟང་ན་བུ་ཟླ།

Wayo, Wayo - Voices from the Past

རོ་མོ་མ་ལུང་གོ་མ་བེ་ཡོ། ལྷ་འབད་ལྷོང་གོ་མ་བེ་ཡོ།
བཀའ་དང་དགོངས་ལེལ་མ་གནང་ལའི་བུ་བྱི།
ཞལ་བ་ལོག་བ་མ་གནང་ལའི།
ད་སམ་རེད་ལའི་གསང་རབ་ཀྱི་གྲུབ་མཚན་ད།
ཤིང་རིགས་ཀྱི་མེ་ཏོག་གི་མཚན་བ་འཕུལ་ཏུ་བུ་བྱི།
རེད་རའི་སྐྱབ་བ་བུ་ལ་ལ། གཡུས་ཀྱི་གདངས་རེས་ལ། མི་འབ་གཏམ་འབ་དགའ་འབ་ཕུར་
ལ་ཚགས་དང་བྱུང་གོ་མ་ལམ།

Today, all the protecting deities
And guardians of dharma, *lama* and the Triple Gem
Samrangpa, Tamshingpa
Lord Jampa Shingjey
Yum Gomo and her attendants
On auspicious twelve months of the year,
And auspicious 350 days of the year,
Do not let us down.
Do not shy away from us.
Do not be displeased and angry.
Do not feel loathing.
In today's offering of song and incense by us,
And offering of flowers of different trees,
During our tenth month,
Within our territorial boundary,
Let there be no slander, gossip, animosity and black magic.

After the purification rite the Bonpo invokes *tсен* of four directions: Lingla Lingchen Tongpai Jamtso and Lamling Jaling Norbu of the east, Somro Somro of the south, Panglajungla Harinagpo and Wamla Rodongnagpo of the

west and Tajang Domjang Dimjang and Ama Dokar Gyeltshen of the north. Apart from *dued*, over 170 *neypo* are summoned for propitiation. Since each of them are identified with a particular territory like valley, cliff, strategic location of river confluence, forest, moor and so forth, special reference to their places must be mentioned when invoked.

The people of Goshing and Ngangla worship Ama Ringlamo - the patron *tsen* of the region. She is referred to as *manmo* (lake-woman). The Bonpo and pamo conduct rites to honour Ama Ringlamo in the evening of the fifteenth day of *Chodpa* at Lhabrang, a hundred meters from the lhakhang. It is celebrated to prevent ailments, exorcise evil influences and invoke good luck. Offerings consist of *changkyed* (fermented rice) and *tshog* (beaten rice and ginger packed in banana leaves). The offering is distributed to the participants after the ceremony. Three krongpa apa who prepare *changkyed* are not allowed to sleep with their wives on the twelfth night. They cook nine *bre* of rice on the thirteenth evening, mix yeast into it and place it on the triangular branches of Ama Ringlamoi Sang (tree of Ama Ringlamo) for fermentation. It is collected on the fifteenth morning. If it ferments well, it foretells abundance of rainfall, less epidemic and a good harvest for the following year.

Invocation of *neypo* begins systematically from the plain of Assam, India to the hill of Goshing. It first begins from the *neypo* of Bangsha Bari in Assam (place where Khengpa still trades with Assamese), *neypo* Mathang Garipa (Bhutan Assam border) and gradually goes up the valleys and hills. Other *neypo* summoned for the invocation are Kangkarey Gangpa, Ridang Gangpa, Miser Gangpa, Pangbangpa, Jindala Gangpa, Jarigangpa, Chey Nyenpa, Odigangpa, Zhaling

Wayo, Wayo - Voices from the Past

Toepa, Budigangpa, Sangsa Ripa, Mamungpa, Siling Bipa, Sangtipa, Dongdong Bipa, Wanglingpa, Badizhing Harinagpo, Morang Logpa, Dinjang Ngawang Lama, Meywagangpa, Gorlampa, Bilamtipa, Bangkila Harapa, Aunglingpa, Dongdong Barinagpo, Natong Choeley Reypa, Babilapa, Chortenpongpa, Phuenchungpa, Lamtangpa, Gorjeyla, Gepgeplapa, Rikampa, Zangbipa, etc.



*Rice being fermented on triangular branches of Tsanchen Ama Ringlamo's tree
Invocation Rite of Tsenchen Ama Ringlamo*



Phod offering for Ama Tsanchen Ringlamo

For the preparation of Ringlamo's ritual, six Peyzangpa, who are young village boys assist the Bonpo in the preparation of the ritual site and alter at Lhabrang. Every krongpa and pampa appoints one peyzangpa. The Bonpo is later joined in the invocation of Ringlamo by the pamo and her assistants, namely *zomkhen* and *champon*, along with their chorus in the late evening at Lhabrang. After the Bonpo has summoned and offered *bangchang*, *changkyed* and *tshog* to Ama Ringlamo, people seek *lungten* (prophecy). Every individual introduces his or her *lo* (birth year sign) and offer prayers and *nyender* to Ama Ringlamo. Thereafter, Bonpo pours *arra* and *changkyed* on a folded square banana leaf and throws it at the altar on behalf of a person seeking divination. It is considered a good omen if it lands fully unfolded at one throw. However, if it remains folded or semi-folded, it is construed as a bad omen. In such case, it is thrown three times.

After the ceremony is over, Ama Ringlamo's *phod* (*changkyed*) and *tshog* are distributed to all subjects. It is believed that they will be blessed and protected from all kinds of misfortunes with the usual grandness. People are also apprehensive that poor harvest, sickness and other misfortunes will befall them in the coming year if they fail to propitiate Ama Ringlamo.

GADPUPA DANCE

In local dialect, Gadpupa means an old man. According to the text (see appendix) he was sent by Lha Jain (Lord Indra) to earth to bless people with longevity, prosperity and fertility. He originally came to Goshing from Ura, Bumthang as revealed in verse recitations of his encounter with Ura Nadmo (female host). Gadpupa dance is performed at the dawn of the fifteenth day of *Chodpa* inside the lhakhang. He offers prayers of longevity, wisdom, and wealth for his root lama, luminous persons and gracious parent, utters exhaustive mockery comments on the genital organs and human body, narrates about his travel from Ura to Goshing and his encounter with some local wrathful spirits and how he subdued them, and eventually tosses auspicious grains of rice. Gadmo (old woman) and Praolo (monkey boy) join him later in the courtyard. Thereafter, they go to *threypa barma*, *threypa cheywa* and finally to *threypa chungwa* to do the same theatrical performance. Gadpupa has a wooden phallus hung from the waist. The phallus, which is symbolic of many things, is explained exhaustively in Gadpupa's recital text.

དང་པོ་དང་པོ་གནས་ཚེ་ལས་བཟུངས་བའི་མཛེ་རྒྱན་རྒྱན་རྗེ་པོ་ལྟོ།

བཞུགས་ན་རྗེ་རྗེ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་ཁྱི་ལ་བཞུགས།

ཏང་བ་མེད་རུང་ལོང་ཤེས་བས།
དབའ་ཙམ་ཙན་ལ་བྱགས་འཚམ་ལོ།
མིག་ཏྲི་མེད་རུང་འཇུལ་ཤེས་བས།
འཁོར་རྩལ་ཙན་ལ་བྱགས་འཚམ་ལོ།
རྩྱ་ཏྲིག་མེད་རུང་ས་སྐྱགས་སྐྱག།
ང་རྩལ་ཙན་ལ་བྱགས་འཚམ་ལོ།”

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

The old trunk of the phallus, born long ago in Tsari,
Sits on the throne of two eggs.
Although it has no legs, it can rise
To the heroic one, I prostrate.
Although it has no eyes, it can penetrate
To the mobile one, I prostrate.
Although it has no bone, it is hard
To the ferocious one, I prostrate.

⁷ For more details, refer to Gadpupa's text in the annexure.



Gaudpupa performing his dance in the early morning in Lhakhang

Before they exit from every krongpa house, Gadpupa uncovers his wooden phallus and blesses every one. It is believed that the act exorcise evil spirits and blesses a sterile person with fertility. Besides, when Gadpupa performs *tashi melom* (auspicious prayers) in the end, the family members of krongpa, Gyalwagongma and the elderly people see *tagpa* (prediction) by placing individual cups filled with *arra*. Gadpupa recites auspicious prayers and solemnly tosses grains for the good will and good fortune. The cups filled with an odd number of grains are considered auspicious for its owner.

COSTUMES AND CHASTITY

A pamo is not hereditary. In absence of any written scripture, the recitations are passed on orally. A woman who was to succeed a pamo learns it by accompanying the incumbent one.

Pamo ties a strip of cloth on her forehead and adorns her hips with fangs of wild animals. Carrying a *drilbu* (bell) in her right hand and a bamboo fan in her left hand, a pamo makes poetic recitations and eventually enters into a trance state. The sound of the bell is believed to reach the deities and spirits who are being summoned for propitiation. The Zomkhan and champon carry drums and beat them to the rhythm of a chorus singing "*omo mani pedmi hung*". The Pamo and her assistants strictly avoid meat and sex from the first to the twentieth day of the tenth month.

Although Gadpupa does not refrain from meat and sex, he remains in meditation from the first to the eleventh day of the tenth month. During that time, he rehearses and performs *tercham* (treasure dance) at his house. The role of Gadpupa is also not hereditary. He is succeeded by his close relative or someone who is good at performance required by the role. Although there is a written text for Gadpupa, on most occasions, it is transmitted orally owing to illiteracy. He wears a white *gho* and carries a small bone trumpet and a bamboo staff.

The Bonpo is hereditary. He is distinguished by his white scarf and white stripe of cloth worn over his forehead. Like the pamo, a Bonpo has no written scripture. Therefore, his knowledge and narration are transmitted orally. During *Buedpa* and *Derchu* festivities, he remains in meditation and refrains from meat and sex for one week on each occasion. However, during *Chodpa*, he remains in meditation from the thirtieth day of the ninth month and refrains from meat and sex until the eighteenth day of the following month.

CONCLUSION

It is uncertain if *Chodpa* will continue in the same order and style hereafter. The invocation ritual and roles of Bonpo, Pamo and Gadpupa have already diminished over the last few years, since people are discouraged by functionaries from practicing. As a result, *Chodpa* is not conducted with the full ritual ceremony as it used to be in the past. The dance of Pedmalingpa, which is performed to accumulate *yang* (fortune and prosperity) at the end of *Chodpa* is observed briefly. Similarly, the custom of receiving Bonpo, pamo and Gadpupa at the *Kadam* (meeting spot) where Gyalwagongma and elderly village people announce oral instruction of rules for *Chodpa* is no longer pursued. The amount of offering of *arra* and *bangchang*, which form the main component of *Chodpa* is also reduced. The age-old practice of offering prayers and seeking prophecy from Ama Ringlamo is similarly under pressure to be discontinued.

The present culture of *Chodpa* is already marginalized, and it is likely to disappear once the popular mask dances are introduced⁸. Bonpo, pamo and Gadpupa will then lose their representations and significance in the community.

⁸ The civil servants from Goshing have already contributed towards purchase of masks and dress for mask dance.

ལས་མ་བབས་ཞལ་ལ། རྟོ་ལོ་ལམ་ལྷའི་བདག་པོར། རྟེན་རྒྱུད་གཅིག་ཡང་གཞིན་མ་ཚུངས་ལ། ར་
 རྟེན་ཚུགས་ལྷ་ལས་མ་བབས་ཚེ། རྒྱ་ཚོམ་ལམ་ལྷའི་བདག་པོར། ལྷ་བ་རྣམས་ཏུ་ཅིག་ཡང་འཐུང་
 མ་ཚུངས། ར་རྟེན་ཚུགས་ལྷ་ལས་མ་བབས་ཚེ། རྒྱ་ཚོམ་ལམ་ལྷའི་བདག་པོར། རྟོན་རྟོག་ལམ་རྒྱལ་
 མ་ཚུངས། རྟེན་ཚུགས་ལྷ་ལ་རྒྱ་ཚོམ་ལམ་ལྷའི་བདག་པོར། མཛེས་གཟིགས་ཡང་དབས་མ་ཚུངས།
 ལྷ་རྣམས་ལྷ་རྣམས་ལ། ལྷ་ལ་དབང་ལོ་ཆགས་པ་དེ། དཔོན་བཟང་རའི་མ་ལུམ་ཡིན། མདའ་ལ་ལུམ་མཚོ་
 གྱིམ་བའདེ། དཔོན་བཟང་རའི་མ་ལུ་རྒྱལ་མེན་ལ། འཕམ་ལམ་ལས་གོང་ཆར་ཟེམ་ཟེམ་བབ་མེད།
 པོ་བཟང་རའི་ལུས་ས་ཡིན། ལམ་རྟེམ་རྒྱལ། ལམ་རྟེམ་མར་དམར། ལམ་རྟེམ་དཀར་འཕྲུག་པའ། ལམ་
 རྟེམ་མཛེ་བདག། བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས་ཀྱིས་བརྩམ་ལོ་ལྷ། ཚོད་པག་མེད་ཀྱི་ཚོས་ལེ་ལེ། བདེ་བ་
 ག་ཤེགས་པ་བཀའ་ར་ར་ག། མ་ལི་རྩམ་རྣམས་དེ་དེ་དེ། ལོ་མ་ལི་བཟུང་རྩྱུ་རྩྱུ། ལྷ་དཀོར་ཅིགས་པའ་
 འཕམ་རྣམས་པ་ལོ། ལོ་རྟེམ་དག་པའི་མཚོས་ལོམ། ལྷི་མའི་དང་ལ་བདེ་ལེག། ལྷ་ཀྱུ་རོམ་རྩེ་སེ་
 ལེག། བདེ་ནས་དབང་ཤག་ལོ། དང་པོ་དང་པོ་གནས་ས་འི་ལས་ལྷུང་བའི་མཛེ་རྣམས་རྟོན་པོ་
 ལོ་ལ། ལྷགས་པོ་རྟོན་རོག་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་ལྷི་ལ་ལྷགས། རྟེན་པ་མེད་རྩུང་ལོངས་ཤེས་བས། དབང་
 ཚལ་ཚན་ལ་ལྷགས་འཚལ་ལོ། ལེག་རྟོག་མེད་རྩུང་འཚལ་ཤེས་བས། ལོངས་ཚལ་ཚན་ལུང་རྩྱུ་རྟོག་
 མེད་རྩུང་སྲག་གྲགས། ར་རྒྱལ་ཚན་ལུང་ཚོ་ལྷག་མེད་རྩུང་ལོམས་འགྱུར་འགྱུར། བར་རོས་ཚན་
 ལུང་ལུང་ལམས་རྒྱ་བ་དཀྱིག་ཤེས་བས། དེ་ཡིང་བར་རོས་ཚན་ལ་ལྷགས་འཚལ་ལོ། གང་གིས་རྟོན་
 བའི་རྒྱ་བ་ལེགས། རྩམ་གསུམ་སངས་རྒྱས་ག་ཤེགས་པའི་རྟེ། ཚོག་ཅིག་དམག་དཔོན་འབད་ཅི་
 རྩམ། ལྷགས་མེད་བརྩམས་པའི་ཤུད་ཅིག་རྩམ། ཚོག་ཅིག་ལོམ་རྟོག་དམ་ཚེ་རྩམ། ཐག་པ་ཏྲག་
 པས་ཤུད་ཅིག་རྩམ། ཚོག་ཅིག་ལོར་དཔོན་འབད་ཚེ་རྩམ། ལྷ་བ་འཐུང་བས་ཤུགས་ཅིག་རྩམ།

བཟང་ལ། སོལ་བལ་རྒྱལ་པོས་མེགས་ཤར་འདོན་བྱུང་ཡོ། སམ་དང་གོང་ཉམ་དང་འདིར་ཞུགས་
 ཞལ་འཛོམས་རྣམས། ཉེ་ཉེ་ མཛེད་ག། མཛེད་ག།འཁག་ཡིན་ཟས་ཀྲོས་དང་སྲོམ། དར་དང་གས་
 ཚེན་ལྷན་ཚེད་སྲོམ། རུ་དང་སོས་ལྷག་དམ་བལ་གཤི། ག་ག་བལ་ཉེས་ཀིས་དམ་ཀྲུ་དམ་ཀྲུ།
 རྗེ་དང་ཞགས་ཀྱང་བོ་བག་ག། བོ་བལ་ཉེས་ཀམ་བོ་ཀྲོ་ག། རྗེ་འི་རྗེས་བའི་རེག་ལ་ཡིན། ད་རུ་དམ་
 བལ་འི་དྲ་ཡང་བླ་མེ་ཚུ། དེ་འདྲའི་རྣམ་ཉེ་འབྱེད་བཞིག་གི་རྗེས་བའི་ཡིད། གཞགས་ཅིག་དང་
 ཉེས་རྗེས་ཀྱི་མ་རྗེས་སྦྱང། གཞགས་སུམ་དང་ཞིབ་རྗེས་ཀྱི་མ་རྗེས་སྦྱང། གཞགས་དང་རང་རྗེས་
 རྣམ་ཚུ་གཞོ། ༡ འཕེན་ཐིབས་སྤྱང་སྤྱང་དེའི་ཡིན་ན། འཕར་ས་འི་བམ་རེ་ནས། རྒྱ་གར་རྒྱ་དྲུ་
 མཛེད་ཤར་ར་ལ། བོད་རྒྱ་དྲུ་རྒྱ་ཤར་ཅུ་ཅུ། རྗེ་རྒྱ་དྲུ་མདག་ལྷེག་ལྷེག། མོ་རང་གི་བུ་མོ་གཡའ་
 སམ་དང་དགའ་སམ་གཉེས་ཀྱིས། ཅིས་བ་རྗེས་བའི་མཛོན་ཤེས་དེ་ཞུས་ནས། རྣམ་ཀྱི་དོད་
 ཚགས་གཡའ་མ་ར་བཟླ་དེ་རེད་མ་རྣམ་གསུམ་ལ་ཉེན་རེ་གང་ས་མེད་འོང། དེ་ནི་རྗེས་བའི་ཀྱིད་ཀྱིས་
 གཞིགས་བར་ཞུ་མོ་སོ། དེ་ནས་མ་རྒྱ་རྒྱལ་མེད་འཁོར་དུ་ཡོད་བའི། རྒྱ་ལི་མཚོ་ཉོག་རྣམས་རྒྱལ་
 དང་། བག་རྗེས་ལྷོག་ཉོ་རྣམས་རྒྱལ། རྒྱུ་ལ་གིས་བཟང་མེད་རྣམས་རྒྱལ། རུབ་ཀྱིས་བརྒྱད་ལུབ་
 རྣམས་རྒྱལ། རྗེ་དྲུ་ཐོག་མོར་རྣམས་རྒྱལ་བཙས་ལུ་ལ་རྒྱས་ལ། ལ་ལ་ལ་ལ་ལ། ལེན་གསུམ་རྒྱལ།
 ལ་གི་དགའ་ལྷན་ཉེན་མོན་བའ། སངས་རྒྱས་རྒྱལ་གཅིག་རྒྱ་ཡིས་དོན་ལ་འགོངས། དེ་ནས་
 མོ་རང་རྗེས་ཀྱིས་དང་འཁོར་ལུ་ཡོད། རྒྱ་མ་རྒྱ་རྒྱལ་མོས་རྗེ་མཛོད་བའི་སེམས་ཅན་བམོ་རྣམས་
 ལ་ལན་བའི་ཀྱིད་དུ་མཛོཾས་གསུང་དུ་གསོལ། ཞེས་མེན་གསུམ་ཀྱིས་བར་དུ་གསོལ་བ་དབག་དུ་
 བཏབ་བའོ། འཁོར་ཤོག་ཚེན་ཤོ་རྒྱུད་གི་ཚོགས་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་རྗེ་ཚོས་དེ་ཉམས་སུ་བྱངས་ནས་
 ཡོད་བའི་ཚོ། གཡའ་མ་ར་བཟླ་འཛོ། ཉེ་ ད་མཇུལ་ལུལ་བལ་ཤོགས་གསུང་ནས། མ་རྒྱ་རྒྱལ་

དབང་ལུག་ཚེན་པོ་རྣམས་པའི་རྣམ་དེ་ཡིན་ལོ། མཛོ་གཞུགས་གཡའ་མར་ཇི་ཡང་ས་བའི་ཚོ། བ་རྩ་
 རྒྱལ་མོ་འཆི་བའི་རྣོ་ག་ཡ་ཐུག། དེ་ཡི་ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་མཛོ་ཚོས་མ་གསུང་ན། བ་རྩ་རྒྱལ་མོ་བདག་གི་
 འཆི་བར་འབྱུང། ཞེས་མ་རྩ་རྒྱལ་མོས་ཀྱང་བདད། ཡང་རྒྱལ་བ་ལྷོ་ལྷོས་ཀྱི་དགོངས་བ་ལ། འཆི་
 བར་ཐུགས་ན་སྒྲིང་ཡང་ཇི་ས་ཞིང། རྒྱལ་བ་ལྷོ་ལྷོས་ཀྱི་གསུང་བ་ལ། བ་རྩ་རྒྱལ་མོ་ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་བསམ་
 རྣོགས་བར་བྱོ། ད་མཇུག་ལུག་བའལ་ཤོགས་གསུང་ནས། ཚོས་མེས་མེད་པའི་རྣོ་ག་ཡར་པམ།
 རྒྱང་ཇི་མེད་པའི་རྣམས་མ་རྣོ་ག་ཡར་མེད། ལྷོ་བ་ལྷོ་བས་མེད་པའི་རྒྱང་ཤོན་རྣམས་པོས་པར། ཐུགས་
 རྣོ་རྒྱང་པའི་བྱུང་རང་པམ། དབང་བའལ་མེད་པའི་དྲག་དང་ལྷོ་ག་ལུག་པམ། ཨ་ལ་ལ། རྣོ་བ་ཚོ་མེད་
 པའི་བྱང་བྱང་པམ། སོལ་རྣོ་བ་པའི་རྣམས་ཤིག་ཐམས་པམ། ཡང་རྣོ་བ་དམར་ཉི་ལྷོ་ག་ལྱང་མེད་པ་
 རྣོ་མས་པའི་མས། འཛོ་མ་བར་ཚེན་བ་ལྷོ་མོ་བ་རྣུ་གས། རང་རྒྱལ་ཚེན་བ་ལྷོ་མོ་ཀྱུ་བ་བཟང་གས།
 སྤི་ཡི་བ་ལྱང་ས་མེན་རྣོ་གས་གས། བ་ལྷོ་མོ་ར་ཡང་ས་རྣོ་མ་གས། སེམས་བྱི་འི་མེད་བ་དེ་ལྷོ་རྒྱང་
 སངས་རྒྱལ་རྣོ་མས་པམ་གས། མཐོ་བའ་དམེར་པའ་ལྷོ་རྒྱང་ཡི་བ་ཚེ་ཅི་ག་ཐམ། རྣམ་རྣོ་ག་མེད་པ་
 སངས་རྒྱལ་བ་རྣོ་མ་པམའ་ཚོས། འབྲེལ་བ་མེད་པ་རྣམས་བྱང་བ་རྒྱལ་པོས་ཡིན། ཤེས་རབ་ཚེན་བ་
 ལྷོ་རྒྱང་རང་བོ་ཤོན་གས། རྣོ་མས་པའ་མེད་པའི་རྣོ་མ་ཚེན་མེན་ལྱོད་ཡིན། རྣོ་མ་ལྷོ་ས་ལྷོ་མ་ལྷོ་མ།
 ཞགས་ལྷོ་ད་རྣོ་མ་ལྷོ་ས་མ་ཞགས། ཤོན་རྣམས་ལོ་རྒྱལ་ཡི་བ་རྣོ་བ་ཤོན། ཚོ་ཅི་ག་ལྷོ་ས་ཅི་ག་ད་
 འཛོ་མས་པའི་ལྱོ་མས་ཚོང་ས་རྣམས། ཞེས་ལྷོ་བྱང་ས་མ་ཚེས་ཚེས། རོ་ལྷོ་ལུགས་རྒྱལ་མ་རྒྱང་
 ཚིག། གས་ལྷོ་དམ་ཚོགས་མ་རྣོ་ས་ཚིག། ལྷོ་མ་ལྱང་གའོ་ག་དཔལ་ལྱི་ཡི་ཤོ་རྣོ་ས་པར་ཤོག། རྣོ་
 བ་ལོ་པོ་རྣོ་རྣོ། དཔོན་བ་པའི་དྲུག་རྒྱལ་ལུག་རྒྱལ་མ་རྒྱང་ལྷོ་མ། མེད་པའི་དྲུག་རྒྱལ་ལུག་རྒྱལ་
 བ་རྒྱང་ལྷོ་མ། ཡང་རྣོ་ས་རྣོ་ལོ་བྱང་པར། དམར་རྣོ་བ་དྲུག་ལྷོ་བྱང་པར། ཨ་རོ་ འབ་ལྷོ་ཅི་ག་

Wayo, Wayo - Voices from the Past

བསྐྱོད་ཏེ་བ་དམེད་བཟབས། བཤེས་མོ་ཐགས་པ་ལེར་ཏེ། བའབ་ལ་དམར་བོ་དམྱོང་མེད་དེ།
བཤྱིད་མར་ཟབ་བའི་རྟུག་ལྷས། རྟུད་བོ་ཨེར་ཀའ་ཤོག་ཤེས། རྗེག་ལིང་མཚོང་ས་བོན་ལེར་
བཤེས། ལྷ་མཚོང་བོན་ལེར་ཤེས། རྟུ་མོན་རྟུ་བ་དམ་ཤེས། བྱ་ལར་བའི་བྱ་མོན་རྟུ་བཟུ་
བརྗོལ་སྐྱོང་བརྗོལ་ས།

སངས་རྒྱལ་བརྟུན་བདར་བའི་ཕྱིར། ཏུ་ཤྱི་བཟུག་པ་གཞི་བའི་ཕྱིར། བརྗོལ་མེ་ནས་ཕྱག་ནས་
ཞི་བདར། བཟུབས་བའབ་བར་གཟུ་རྟུགས་མེད་དེ། སངས་རྒྱལ་བརྟུན་བདར་བའི་རྟུག་ཡིན་
བས། ཚེས་གོས་གར་གི་བབད་མེད་དེ། ས་ཞི་རྟུ་ལ་ཕྱིན་ཕྱགས་བས་རྟུག་ཡིན་བས། དེན་དབྱ
གས་ལ་དེད་མ་དེད་གཏང་མེད་དེ། དཔུས་དང་བྱ་མོ་གུ་བའི་རྟུག་ཡིན་བས། ལྷ་བ་བརྟུ་བའི་རྟུ་
བཟང་ན། ད་མི་མིག་མི་རས་གཏེ་རར་རྟུག། ཨ་རའི་རར་རྟུ་རྟུ་རར་བཟུག་རྣམ་བཟངས། ཤོར་
ལྱིར་དུ་ལྱུ་བ། ས་བསྐྱིན་ལྷ་བགོགས་རྣམས། བརྗོལ་མེ་ནད་ཞི་བཟུར་ནས། ཏུ་ཤྱི་བཟུགས་གཞི་
བ། མཚོན་ཤིས་རྒྱལ་པ་ཉམས་པ་བཟུར། ཡང་ཡུལ་དགོང་བརྟུད་བདར། དང་ལྷན་ནས་ལོ་
ཕྱག་རྟུག་རྟུ་ལེགས་པ་དང་། ཚར་རྟུ་རྟུ་སྐྱུ་བབབ་ན། བཀྲ་ཤེས་པ་དང་། ལོངས་སྐྱོད་ལྷན་
སྐྱམ་ཚོགས་ན། བདེ་སྐྱིད་དཔལ་ལ་ལོངས་སྐྱོད་བར་བཟུར། ཤེགས་པ་དབའི་དམ་པ་འདི། མ་
རྟུ་རྒྱལ་མོ་སངས་རྒྱལ་བ་དམ་པ་ལོ། ལྷ་རྟུ་ལོ། ཡངས་སང་ཚམོ་ལ། ལྷ་ཤོང་ན་པ།

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHENDEBJI VILLAGE AND LHABON CELEBRATION¹

SONAM KINGA **

Chendebji is a well-known valley in central Bhutan. It is known particularly for the large 19th century *choeten* (stupa) located below the highway five kilometers from Chendebji village. Built by Lam Oensey Tshering Wangchuk, it is modeled after the Bodhnath stupa in Kathmandu, Nepal. Also associated with the Chendebji valley is the living legend of Nyala Dum, a ferocious demon whose diabolic exploits are recounted both orally and in folk literature. The name of the valley is derived from Chendebji village, which is a very old settlement. It is mentioned in the hagiography of the 15th century saint Drukpa Kuenley. He was traveling from western Bhutan to the east. After reaching the Pelela Pass, he declined to travel further saying he would not visit places where 'three *bji* meet'. These places are the three villages of Rukubji, Chendebji and Tangsibji that are located in the area. Chendebji village then, was however, located at a different site. The present village was the course of a stream. A heavy flood long ago washed down many boulders which litter the landscape of the village today. The stream, Khebachu gradually changed course. Chendebji village sprung on the

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former course. Khebachu flows on its right side. Many villagers do not seem to know about this flood. Some even deny that there was such a flood. However, Khebachu seems to flood once in a while. Phurpa Wangdi, 63 yrs. old remembers experiencing a flood in 1983. Khebachu is formed by two streams, each flowing below the base of two mountains, Semchekam and Lamsala. A deep course upstream often builds and burst natural barriers causing heavy flood downstream. The sources of each stream in these mountains are called Kemlagang and Zhoutugsa. There are plenty of *tsendug* (acotinum) plants growing in the watershed of these streams. Hence, taking a hot stone bath downstream is believed to have curative effects.

Chendebji (Cenden-bji) means the 'Valley of Cypress'. 'Chenden' or 'Tsenden' means cypress, and 'bji' ground or valley. A lofty cypress tree grows below the village beside the road that approaches it. This tree is less than 100 years old. Ap Wangchu Norbu, 84 years old remembers that there stood in his childhood days a much larger tree. It had a hollow trunk. Beneath it, seven people could lie down to sleep. The village is located at the confluence of two streams: Khebachu (phochu or male stream) and Maleychhu (mochu or female stream). Hence the description of village in the following verse:

མོ་ལྷ་གཡམ་བསྐོར་རྒྱབ་ས།

མོ་ལྷ་གཡོན་བསྐོར་རྒྱབ་ས།

ཕྱོད་རྩོད་གསེར་གྱི་པད་ཐང་།

ཕྱོད་རྩོད་དུལ་གྱི་གཞོང་མ།

A Brief History of Chendebji Village and Lhabon Celebration

བར་ལུ་རྒྱལ་པོའི་ཕྱོགས་།

ཕྱི་ཕྱོད་རྒྱལ་བསྐོར་ས།

འམས་ཕྱོད་མཐོང་བྱལ་ལྷལ་ས།

ཅོན་དན་གཞུང་རྒྱུ་ས།

Where *phochu* flows on the right
Where *mochu* flows on the left
The upper village is a plain, like a golden lotus
The lower village, like a silver bowl
In the middle, the palace of a lord-deity
Circled by oaks like a fence
Where peach trees are offered as mandala
Where cypress trees are spread like canopies

It is believed that a *dupthob* called Agay Tenp (Tenpa?) thought that the people in his village should spread out from the base of a cypress and multiply like its seeds. He looked for two cypress trees, a male and a female, and planted them on a 'bji' ground with the prayer that people should flourish in his village. By the time the two trees grew large, the village also became a large settlement. However, it had no local *kasung* (deity entrusted with the protection (*sung*) of Dharma/Command (*ka*)). It was then that Yab Tenpi Nima, father of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594 -1650) visited the village. Agay Tenp (Tenpa) welcomed Yab Tenpi Nyima in his house and paid obeisance making many offerings. Agay Tenp is believed to be an incarnation of Jampelyang, who composed the dances performed during the annual Lhabon festival. Yap Tenpi Nyima subdued local devil and naga. He installed the Gyelp (ruling deity) of Samye, Tibet as the *kasung* of Chendebji. A shrine, *goenkhang* was also built for him.

Another source says that Yab Tenpi Nyima commanded the local deity Gyelp Dungle Karmo also known as Kuntu Zangpo to safeguard the village.

Oral sources mention that there were about one hundred households that dotted the surrounding hills. A *dungpa* (administrator of a sub-district) and a *ney* (host, usually of high officials) administered these households. The ruins of *dungpa's* house can be seen on a hill opposite the village. Today, Chendebji constitutes of twenty-two households. Almost every household has a name though a few households share similar names. They are Nagtshang, Togto, Pogtoteng (two households), Drongtey, Ruleynang (two households), Zaga, Phakhap (two households), Geypai Tsawa (two households), Jidrong (three households), Lhagang Tsawa (four households), Drongmey (two households) and Tsigpuding. They have been named according to their location in the village mostly in relation to the Nagtshang, which is centrally located.

Local history revolves around the Nagtshang, which stands out prominently owing to its larger size, structure and an eminent family who lived in it. It is said that Yab Tenpi Nyima shot arrows from an unidentified place in Punakha. The arrows landed at the houses of Bemji Choeji, Taktse Choeji and Chendebji Nagtshang in Trongsa, and at Ula Sangm in Wangdue Phodrang. He is said to have visited each of these places. On arrival at Chendebji, Tshewang Tashi, owner of the Nagtshang welcomed Yab Tenpi Nyima who gave him a new name, Lamchung. It is not known whether this Tshewang Tashi is same as Agay Tenp since both of them are remembered as ones who first welcomed Yab Tenpi Nyima. The Nagtshang still possesses the golden Kadam

Choeten (measuring approximately about 7 inches), a *phurba* (a three-sided dagger used by exocists and lama in ceremonies and rituals), a conch, a volume of Gyatongpa (an abridged scripture containing 8000 s'loka) whose first folio is written in gold, a small lead dog (whose back has holes to hold incense sticks) and some other relics which Yab Tenpi Nyima gave to Tshewang Tashi. He also provided the *zung* (mystic charm woven into printed mantra, statues etc) for the *choeten* located below the village *lhakhang*. While these relics are private property, the *dzongkhag* administration ensures their safety. Some of the relics are locked in a safe which is opened on the first day of every eleventh month by the *dzongkhag* administration. A prayer ceremony called the Lamai Tsham is also performed on that day.

When the mortal remains of the late King His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuk (reign: 1952-72) were cremated in Kurjey, Bumthang, many monks from Punakha Dratshang attended it. On their way to Punakha after the cremation, they spent a night at the Chandebji Nagtshang. Although the Nagtshang owner did not know, the lead dog was stolen. Three months later, the image of the dog was returned by a *zamsungp* (bride-guard) who said that it was passed on to him by a monk. The image was wrapped in a daphne paper containing a few grains of rice.

Besides their religious and historical significance, the relics are important to the village in contemporary farming context. Whenever hailstorm of strong winds tend to damage crops, the golden *choeten* is kept on the window of Nagtshang, and the conch blown. Then, the hailstorm and wind always stops. Similarly, when there is no rainfall, a person wearing a blue *gho* would climb up to the roof of Nagtshang to read the

Gyatongpa. Lamchung's son Gomchen Gyeltshen is reportedly one of the first students of Lama Togden Shacha Sheri. On his return from a visit to Tibet, he brought with him, *karmi jamchhe* (hundred butter lights) which are precious family possession. Some sixty to seventy years ago, the *Tsipi Lopen* (master of astrology) of Trongsa Dratshang used to visit the Nagtshang to offer *tshog* and *lhadar* to the local deity. This tradition has stopped. It was around that time that the Nagtshang was renovated and assumed its present shape.

His Majesty Ugyen Wangchuck (r. 1907-1926) and His Majesty Jigme Wangchuck (reign: 1926-1952) would always alight from their mounts in the vicinity of the Nagtshang while traveling. While they may not necessarily visit the Nagtshang in person, they would always send a representative with offerings for the deity. Sometimes, they would camp in the small park where the Chendebji Community School has been built. The park was called Maleytham. At other times, they would send a monk or a *garto* (retainer) to make offerings a day before their journey.

Another household of significance to the village is the Drongmey. The *gup* of Chendebji came from this household. Gup Pangla became well-known during the time of Zhabdrung. The villagers were able to offer, through him to the Zhabdrung in Punakha, 20 *bog* of rice as regular offering. (1 *bog* equals 20 *dey*). As a token for such offering, the *gup* was entitled to a high seat (*denthob*) in Punakha Dzong, a symbol of honour bestowed on him and the village. It is said that his name is recorded in the Chayig Chhenmo (Supreme Laws) of Zhabdrung, carved on slates. These slates are displayed in the *dzongchung* in front of Punakha Dzong. In recognition of his offerings, the Zhabdrung gave Gup Pangla an image of

himself which he had made. This image is a family treasure. Incidentally, the root of the cypress tree from which the village derives its name is said to emerge from the ground floor of this house although the tree grows more than 70 metres down the house.

Another public position of significance in the local history of Chendebji is its *chipon*, village herald. He is mentioned in a 19th century ballad. In it, he gives direction to the militia led by Pemi Tshewang Tashi who were on their way to a battle at Trongsa. Unlike other *chipon*, that of Chendebji was equal in rank to a *Nyikem* (a high official who has been awarded red scarf by the king) especially during the reign of His Majesty Jigme Wangchuck. Every year, he had to call on the king once, and submit reports of labour contributions, collections of cereals and diary products from his locality. Among his other responsibilities, the major one was to screen and regulate the movements of people from western Bhutan to Kuenga Rabten, Trongsa and Wangdichholing, Bumthang, the king's summer and winter palaces respectively. Many people, including high officials often with caravan of mules and horses travelled to call on the King. If the palace passed instructions to refuse passage, the *chipon* had to send them away. However, some would insist that they be given permission to proceed since they had come a long way carrying gifts for the king. If such a person succeeds in reaching the palace, the *chipon* would be summoned and lashed. Afterwards, he would manhandle the guest even if he were a powerful chieftain, and send him away by forcibly retaining his goods and horses. In order to control human traffic, the *chipon* and people of Chendebji would more than often remove the bridge, Maleyzam, below the village. The bridge used to be cut off during times of conflict restricting communication.

The Chendebji *chipon* is changed every year on the 5th day of the 3rd month. Every household takes turn to serve as *chipon*. In the ceremony of appointing the new *chipon*, a sheep used to be sacrificed. Today, every household contributes three eggs after the tradition of sheep-sacrifice was abolished. The outgoing *chipon* hands over a *sang* (measure, scale), and the *thram* (land register) of Chendebji to the new *chipon*. The *sang* has the royal seal of His Majesty Jigme Wangchuck affixed at the end of the measuring rod, and at the base of the weight. This seal was stamped in order to ensure that the *chipon* do not use a *sang* of higher weight and value while collecting cereal and dairy products from the people.

Togto is another household that enjoys a certain degree of pre-eminence in the village. Nine lamas have consecutively come from that household. Each of them has served as the Lama of Wangdue Gonpa under Sephu Gewog, Wangdue Phodrang. The names of some of them are Asurasu, Tshewang Gyatsho, Gyem Dorji, Phuntsho, Penjor, and the incumbent one, Lam Jigme Yoezer. It is said that a certain Deb Tsangpa of Tibet arrived in the village seeking military support. It is not known if this incidence is true or against whom and when the support was sought although the mainstream Bhutanese history recounts how Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal fled to Bhutan in 1616 after his deepening rift with Deb Tshangpa. The Deb also launched military campaigns against the Zhabdrung after his arrival in Bhutan. Local history speaks of the Deb persecuting Buddhist practitioners. The lama of the Nagtshang escaped persecution by reporting to him that he has been stuck in the village without finding any recruits. The lama of Togto household escaped by saying that he is a *Bon* practitioner and became a *phajo*, chief Bon practitioner. Hence,

the *phajo* from this household leads the celebration of the Lha Bon festival every year during the tenth month. The first *phajo* was called Phajo Namgay who is believed to have miraculously extracted a water source above the village. This water source is called Phajo Namgay Drubchu. The water is drained through a pipe into the Drongtöe household. The summer residence of Togto Lama was in Tangjey in Phobjikha valley. He resided in Chendebji in winter. A descendent of the lama now resides permanently in Tangjey.

Another unique feature of the village is the small stupa-like monument found in front of every household. These monuments are shrines dedicated to the nagas. A special ritual and festival is observed on the tenth day of the second month every year to honour the nagas. The monuments are then decorated with flowers accompanied by offering of milk.

Although the people of Chendebji are Buddhist, a strong tradition of *Bon* as reflected in the annual Lhabon celebration prevailed in the village. The *Bon* culture in fact pervades communities living immediately east of Pelela such as in Longtey, Longmey, Rukubji and Tangsibji. Communities especially of Longtey and Longmey were home to many *pawo*, shamans who were staunch *Bon* practitioners. Oral sources speak of how the conscience of a dead *pawo* immediately entered a living person as fast as a day after the *pawo's* death. The number of *pawo* in these communities had declined drastically. A distinct aspect of the *Bon* tradition was the prevalence of animal sacrifices that were integral to certain rituals and festivals. Live sacrifices of roosters, pig and sheep at different times of the year were done away with only about three years ago in Chendebji, and about fifteen years earlier in Rukubji. These sacrifices

were compulsions of tradition although many people found them contrary to their Buddhist practices. They devised a system of undertaking sacrificial killing on rotational basis among all the households. The abandonment of animal sacrifices have however, not affected the festivity and general proceedings of the Lha Bon.

LHA BON FESTIVAL

The annual Lha Bon is celebrated between the 1st and 25th day of the tenth month. The dates may however, be changed if there has been a death in the village then. Village *chupen* consult *tsip*, astrologer to identify exact date. They then summon a meeting of the village to inform the dates and discuss other issues related to the festival.

The festival centres on the participation of two hosts, known as *tsawa* or *darcho*. Hosts for the succeeding year are selected every year during the Lha Bon. *Atsara* or clowns who are part of the religious dance performed on the 2nd day help identify the host. Everyone in the village participate in making a bamboo hut and an enclosure known as *lhachim* days before the Lha Bon. Many events and proceeding of the festival take place in and around the *lhachim*. Household representative, especially women assemble by noon of the first day at the *lhachim*. They engage in spinning wool and thread works which are used in making a tall wooden structure called *dungse*. Three *dungse* are made. Each *dungse* has a wooden phallus fixed on it, and each one requires wool of approximately one sheep. Preparation of the *dungse* is completed by 4 p.m.

In the evening, all men gather in front of the lhakhang located above the village. They would wear woolen *charkap* or *kabney*. They also take within them a palang (palang chidrap) of bangchang. The three *dungse* are then hoisted in front of the lhakhang. After that everyone prostrates. An offering of *bangchang* is made to Lhai Wangpo Gyelchen. They start to drink while some elder community members address the gathering. This address is called Tam. They ask everyone to make the best of the festival avoiding any remarks or behavior that would disrupt the processing of the Lha Bon and affect it's festivity. People are asked not to drink in excess, avoid quarrels, dress clean and ensure that the guests are treated well. It is believed that any conflicts during the festival would displease the gods. This is reflected in the saying. Everyone then sings a song with the refrain and come down to the lhachim. By 6.00 p.m, two *phajo*, who lead the religious ceremony would have already prepared the *torma*. About seven people who are responsible for the festival proceeding would have stayed back in the lhachim to collect chifey (flour) from women who are not attending the meeting at the lhakhang. Women bring chifey and dey of grain known as *torten* to be spread out below the *torma*. As the grain are spread out, people exclaim. Grains are spread out on a large bamboo mat called *redey*. Once this is over, the *lebje*y would bring bangchang for everyone to drink. Grains for this drink are collected from each household and fermented days ahead of the Lha Bon. Then people go visiting every house singing and drinking. Meanwhile, dancers for the following day to their final rehearsal nearby. There are a total of 17 households in the village. Men would visit all the households except of the two *tsawa*. Singing and drinking are over by 7 a.m the following morning when everyone disperses home. When men go singing and drinking, children below 13 years old also

visit houses reciting a verse called *lolay*. They would take along a small bag. In each house they visit, they are given some *zaw* (sizzled and parched rice) and served tea.

But 9 a.m everyone gathers at the lhachim. Two wooden phallus called *sungp* are made and placed among the *torma* in the lhachim during the early hours of the 2nd day. These phalluses are later hung on the edge of the lhachim's roof in a special ceremony. It is a tradition that the dancers always come out from the *Nagtshang*. Before coming out, they would prostrate in the shrine of the *Nagtshang* where all the relics are kept. Dancers are unique to the village, and known as *chemji lhabon chham*. Persons responsible for the festival offer marching in front of the lhachim. The dance then begins.

Sometimes during the day, all the dancers are offered *dar* by the people. *Dar* constitutes of scarves and money. By 4.00 p m, dancers split into two groups and go to the house of each *tsawa*. There, they dance to a special verse called *yebem*. Only two persons in the village know *yebem*. They also go to each of the *tsawa's* house. Recitation takes place till midnight. During specific interval of recitation, people sing and dance. On the following morning, people visit each *tsawa's* house to drink what is called the *changlhag*. Hosts would prepare about three *dey* of *bangchang*. Visitors would also take along a pot of *bangchang* each called *nagozam*. The dancers then host a lunch for the community called *darlog*. *Lha Bon* ends with singing and dancing throughout the day. Two days of archery games follow the *Lha Bon* celebration.

KHARAM - THE CATTLE FESTIVAL

KARMA GALAY*

INTRODUCTION

Gopilal Acharya's recent article, "Of Phallus: an arcane symbol," is one of the first anthropological explanations of the significance of the phallus in Bhutanese society. The article describes different ceremonies and other social occasions where the phallus is used as a core symbol of celebration. In this article, I will provide a short account of the origin of one such occasion. Apart from a mere description of the festival, I will provide some supplementary findings to Gopilal's article.

Kharam literally means curse. *Bonpos* and astrologers normally consider that there are three forms of Kharam: those that relate to one's land (*zhing gi kharam*), to one's health (*miyi kharam*), and to one's property or cattle (*nor gi kharam*). The Kharam that I will discuss in this article concerns the one that is associated with cattle. Although Kharam means curse, the festival that is observed to guard off the curse has also come to be known by the same term.

ORIGIN

Bonpos believe that in ancient times there lived a dump brother and sister. One day they committed incest and the sister soon became pregnant. On the birth of child, the brother and sister came to be known as *Yab Kugpo* and *Yum Kugmo*,

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respectively. The birth of this child was considered a worst defilement to the community to which they belonged. People were worried that a bad curse would befall them, and a great deal of confusion followed the birth of the child. In the middle of this confusion, a rooster from Tang in Bumthang (*Bumthang Tangi Japo*) appeared and said that it would protect the community from the curse. It said that it would use its beak to peck or bite the curse away, its wings to wipe it away and its claws to scratch it away. The community was told not to worry about the curse. The expression “Bumthang Tangi Japo,” “the rooster of Tang,” would lead one to think that the place where this incident occurred must be Tang. However, interviewees were not aware of a specific place where this incident might have occurred.

Bonpos believe that the concept of Kharam emerged from the events that followed the birth of a child out of incest between the siblings. While the concept originated from an unacceptable social norm of incest and was considered bad, the concept was later used to refer to other bad things or curses. Over the years, kharam typically came to be associated with three broad things of land, health and cattle. Performance or observation of Kharam as a ritual or festival to ward off curses is a custom that came into existence as an extension of what the rooster of Tang did to prevent the society from curses.

CELEBRATION

Kharam is celebrated on the 29th day of the 9th month of the Bhutanese calendar in the villages of Tsamang, Thridangbi,

Banjar, Ganglapong and Saleng¹. The dates of the celebration are important. Nine is a significant number here. Buddhist astrology considers the 29th day as an auspicious occasion for performing rituals in honor of *Goembo* and *Lhamo*. It is because of the auspiciousness of the date that the festival of Kharam is celebrated on the 29th day. The choice of the ninth month may be attributed to significance of number nine in both Buddhist and Bonpo beliefs: nine realms is an important concept in Buddhist cosmology and Bonpos believe that the universe consists of nine layers (*Sarimpa Dgu*).

By the early part of the ninth month, preparations are underway for the celebration of the festival. People at home brew *ara*, pound rice, and prepare *zaw*; the herders start stocking cheese and butter. Herders normally start stocking milk about five days before the festival, but if the number of milking cows is small, they start stocking milk as early as one week before the festival. On the 28th day of the month, along with a pony or two, loaded with rice, *ara* and vegetables, people leave for the place where the cattle is being kept at that particular part of the year. This is locally called *nor brangsa* and could be anywhere between a half a day to full day's journey from the village. They carry gifts such as special *ara* colored red with *tsendhen marmo*, ripe bananas, *zaw*, eggs, etc. for the herders. Often a *tsip* or a *gomchen* also accompanies them. When they reach the *brangsa*, the cow herders welcome them with butter tea and buttermilk. Special gifts are then given to the herders. That evening, there is no celebration and the people normally spend time discussing different topics, ranging from the number of milking cows that they have to

¹ I am not aware of but it is possible that this festival is celebrated elsewhere too.

agricultural activities back in the village. Some households or herders do not have any milking cows at that particular time of the year, but they join the other households who have milking cows for the celebration. It is very common to see a group of three or four households celebrating this festival together.

As dawn breaks, the *tsip* performs the *lhapsang* (cleansing ceremony), and during the day, he performs rituals such as *Jomo* and *Dhangling*, and offerings are made to local deities (*tsen*) such as Gogpolha, Nanaphu, Zarkula and Golong Draktsen. In the meantime, preparations begin for the main event of the celebration, which takes place in the evening. A group of three or four men go to forest to construct a *Kharamshing*, a V-shaped wooden structure made out of a plant locally known as *Chokashing*. The name *Kharamshing* is derived from a large wooden phallus placed at the base of the V-shaped structure. Bonpos believe that the use of the phallus as a symbol to ward off curses and evil spirits may be because the very concept of *Kharam* emerged out of incest. Tips of two arms of the V-shaped structure are curved into pointed shapes, something similar to the tips of daggers. A bundle of nine wooden and bamboo sticks are attached to these arms. The wooden sticks are half painted black and half white, representing evil and good, respectively. The bamboo sticks are not painted and they are used later as an instrument to wipe and force out curse out of the locality. Wiping the V-shaped structure with these bamboo sticks mimics this.

About 4:30 in the afternoon, the cattle return to the shed from the nearby pastures. Then the calves are tethered. By the time it is dark, the food is ready, but before it is served the Bonpo recites the *kharam* (*kharam choed*). This recitation is normally

performed on a spot at the edge of the *badep* (an area where cattle are tethered in the evening). A few men and women accompany the Bonpo to the place for the recitation of the kharam. The kharamshing, with top of the phallus pointing towards the sky, is placed on the ground. A fire is prepared and incenses burned. Three small stones are placed in front of the Bonpo. Offerings (*tshogs*), consisting of butter, cheese, milk and rice, are made to the local deities. A few decades ago, a rooster's head was also used as one of the offerings. This was done to represent the presence of the rooster of Tang in the celebration, but a Tibetan Lama stopped this practice of sacrifice of a rooster when he visited the village. Today the feathers of a rooster are used as substitute for the head to symbolize the presence of the rooster of Tang. Each deity is invited by name to come and partake of the offerings that are being made. The Bonpo thanks the deities for the protection that they provide for the health and safety of the cows, and requests similar protection in the future.

The Bonpo then starts his recitation, which describes the journey that the mythical rooster of Tang made to drive away the curse that arose due to the act of incest. The Bonpo says, 'having completed a cycle of 12 months consisting of 350 days (a year is considered to be 350 days), we have come back to you, the rooster of Tang, to seek your help to drive away the curse from us.' The journey, in the Bonpo's narration, starts at the cowshed and follows the ancient trade route between Zhongar and Samdrupjongkhar. Names of all prominent places along these places are mentioned as the successive destinations for the rooster. A typical recitation of the Bonpo reads as follows in the local dialect (*choe cha nga cha*).

Pho-pho pho, Buthang Tangi Japo, pho-pho pho

Wayo, Wayo - Voices from the Past

Odhay kay kay pha phopi zena, Lingmithang ngey photey,
Pho-pho-pho
Khamchu kiney choptey khershi, shogpa kiney japtey khershi,
kangpa kini bradhey khershi,
Pho-pho-pho
Legna legpi kharam, zogna zogpi kharam, cha nyam chagtey
khershi,
Pho-pho-pho

You, the rooster of Tang,
From here, you will go to Lingmithang
As you continue your journey, peck or bite the curses hard with
your beak,
Wipe them away with your wings,
Scratch them over with your feet, and
Take away with you, the curses emanating from both bad and
good things.

It is believed that if someone does a good deed and if others talk about it excessively, a curse will befall the doer of good, thus the reference to “good thing” in the previous verse. This verse is repeated for every major destination on the journey, from Lingmithang to Kurizampa, Gyalpozhing to Kengkhar to Pemagatshel, to Kothri (now Deothang). The journey ends when the rooster reaches a road known as *Lam* (road) *Ali Jadram* at a place called *Bema Yurung*.

When the rooster reaches this place, the Bonpo recites: “*nem, nem, nem*”. *Nem* means “subdue”, and by saying it the Bonpo encourages the rooster to subdue or drive away the curses. As he repeats this word, he touches the three small stones that are placed in front of him. These represent three tall mountains. His touching them signifies that he is standing on top of these mountains and is seeing the rooster arrive at the plains of Bema Yurung. This ends the Bonpo’s recitation. The

Kharamshing is then placed at a junction of roads or a place where many people can see it, in the belief that the more people see it, the more it will guard against the curses. Bonpo and other people present at the recitation drink a round of *ara* and return to the cow shed, where rest of the participants are waiting.

Dinner is served. The main feature of the dinner is a cylindrical shaped lump of butter and curd served to each individual (about a liter per person). Before the lump of butter is placed on the food, the server will touch it to the forehead of each individual. When he does this, the individual is expected to produce a sound mimicking the bellow of a calf or cow. This is believed to symbolize a healthy cattle population for the year. After dinner, boiled/heated *ara* is served and dances follow. As the night progresses and the dances continue, more and more rounds *ara* are served.

The following day, the 30th, the people return to their homes. An early lunch is cooked and the main feature on this day is boiled milk. The whole day's milk is boiled with chilies and other spices and served with food. After this early lunch, as people prepare to go home, the herders organize the *chel chang* (a drinking ceremony to see off guests) at some spots about hundred meters or so from the cowshed. Herders serve drinks and in return the people leaving for home give some cash as a token of *soelra*. Words of farewell are exchanged. The festival is over and the curses are driven away until the next year.

CONCLUSION

I hope that this descriptive article documenting the festival will encourage other researchers to carry out similar studies.

Apart from mere description, I have attempted to establish a linkage between the origin of Kharam and the use of phallus in its celebration. It is my belief that in this particular festival, the phallus is used to symbolize fertility albeit the right kind of fertility, and is a charm to ward off the curse brought about by incest—the wrong kind of fertility. It is true that the phallus is used in many other festivals, but fertility would have been an issue throughout the valleys of Bhutan. Recent articles on Kharphu in Tsamang village by Ugyen Pelgyen and Chodpa in Goshing village by Phuntsho Raptan all mention use of phallus. Gopilal described use of phallus in several other occasions. Given this myriad of occasions and purposes in which people use phallus, one could conclude that the phallus symbolizes potency or it can be taken more as a symbol of potency.

KHAR PHUD: A NON-BUDDHIST LHA SOL FESTIVAL OF EASTERN
BHUTAN^{*}

UGYEN PELGEN^{**}

INTRODUCTION

Not much research has been done in the field of non-Buddhist festivals and rituals in Bhutan. Any non-Buddhist festival or ritual is called Bon, a term which has to be understood in this case as opposed to Buddhist, and needs further research. On subjects close to mine today, the bibliography on Bhutan is poor. I can only think of Chime Wangmo, who spoke about the phallic symbols in house building at the IATS in New York in 1982, Françoise Pommaret, who dealt with a non-Buddhist festival in south-central Bhutan (Proceedings of the IATS in Bloomington, IN Press), Tandin Dorji's contribution to the Vienna conference 1999, and finally my own contribution to New Horizons on Bon studies, Bon Studies 2, National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, 2000.

While in most communities worship of the local deities is simply conducted by food offerings (*tshogs*) and fumigation (*bsang*), it is performed in a slightly different manner in

* I am grateful to the people of rTsa mang village for sharing their experiences and providing me with the information on the *mKhar phud* festival. I also would like to thank Principal, Mr. Tshewang Tandin and Vice-Principal Mr. T.S. Powdyel for their support and encouragement and my colleagues at Sherubtse College. Many thanks to Professor Karmay Samten, Dr. Françoise Pommaret and Dr. Katia Buffetrille for sparing time to proofread the paper and for making necessary corrections.

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villages under rTsa mang *rged 'og* in the Mongar district in eastern Bhutan. Situated on the west bank of the Kuri chu, it is inhabited, like most villages in Bhutan, by a farming population. Dry land (*sKam zhing*), and wet land (*chu zhing*) dominate the agricultural activities. The annual crops of maize and rice occupy the largest area. Livestock rearing also supplements the rural living. The major sources of cash income are potatoes and citrus fruits. Dairy products provide another source of cash income. The *rged 'og* has a primary school, a basic health unit, an agriculture center and a veterinary center.

The language, a branch of the Bum thang pa language, in its literal sense is known as 'you and me' *khyod chang nga chang*. Curiously, it is a closely related language to rDzong kha, the national language of Bhutan, and to a certain extent to *Chos skad*. I have tried my best wherever possible to comply with the standard rDzong kha and *Chos skad* spellings while transliterating, but words that do not conform either to rDzong kha or *Chos skad* have been written retaining the pronunciation of the spoken dialect.

If we break the word *mKhar phud* into two-- *mKhar*-house, *phud*-first offering--it literally means a festival of first offering¹. This offering is done in honor of a deity, known as *zhes gsungs Guru bzhes*. The *mKhar phud* festival is celebrated in the villages of rTsa mang, Ban jar, 'Dra ma gling, sGong la spong, and Khengs Gongs du under Mong sgar rDzong khag in eastern Bhutan². Though it is celebrated in all these villages,

¹ The languages of eastern Bhutan called tshangla or shar chog pa do not have scripts; therefore, some of the names/terms are rendered phonetically.

² These villages together form the rTsa mang administrative unit, *rged 'og*, administered by the rTsa mang village headman *rged po*. *rged 'og* is made

one might find slight variations in their actual practice, in the names attributed to the practitioners, and in the number of days the lHa gsol festival is performed. While the *mKhar phud* festival is celebrated for the entire seven days in the villages of rTsa mang, Ban jar and 'Dra ma gling, it is celebrated for only three days in Gong la pong and Khengs Gongs du. The priests are also known by different names. In Khengs Gongs du the priest of the ritual is addressed as *sTon pa gshen rab-* the name attributed to the Bon founder, whereas in the villages under rTsa mang rged 'og the priests are addressed by different names. The Bonpo or *phra min*³ who does the *gsol kha* and the *boro dpon* and the *boro gyog* who performs the main rituals.

In this paper I would simply like to discuss the *mKhar phud* festival of rTsa mang village starting with the historical background, the preparations involved and the actual performance of the festival⁴.

up of three to four villages and forms the smallest administrative unit supervised by the village headman. The village of Khengs Gong du forms a separate rged 'og and is administered by the Gong du rged po. While the villages under rTsa mang rged 'og are on the right side of river Ku ri chu on the lateral highway to Thim phu, the village of Khengs Gong du is two days walk from Mong sgar district.

³ *Phra min* is a word used in Tsangla (= Sharchopkha), and has therefore no written form. However one may ask whether it does not refer to the Tibetan word *phra men*. This word is found, for example, in Mi la ras pa's *Hundred Thousand Songs* by gTsang smyon, when Mi la ras pa questions beautiful young women on who they are in reality "Are you magic dakini? (*phra men*). Cf. Chang 1977:vol. 1:314; and by the 5th Dalai Lama in his '*chams yig* and translated by Nebesky as "witch". Cf. Nebesky 1976:91, 169-173. Also *The S.C.Das dictionary*, 1977:842, gives the meaning of "magical forecasts". Extrait de l'article de vienne de F. Pommaret.

⁴ The last *mKhar phud* festival was celebrated in 1999 and the next will be celebrated in 2001. The Village headman of rTsa mang rged 'og provided me with substantial information. He is also at present the priest of 'Dra ma

BACKGROUND

At the time of my visit to rTsa mang village, the festival had already been celebrated the year before, which meant I had to wait for another year to take part in its celebration. For this research I relied on Padma rDo rje, a seventy-year-old resident of the village, who in his younger days had taken part in the festival. With my limited understanding of the dialect *khyod chang nga chang*, I had to depend at most times on an interpreter. As I talked to Padma rDor rje he narrated his perception of the history of this festival and describe how it is performed today by the residents. In the actual festival performance the priest would begin by narrating in verses its history to the people before coming to the performance, and that the recitation of the prayers by heart is also done in verse. The would begin the festival with these verses:

In the beginning there was no earth,
Without earth there was no sky.
In the beginning there was no Man,
Without Man there was no God.
The one to come before Man was,
Mi thos gny' khri btsad po.
The one before bird was,
sTon pa sgom chen.
The first among the Rich was,
The rich sGam chi stong ldan⁵.

gling village and has been actively involved in the festival for more than ten years. The other most useful informant was 70-year-old Padma rDo rje of rTsa mang village, who was the priest from his youth till retirement. On the eve of his retirement, he has chosen two village men to take up his position. They are being trained by him in the art of performing this festival.

⁵ *Dang po dus ni sa yang med*
Sa med na ni gnam yang med
Dang po dus ni me yang med
Me med na ni lha yang med

With these verses begins the history of the *mKhar phud* festival, which first took place so long ago that it is almost lost in antiquity⁶. The above verses claim that central to all beings in this universe is a god, without whose presence the existence of sentient beings in this universe is meaningless. So the three, *Mi thos gnya' khri btsad po*, *Bya rtsi sTon pa sgom chen* and *Phyugs chen gam chi stong ldan*, met together and agreed that what they needed was a God whom all earthly beings could look up to as their guardian and protector in their daily chores. They decided among themselves to ask for one from the gods in heaven. *Mi thos gnya' khri btsad po* agreed to render labour services, while *Phyugs chen gam chi stong ldan* agreed to bear the expenses. *Bya rtsi sTon pa sgom chen* decided to go to the gods' realm and ask for a god but thought that *Mi thos gnya' khri tsoed po* had the least work. So he came up with an idea to give him an equal share of the burden. When the actual day came for *Bya rtsi ston pa sgom chen* to proceed to the god's realm, he disappeared from the scene. *Phyugs chen gam chi stong ldan* and *Mi thos gnya' khri btsad po* met and decided that because *Mi thos gnya' khri btsad po* had the least work, he should look for *Bya rtsi sTon pa sgom chen*. *Mi thos gnya' khri btsad po* went in search of *Bya rtsi sTon pa sgom chen* in all the four directions.

Dang po med las nga ba ni
Mi thos gnya' khri tsod po
Dang po sa la nga ba ni
Bya rtsi ston pa sgom chen
Dang po chu las nga ba ni
Phyugs chen sgam chi stong ldan

⁶ Padma rDo rje was himself lost in time and space as he narrated the verses by heart. He remembers the festival being conducted when he was still a child and no one remembers when and who first conducted it. All he could say was that it happened long, long ago.

Mi thos gnya' khri btsad po went to the east,
He met rDo rje sems pa the eastern Lord,
He could not meet sTon pa sgom chen,
And Mi thos gnya' khri btsad po had to return⁷.

Mi thos gnya' khri btsad po could not find *Bya rtsi sTon pa sgom chen*. In the East, *Mi thos gnya' khri btsad po* met the God of East *rDor rje sems pa*. In the West, he met the God of West *Rin chen byung gnas*. In the North he met the God of North *Snang wa mtha' yos* and in the South he met the God of South *Don yon grub pa*. At last he went to a rocky cave known as *A su ra'i brag phug*⁸ situated in the south of Tibet and inquired after *Bya rtsi sTon pa sgom chen*.

In the south of the country of Tibet,
In the rocky caves of *A su ra'i*,
Where three mountains meet,
Where three rivers join,
The water droplets fall on the rocky caves,
The clear water reflects the rocky caves,
The rosary of precious gems,
The medicinal cleansing water,
In the rocky caves of *A su ra'i*
Bya rtsi sTon pa sgom chen are you there⁹?

⁷ *Mi thos gnya' khri btsad po shar du 'gro*
Shar rDo rje sems pa'i sku mjl song
sTon pa sgom chen zhal ma mjl
Mi thos gnya' khri btsad po zhi du log.

⁸ The rocky caves of *A su ra'i* is in Nepal and is a Buddhist place of pilgrimage.

⁹ *rGya nag yul gyi pha rol na*
bod pa'i yul gyi tshur rol na
gang chen gsum yang 'zoms sa lu
chu chen gsum yang babs sa lu

Padma rDo rje said that *Mi thos gnya' khri btsad po* finally found *bya rtsi sTon pa sgom chen* hiding in the rocky caves of *A su ra'i*. But *Bya rtsi sTon pa sgom chen* refused to go to Heaven insisting that he would have to be in proper attire for such an arduous journey.

I won't go to the upper realm of the gods;
If I am to go to the upper realm of the gods;
I need a white band on my head;
I need a mirror on my forehead;
My mouth should be a cleft mouth;
I need an amulet on my back;
I need clothes on my body;
I need necklaces on my neck;
I need shoes on my feet;
I need wings on my sides¹⁰.

As desired, *Bya rtsi sTon pa sgom chen* was dressed with all the items he demanded and prepared for the journey. Riding astride the clouds like they were horses, he finally entered the gods' realm. Before entering the palace, he remained clinging

*chu yi zir pa brag la phog
brag gi zir pa chu la phog
mu tig shel gyi 'phrena ma khro lo lo
sTon pa sgom chen bzhugs la bsam.*

¹⁰ *sTeng lha yi yul du nga mi 'gro
sTeng lha yi yul du nga 'gro na
mGo la thod dkar yug chig dgos
dprl ba thig la me long dgos
kha mchu 'di ni shor ba dgos
rgyabs la di ni rgyab ga dgos
gzugs la di ni skyi rung dgos
rkang pa di ni zhabs lham dgos
shogs pa di ni gdong mar dgos.*

to a water pipe till a water carrier came along. He sent word through the water carrier to *Wa ldan gungs ldan*, the God King¹¹ who called for him. *Bya rtsi sTon pa sgom chen* flew inside the palace and attached himself to a pillar. *Wa ldan gungs ldan* fainted at the ugly sight of *Bya rtsi sTon pa sgom chen* and on gaining consciousness inquired after the purpose of his visit. *Bya rtsi sTon pa sgom chen* told the king that the earthly beings had no one to protect and guide them and that he had come there personally on their behalf to ask for a god. *Wa ldan gungs ldan* told him that he could not send any of his sons but that *Bya rtsi sTon pa sgom chen* could choose any of his four daughters. *Bya rtsi sTon pa sgom chen* replied.

It is the son who looks after the family and his relatives;
 It is the son who destroys enemies;
 I want a son for the earthly beings and not a daughter.¹²

Wa ldan gungs ldan, outwitted by *Bya rtsi sTon pa sgom chen*, consented to his request and ordered his youngest son *zhel gsung Guru zhel* to go down to earth. *zhel gsung Guru zhel* did not want to leave his godly realm and replied:

I will not enter the realm of the sentient beings.
 I will not enter the polluted land of sickness and filth.
 I will not enter the land of eternal birth and death.¹³

¹¹ The God King referred to here is *Lha tshang pa* or Lord Brahma. He is also called as *wa ldan gungs ldan* by the village folks of *rTsa mang*.

¹² *gnyen 'khor skyong rung bu gis skyong*
dgra 'khor 'dul rung bu gis 'dul
'jig rten mi yul gyi bu zhu ba.

¹³ *'jig rten mi yi yul du nga mi 'gro*
nad grib btsogs grib yul du nga mi 'gro

Bya rtsi sTon pa sgom chen replied:

Sickness and pollution of filth can be cured by fumigation;
One should be cautious of filth from birth and death.¹⁴

But *zhel gsung Guru zhel* would not listen. Finally, *Wa ldan gungs ldan* decided that whoever rolled the least number would leave for earth, while the rest could choose destinations of their own. They all agreed. The eldest son, *gTsang gtsang rdo rje*, rolled three sixes and chose to go to Tibet. The second eldest, *rGya nag brong nag*, rolled three fives and chose India. The third eldest, *sPyi la dkar mo*, rolled three fours and chose *Kheng sPyi la dkar mo*¹⁵. The youngest, *Zhel gsung Guru zhel*, rolled three threes and had no choice but to come down to earth. A day was fixed for his descent. The King sent his three sons and a retinue of gods to accompany his youngest son to earth. On the way the demi gods and devils heard of the descent. They were so surprised to see that a small creature like *Bya rtsi sTon pa sgom chen* was able to persuade God to send his son to earth. The demi gods and the devils watched the whole retinue with surprise and laughed at them. *Bya rtsi sTon pa sgom chen* felt annoyed and wanted the lesser gods and devils to go away. He hit upon a plan and removed his undergarments. The demi gods and the devils, seeing him naked with his penis dangling, cursed him and went away in utter shame and disgrace leaving the entourage in peace. The entourage at last reached earth safely.

shi grib skyes grib yul du nga mi 'gro

¹⁴ *nad grib shi grib bsangs thabs yod*
skyes grib shi grib zen thabs yod.

¹⁵ The place is probably referred to the present Kheng district in Bhutan.

As told in the oral history of the *mKhar phud*, from that day the earthly beings started worshipping deities and making offerings. *mKhar phud* celebrates the day of descent of the deity *zhel gsung Guru zhel* from the gods' realm to earth. The tradition of hanging phalluses and uttering obscene remarks echoes the removal of undergarment to drive away the lesser gods and the devils. Unlike other villages where a mountain or a hill is designated as the abode of the deity, *rTsa mang* village does not have any mountain abode for its deity *zhel gsung Guru zhel*.

CONTRIBUTIONS

The *mKhar phud* festival does not involve much preparation except in cutting and decorating of an oak tree, the deity's tree (*lha gshing*), preparing fermented wine (*sing chang*)¹⁶ and assembling a makeshift altar (*mchod gsham*). It also does not involve any sacrifices, unlike many other festivals which would demand a bull, a pig, a sheep or a chicken. The contributions are also minimal. At the collective level, the contribution is only wheat grain used for preparing fermented wine. The contribution of wheat grains varies from the wealthy to the poor. The rich would contribute ten to 15 *bre*¹⁷ while the poor would contribute about 1 to 2 *bre*. At the individual level, every household stores enough rice, meat, butter, cheese, milk, fermented wine and other necessary items to entertain guests as they visit each house as part of the festival. They make a long slender cakes of long life from wheat (*tshe 'khrungs*) and of prosperity and wealth (*gyang 'khrungs*). They also prepare wooden phalluses called *lha'i bu*

¹⁶ The liquid extracted out from the fermented grains and served before distillation is known as *singchang*.

¹⁷ a unit of measurement used by the Bhutanese; one *bre* of wheat is approximately one and half kilograms.

*tshe rings*¹⁸ (= *khyod chang nga chang*), which are normally kept with the grains in the storehouse or in the attic to guarantee a good harvest.

PREPARATION

The first step towards conducting of the festival is the preparation of fermented wine. On the 20th day of the fourth month, the villagers with their contributions of wheat grain gather at the house of the deity's host (*lha'i gnas po's*), a house nominated in the village where an altar is made for offerings. Usually a wealthy house is nominated for this purpose. A stone oven (*thabs bor*) (= *khyod chang nga chang*) is also made by planting three big stones on the ground on which is placed a pot for cooking the collected grain. It is opened on the 26th day of the lunar calendar at the start of the festival. While fermented wine is being prepared, the grain that floats to the top of the container is collected and put in a separate container and kept in the attic of the house of the deity's host. On the concluding day of the festival, the container with the grain is brought out in public to see if it has germinated. If the seeds have germinated, it signals a good harvest.

On the morning of the 26th day, the villagers gather in front of deity's host house and decide on a person to prepare the deity's tree. Unlike other traditions and festivals, they do not have any beliefs about choosing particular persons with regard to age, etc., except that females are not allowed to cut the deity's tree. The person chosen could be any one enthusiastic and eager to carry out the task of cutting the

¹⁸ It is an honorific term, generally applied to such a thing. It would stress the fact for the people, it gives blessing of long life and becomes sacred. It is also considered as a talisman to drive away evils, misfortunes and protect families from curses and other disasters.

deity's tree and preparing the phalluses. This chosen person is acknowledged as a clean person (*gtsang mi*). On entering the forest at dusk the person chooses a *sog skyes shing*, one of the many species of oak trees grown in Bhutan and the one that is used for making a deity's tree. The tree chosen to be cut as a representation of the deity *zhel gsung Guru zhel* who came down to earth is one that is vertically straight with lots of branches. The branches are cut off leaving only those at the tip so that the tree is not completely barren. The tree bark is also peeled off. The tip of the tree signifies fumigation plants (*bsang shing*) of the deities, the root represents the life tree (*srog shing*) of the nagas (*klu*), while the branches represent the resting site of the Nightingale (*lhab bya*), and the white part of the peeled off bark of the tree represents purity of heart. Then the clean person shapes about nine to ten phalluses the size of an arm's length. These phalluses represent *Bya rtsi Tton pa sgom chen's* penis and symbolize fertility. Though *Bya rtsi sTon pa sgom chen* had just one hanging below his waist, they prepare as many phalluses as possible so that each household is at least blessed with one. These phalluses are painted red at the tip with the red juice extracted from a creeper plant known as (*rtsod*) which is similar to madder. The phalluses are then tied on to the branch of the deity's tree, heads downwards using creeper plant as the rope. Before dusk the deity's tree with all the decorations is brought from the forest and kept at a small field near the deity's host house to be taken to the ritual site (*lha vaung*)¹⁹ (= *khyod chang nga chang*) the next day.

¹⁹ The designated ritual place where the festival is conducted. It is a flat ground where they do not farm.

From the day of the preparation of fermented wine till the festival is over, women who have recently delivered babies are kept out of participation and the dead are not burnt but buried with the belief that impurities (*sgrib*) affect gods. The dead ones are burnt later when the festival is over. The participants also refrain from consuming pork during the festival. Besides the preparations involved, a few villagers are designated to take an active role during the festival. They have the main priest of the rituals (*boro dpon*)²⁰ and the assistant priest (*boro gyog*)²¹. The main priest and the assistant priests are trained and know all the verses by heart. The Bonpo who performs the *gsol kha*. The caretaker (*mdo dam pa*) who looks after the guests. The wine incharge (*chang gnyer*) and the general participants known as *las bi las cham* (= *khyod chang nga chang*).

²⁰ The word in a literal sense when broken into two could mean a dance leader. However in the mKhar phud festival he is the designated person playing a major role and involved right from the start till the festival is over. He is one of those persons selected and trained to lead the festival. He serves as an assistant till he takes over the charge as boro dpon.

²¹ gyog means work. boro gyog in a literal sense would mean an assistant. He is also chosen and a trained person and assists the boro dpon in the festival and in the absence of the boro dpon conducts the festival.



People on their way to the house in the village with phallus sticks, in a similar festival, Dueza celebrated in Kengkhar, Mongar. Photograph by Francoise Pommarret

THE DESCENT OF THE DEITY AND STRIPPING OFF THE PHALLUSES

The 26th day of the fourth month marks the beginning of the *mKhar phud* festival. It is the day of the deity's descent (*babs dus*) from the Godly realm to earth. As daylight breaks, the Bonpo visits the deity's host house and makes wine offerings (*chang phud*) and prayers in honour of the deity. He does this every morning before the start of the actual celebration. After the wine offerings and prayers, he joins the villagers at the ritual site and helps in the preparation of the ground and the altar. While the elderly folk wait for nightfall, small children in ones and twos crowd near the ritual site and entertain

themselves throwing obscene remarks at each other known as (*ba dab stu*)²² (= *khyod chang nga chang*).

No fire tongs pulled at it, yet red fiery tongue stood jutting out,
No driller entered it, yet depthless the cavity,
No flames singed it, yet dark and black it is,
Longing for more and never satiated.²³

As night falls, the main priest and the assistant priest accompanied by men and women folk from every household dressed in their best attire gather at the ritual site. Unbothered by the obscene remarks of the children, the gathering is offered welcome wine (*bzhes chang*) by the host lady (*Nang gi aam*). It should be noted here that shyness and feeling of shame are brushed aside during the entire festival. As night falls people light up torches and amidst dances and songs the menfolk carry the deity's tree to the ritual site, with children following close behind shouting obscene remarks at the top of their voices. On reaching the ritual place the deity's tree is placed inside a hole by the main priest dug earlier in the day, while the rest of the villagefolk sit in rows in front of it. Offerings of fermented wine are made to the gathering before the main priest and the assistant priest take their seats in front of the deity's tree to mark the beginning of the festival. A volunteer, usually a middle-aged man who has participated in the festival earlier, is invited from amongst the crowd to partake in a duel of words with the main priest. This duel of

²² The obscene remarks used by the children are known as *ba dab stu* and do not have any specific reason.

²³ sTu zhong zhong rgyal mo zen za do
da ta 'byon na da ta nyams
kem pa ma snem lcae bur mo
me gyi ma nem kha nag mo.

words between the two marks the beginning of the *mKhar phud* festival, reenacting in words the whole history of the *mKhar phud* festival from the descent of the deity to the description of the deity's tree from its tip down to its trunk. The onlookers listen in silence. Once the duel of words is over, the gathering is served with another round of fermented wine. It should be noted here that the only drink served in the entire festival is fermented wine and retaining tradition, cups and plates of bamboo leaves are used in the entire festival. The main priest then takes the lead and dances around the stone oven. Unlike dances on other occasions where the whole group sings, here the dancers repeat every stanza after the main priest. This dance goes on till daybreak. As the first day comes to an end, the crowd rush towards the deity's tree and strip off the phalluses and make it barren except for the few branches at the top. The phalluses are taken home to save the family from misfortunes and bring good luck.

BLESSINGS AND WINE OFFERINGS

The second day of the *mKhar phud* festival is a day of wine offering and receiving blessings (*dKon mchog pho rab*). Every household takes with them, milk, butter, cheese, fish and fermented wine in bamboo containers *palangs* (= *khyod chang nga chang and shar chog pa kha*). In two small baskets (*ama*) (= *khyod chang nga chang*) they take slender boiled wheat flour cakes of long life and cakes of prosperity. The crowds gather and walk to a place not far from the ritual site. The menfolk wear scarves (*bkab ney*), and lining up facing north offer wine from the small bamboo cups filled with fermented wine to *btsan gog 'phel* and *klu dga' dbang 'jog po*²⁴.

²⁴ They are also local deities worshipped by the people.

Offerings to *gsung chog sGrdol ma*, the mother,
Offerings to *dpal li rgyal mtshen*, the son,
Offerings to *gyu sGron*, the daughter.
Offerings to *klu dga' dbang 'jog po*,
Offerings to *mtsho sman rgyal mo*, the mother,
Offerings to numinous forces of the right,
Offerings to numinous forces of the left.²⁵

In the meantime, women watch their men folk offer wine to the deities. After the offerings are made, both men and women leave for the ritual site. There, the offerings of milk, butter, cheese, meat, fish, cakes of wheat flour and fermented wine are spread on the makeshift altar. The Bonpo²⁶ then takes his place. So far the Bonpo was a mere spectator. But now his participation in the *mKhar phud* starts with the offerings of prayers. He offers fumigation (*bsang rab*) and water (*chu rab*). Reading from a text, he invites all male and female gods and prays for peace and prosperity in the village. The main priest then takes his seat and performs prayers for long life (*tshe zhu*). Here is the first stanza:

In the holy abode of Zangs mdog dpal ri,

²⁵ *Gog 'phel lhab sey dkar po cho dor*
yum ni gsung chog sgröl ma cho dor
sras ni dpal li rgyal mtshen cho dor
sras mo gyu sgron bzang mo cho dor
klu chen dga' dbang 'jog po cho dor
yum ni mtsho sman rgyal mo cho dor
phar gyas la gnas pa cho dor
tshur gyon la gnas pa cho dor.

²⁶ *mKhar phud* is considered a Bon celebration in the sense of the Bhutanese term with the Bonpo minimally involved. His only designated task in the festival is to perform *gsol kha* every morning before the actual start of the festival. A particular text is read while performing *gsol kha* in honour of the local deity.

Resides slob dpon o rgyn gu ru with his vase of long life,
Came to receive blessings,
As the vase reaches the upper sky,
Let man live life that reaches the sky²⁷.

After this, the people begin their rounds to the houses visiting the nearest house from the ritual place to perform prayers of good wishes (*smon lam*) led by the main preist. Before reaching the house both men and women wear bands on their heads made from twigs and branches with leaves sticking out from the sides. Prayers of good wishes are performed at every house of the village for the welfare and prosperity of the household members and to protect them from any misfortunes and mishaps for the year. The prayers last for the next two to three days until they complete visits to every household in the village. Before entering the house, they wait at the entrance and describe the entire house from the doorstep to the walls and the pillars. Then they request the landlady to open the door²⁸. Before she opens the door she inquires,

Are you all friends or foes?
If you are foes, then my door is closed.
If you are friends, then my door is open²⁹.

²⁷ *Gnas zangs mdog dpal gyi dgon pa lu*
slob dpon o rgyan gu ru tshe bum
tshe bum pa mi shig tshe zhu ba
bum pa'i mtha ni dgung la thug
mi tshe dgung la mitho ba tshe zhu ba.

²⁸ *Phel lo phel lo sgo phel lo.*

²⁹ *Khyod gnyen yin nam dgra yin nam*
dgra yin na bsdam sgo yin
gnyen yin na phel sgo yin.

The *Bro-dpon* and his company of men and women reply,

I am a friend and not a foe,
Let me in, open the door³⁰.

The landlady opens the door and welcomes them. Everyone is offered seats and served locally brewed alcohol (*ara*) and fermented wine. The main priest then starts with a verse conveying to the family members that he brought with him prayers for long life.

I brought long life for father,
I brought prosperity for mother,
I brought strength for your sons,
I brought authority for your daughters,
I brought growth for your children,
I brought medicine for the young ladies³¹.

As the main priest chants prayers for long life and prosperity, the landlady brings a small woven basket filled with a variety of crops. In the middle of the crops she places a wooden phallus covered in a small scarf. This is known as the birth of long life (*tshe ring*), the phallus symbolizing long life. After the prayers are over, the guests are served with fermented wine.

³⁰ *Nga ni dgra ni men no gnyen yin no
phel lo phel lo sgo phel lo.*

³¹ *Pha a pa dga' ba' tshe 'ong pi
yum a ma dga' ba' gyang 'ong pi
stag shar dga' ba'rste 'ong pi
smen chung dga ba' bang 'ong pi
wo lo dga' ba'l skyis 'ong pi
smen shar dga ba' bya 'ong pi.*

The initiation of prayers of good wishes and prosperity for the entire family is followed by the driving away of evil spirits (*phyi la*) (= *khyod chang nga chang*). Two women who have brought two phalluses with them take the floor and start dancing. As they dance they touch the head of every person present with the phallus, signifying that the phallic power will drive evils and misfortunes out of the house. When the dance is over, the landlady serves the guests with food and more drinks. As the group leaves for the ritual site, the landlady thanks them for visiting her house and blessing her family with good luck and prosperity. At the ritual site the main priest and the assistant priest then divide the people into two groups. Each of them leads a group and visits every house in the village to bless the household members with good luck and prosperity. The blessing of the family members and driving away of evil continue for the next three days until the evening of the sixth day when all gather once again at the ritual site. In the mean time, the deity's tree is kept at the ritual site.

THE CONCLUDING DAY

On the last day of the *mKhar phud* festival, known as *wag pa'i zor*, (= *khyod chang nga chang*), the village folks once again gather at the ritual site. Led by the main priest, the villagers sit around the deity's tree and join the main priest in saying the concluding prayers. The last verse, which is sung by the main priest with the village folk repeating every syllable after him, goes as follows:

The sun has set beyond the skies;
Its warmth has been left in my hands.
The moon has crossed the sky;
The dates have been left in my hands.

The stars have crossed the sky;
The moon has been left in my hands.
The lion has crossed the mountain;
Its roar has been left in my hands.
The stag has crossed the forest;
The horns have been left in my hands.
The deer has crossed the meadows;
Its footprints have been left in my hands.
The bird Tong tong has crossed the birches;
Its soothing voice has been left in my hands.³²

Bidding goodbye to *zhel gsung Guru zhel* and thanking him for blessing the village with prosperity, long life and good health, the weeklong *mKhar phud* festival finally comes to an end. Before dispersing for their respective homes, the villagers sit in a circle and drink the leftover locally brewed alcohol. Leaving for their homes in one's and two's with marks of contentment and accomplishment on their faces, they already begin talking of the next occasion when they can partake of the celebration and pray for long life, good health and prosperity.

³² *Aa hoi, khri gdung o'gal tey dgung o'gal tey
drod nyams mi nga'i lag na lus
zalad wa 'gal tey dgung 'gal tey
tshe grang mi nga'i lag na lus
sKar ma 'gal tey dgung 'gal tey
zalda dkar mi nga'i lag na lus
seng ge 'gal tey gangs 'gal tey
gsung skad mi nga'i lag na lus
sha wa 'gal tey nags 'gal tey
rab chu mi nga'i lag na lus
ka sha 'gal tey spang 'gal tey
rKang rjis mi nga'i lag na lus
tong tong 'gal tey mdang rgyal tey
gsung skad mi nga'i lag na lus.*

CONCLUSION

The *mKhar phud* festival, observed by the people of rTsa mang rged 'og since time immemorial, still continues to play a considerable role in the daily life of the villagers. Of the many differences found throughout Bhutan in the practice of worshipping deities from trees, rocks, streams and lakes to designating mountains as abodes of deities, this practice finds in itself a place unique to the people of rTsa mang rged 'og. I haven't heard or come across lHa gsol practices that involves the participation of children and shouting obscene remarks at each other nor of people rushing for phalluses and taking them home as talismans. Every household hangs them from the sides of their roofs and in front of the entrances. Nor are lHa gsol's carried out for days as this that lasts for a week. The Buddhist practitioners in Bhutan certainly attribute such worship to Bon. Yet the Buddhist practitioners have never questioned the conduct of these festivals and it is correct to claim that the two existed harmoniously. Nor I do intend to oppose or question this view.

The rapid economic development and changes taking place in Bhutan pose no less threat to this ancient tradition than they do to the very identity of the villagers themselves.

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