

THE HOUSE OF 'OBS-MTSHO - THE HISTORY OF A BHUTANESE GENTRY FAMILY FROM THE 13th TO THE 20th CENTURY

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Backgroundⁱ

One of the most important threads of ongoing research in Bhutanese history is the documentation of the origin and historical interrelationships among its regional elite families. For most of its history, Bhutan has been characterized by relatively decentralized government, a geographically complex land of fragmented ecosystems in which such families shared habitat and competed for local dominance (the term “ruled” is probably too strong a generalization). The 'Brug-pa theocracy which began during the 17th century was the first successful attempt to impose national unity upon a constellation of local self-governing units of great variety, which in some cases trace their ancestry back as far as the 8th century AD. Even under the *Zhabs-drung Rin-po-che* and his successors, local elite families strongly influenced the direction of state policies. Remnants of the earlier era of decentralized local government are found in the persistence of old socio-geographic namesⁱⁱ including, perhaps, an archaic name for Bhutan itself: *Lho (Mon) Kha-bzhi* (The Southern [Mon] Country of Four Approaches). ⁱⁱⁱ

From its inception in 1625,^{iv} the *Zhabs-drung's* transplanted ecclesiastic establishment, sought to defend its Bhutanese properties against external enemies and to establish a framework for local law and order based upon Buddhist

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principles. The support cadre that administered this enterprise consisted initially of monks who came with him from Tibet and local leaders from prominent families. However, relations among these families were not always harmonious. Mediation of local family disputes had been a common activity of missionary lamas from Tibet, whose advent over the centuries resulted in persistent ties between a particular Tibetan monastery and its Bhutanese outposts. But the geographic and cultural distance from Tibet was significant, and ties were often loose. Many Tibetan lamas took local wives and settled permanently in Bhutan. The headship of their local family hermitage was passed down among descendants. As Aris has shown, this process often resulted in the supplanting of older layers of ruling families with new ones of a quasi-ecclesiastic character headed by men with such titles as *zhal-ngo* and *chos-rje*.^v

The purpose of this paper is to describe one such case, that of 'Obs-mtsho, a family with a monastic establishment in the vast district known today as Goen (*dGon-yul*), in the mountains northwest of Punakha in western Bhutan. The history of the rise to prominence and vicissitudes of the house of dGon 'Obs-mtsho during the 13th - 20th centuries offers important insight into the sociology of Bhutan. It also exemplifies changing patterns of competition among landed Bhutanese gentry families for positions of power within the emerging Bhutanese state.

The Early History of dGon 'Obs-mtsho^{vi}

In common with many other elite family lines of Bhutan, the 'Obs-mtsho people trace their ancestry to a renowned lineage of ancient Tibet, in this case to the lDan-ma clan (*rus*) of eastern Tibet.^{vii} The legendary ancestral progenitor was a soldier named lDe-ma lDe-ma, who is said to have guarded the Jo-bo image of the Buddha as it was to Tibet brought from China in the train of princess Wen-cheng, Chinese bride of king Srong-btsan-sgam-po. The next cultural hero in this lineage was the legendary scholar *Lo-tsa-ba* lDan-ma rTse-

mang associated in the *Padma-thang-yig* and the *bKa'-thang-sde-lnga* with Padma Sambhava and canonical translation activity of 8th century Tibet.^{viii} Traditions handed down in Tibetan and Bhutanese *gter-ma* texts connect him with various works of early scholarship, and by the 16th century he had become enshrined as an early figure in an important Bhutanese incarnation lineage (*'khrungs rabs*) of the Padma Gling-pa tradition.^{ix} Reputed for his skill in calligraphy, the alleged inventor of Bhutanese cursive script,^x manuscripts in his original hand were reportedly still to be seen in Tibet during the early 19th century,^{xi} and in Bhutan during the 20th.^{xii}

By the 13th century, various strands of lDan-ma people had migrated to gTsang, such as those who became ministers of Sa-skya and the “kings” of Gyantse.^{xiii} But more than one hundred years before the beginning of Sa-skya hegemony another branch of the lDan-ma had established itself in the Myang sTod district of gTsang, at a place called rTa-thang (“Plain of Horses”). There, a teacher by the name dPal-lDan Shes-rab became known for his religious practice and acquired the epithet *dGe-bshes* rTa-thang-pa. It was from him that gTsang-pa rGya-ras (1161-1211), founder of the 'Brug-pa sect, took his preliminary monastic vows. *dGe-bshes* rTa-thang-pa's own son Nor-bu dPal-lDan later became a student of gTsang-pa rGya-ras. In his early youth, Nor-bu dPal-lDan meditated at a place called sGo-mo gter-khung, noted for its thermal springs and sulfurous geysers, and which was also the habitation of a local deity named dGe-bsnyen chen-po.^{xiv} Through his great yogic powers he subdued this deity, who thereupon promised to become a protector of Buddhism and of Nor-bu dPal-lDan's successors.^{xv} From these accomplishments this yogin became known as *Grub-thob* gTer-khung-pa (~ gTer-khungs-pa).

After some years had passed, *Grub-thob* gTer-khung-pa went before his guru and an assemblage of monks at Rwa-lung, where gTsang-pa rGya-ras is recorded to have foretold,

My son, your field for converting disciples is in the South. Hence go there, and though groups of the faithful will come to you, you must take charge, for great benefit will accrue to sentient beings.^{xvi}

In this way, gTsang-pa rGya-ras dispatched him to seek his spiritual fortune in the southern wilderness of what would become the state of Bhutan.^{xvii} On his way he founded a hermitage in Tibet called dPal-sdings, returned briefly to Rwa-lung for the funeral ceremony of gTsang-pa rGya-ras, and then left on his mission to the south. Along the way, he was invited to visit places known as 'Brog Tsha-yul and bDe-chen-chos-sdings, then entered the vast mountainous districts of La-yag and dGon-yul in what is now northern Bhutan. In about AD 1212-13, he established a *bla-brang* at 'Obs-mtsho chos-sdings, not far from what is now Gasa (*mGar-sa*) rDzong in the administrative district of Goenkhatoe (dGon-kha-stod).^{xviii} He then returned to Tibet where his uncle dPal-ldan-rgyal-po still resided. There he installed the latter's younger grandson dPal-ldan-rdo-rje as head of the local *gDan-sa* (presumably dPal-sdings).^{xix} He also petitioned gTsang-pa rGya-ras's successor at Rwa-lung, Dar-ma Seng-ge (1177/8-1237), for permission to withdraw the elder grandson Bla-ma dBon from the monk body at Rwa-lung and install him as head of the 'Obs-mtsho *gDan-sa*.^{xx} The connection between 'Obs-mtsho and Dar-ma Seng-ge is confirmed by a note in the latter's brief but contemporary *rnam-thar* in the biographical collection entitled *Rwa-lung dkar-brgyud gser-'phreng*, which mentions a certain *dGe-bshes* 'Obs-mtsho-pa as one of his students.^{xxi}

From this point until events of the 17th century, the details in our sources become somewhat sketchy. For several generations we know only the names of the monastic heads and a few bare facts about their deeds. The initial intent seems to have been to maintain a unified administration of the two religious centers of dPal-sdings in gTsang and 'Obs-mtsho in Bhutan. But these ties gradually loosened and within one or two generations the two monasteries became

virtually independent. It appears that succession at 'Obs-mtsho initially followed the familiar 'uncle - nephew' pattern. During these centuries, the founder's descendants and relatives intermarried locally, increased the lands under their possession and systematically assumed the title of *chos-rje*. Then, during the 15th century, the ninth incumbent Seng-ge-rgyal-mtshan took a wife in order to preserve the family line, after which the rule of celibacy seems to have been preserved only intermittently.

'Obs-mtsho itself was expanded over time, and affiliated hermitages were built in nearby districts. A noted *lha-khang* at 'Obs-mtsho was constructed by the 4th abbot bSam-gtan Byang-chub. A later split in the *gDan-sa* resulted in the founding of a monastery named Yon-tan rDzong with its own *chos-rje*. The most important expansion, however, was a branch hermitage built near the summit of rTsig-ri, a mountain peak two days to the southeast and six hour's trekking distance north of Punakha. During the 14th or early 15th century, this site was given to the 7th abbot of 'Obs-mtsho, *Chos-rje* 'Jam-dbyangs bSod-nams-rgyal-po, by a prominent lord of the Punakha region named *sLob-dpon* rGyal-mtshan rDo-rje whom he had cured of sickness. Serving initially as a winter residence, this dramatic mountain-top site was named rNam-rgyal-rtse. A *lha-khang* of that name was created at the very summit as a residence for *dam-can* sGo-mo, protective deity of dGon-yul and the northern Punakha valley (and of the followers of gTer-khung-pa).^{xxii} In the course of time, the monastery on the ridge just below rNam-rgyal-rtse *lha-khang* was expanded into the important monastic complex of Se'u-la (also spelled bSe'u-la), which today contains some of Bhutan's finest art treasures of the 17th - 19th centuries.^{xxiii} During the same era (although we have no direct testimony for the precise date), a branch residence for lay relatives of the 'Obs-mtsho *chos-rje* was established in the hamlet of Amorimu, located below the crest of a ridge several miles northwest of Se'u-la.

Coupled with this lineage's successful establishment in Bhutan were its religious ties maintained with the parent Rwa-lung monastery in Tibet. Over the centuries, generations of youths from throughout the Bhutanese southlands were sent to this monastery to receive formal tuition and exposure to the larger universe of Buddhist scholarship and practice. The 'Obs-mtsho families dutifully participated in this tradition. When the future Rwa-lung hierarch Ye-shes Rin-chen (1364-1413) was born to a Bhutanese mother at Wang-ri-kha, near 'Obs-mtsho, it was 'Obs-mtsho *Chos-rje* 'Jam-dbyangs bSod-nam rGyal-po who accepted him as a student for several years, before conducting him to Rwa-lung for ordination.^{xxiv} Several generations later, we know that the 'Obs-mtsho *chos-rje* Nam-mkha' dPal-bzang married a sister (*lcam*) of the 'Brug-pa hierarch *rGyal-dbang* Kun-dga' dPal-'byor (1428-1476), and that their son *rJe-btsun* Grags-pa Rin-po-che was sent to study at Rwa-lung monastery, before his installation as head of 'Obs-mtsho.^{xxv}

Parallels with Pha-jo 'Brug-sgom-zhig-po

In order to see the history of the 'Obs-mtsho establishment in better perspective, and before following the story into the modern era, it is useful to compare its history with that of another lineage of remarkably similar origin. A few years after *grub-thob* gTer-khung-pa, a second Tibetan devotee of gTsang-pa rGya-ras destined for fame in Bhutan came to Rwa-lung, only to discover that his guru-to-be had just died. Pha-jo 'Brug-sgom-zhig-po (1179?-1245?)^{xxvi} was accepted as a student by the new Rwa-lung hierarch Dar-ma Seng-ge. But before his death, gTsang-pa rGya-ras had foretold his coming:

There will come from Khams a small child, but I will not meet him. You should accept him and send him to the Valleys of the South where the feet of U-rgyan mKhan-po Padma-'byung-gnas have trod. There he will bring great benefit to the teachings of the Buddha.^{xxvii}

There are strong mythic elements to the life stories of these two 'Brug-pa pioneers, as one might expect given that the descriptions we have of them date from more recent centuries.^{xxviii} Even so, it is useful to compare their careers and overlapping Bhutanese legacies, which had little in common beyond a similar inception. From the time when he must have first entered Bhutan in about AD 1225 Pha-jo was active mainly in the valley settlements of the far west, at Paro and Thimphu. But in contrast with the quiet life at 'Obs-mtsho, Pha-jo's career was tempestuous. gTer-khung-pa emerges from our sources as a reclusive yogi by temperament, fond of mountain retreats, whereas Pha-jo was a combative sorcerer with a sizable family. His reputed proficiency in magic and illusion won students and many patrons, as did his encouragement for their rebellion against the carrying tax (*'u-la*) and other excessive tithes imposed coercively by the local chief lama of the Lha-pa or Lha-nang-pa sect, then well established in the area.^{xxix} Possessed of a galvanic personality not unlike the *Zhabs-drung Rin-po-che* who battled the Lha-pa four hundred years later, his actions in support of the 'Brug-pa faith polarized the valley settlements, which led to his poisoning and death. So it is Pha-jo, and not Grub-thob gTer-khung-pa of 'Obs-mtsho, whom the Bhutanese regard today as having first introduced the 'Brug-pa teachings to Bhutan.^{xxx}

Late in life Pha-jo parceled out his acquired territories among four sons, to whom numerous prominent Bhutanese *chos-rje* families of later centuries trace their ancestry. One of these sons, dBang-phyug, was given control of land in the Thed (Punakha) district and to the north in dGon-yul, which must have soon brought him and his descendants into contact with the family of the 'Obs-mtsho *chos-rje*.^{xxxi} But being fellow 'Brug-pa sectarians, the relationship which developed between 'Obs-mtsho and Pha-jo's successors in the area seems to have been at least outwardly amicable. A key factor must have been their mutual, enduring tie to Rwa-lung monastery.

One result, if not the principal cause, of the persistent relationship between Rwa-lung and the 'Brug-pa lineages of dGon-yul in Bhutan was a series of marital links. It is a remarkable fact that during the 14th century, every single hierarch of Rwa-lung monastery was married to and/or born in Bhutan to a local woman descended from Pha-jo 'Brug-sgom-zhig-po, at least three of them from Wang-ri-kha near 'Obs-mtsho.^{xxxii} The 9th Rwa-lung hierarch 'Jam-dbyangs Blo-gros Seng-ge (1345-1390) was born at Wang-ri-kha to a Bhutanese holy woman of prominent family named *sLob-dpon-ma* *Sras-mo* bKra-shis-ldan, who founded this hermitage.^{xxxiii} He later married a woman of the same Bhutanese lineage, and their son became the 10th Rwa-lung hierarch *chos-rje* Shes-rab Seng-ge (1371-1392).^{xxxiv} The latter's brother and successor on the throne of Rwa-lung, 'Jam-dbyangs Ye-shes Rin-chen (1364-1413), was also born at Wang-ri-kha to a Bhutanese woman.^{xxxv} Until he reached eight years of age, Ye-shes Rin-chen resided in Bhutan under the tutelage of the 'Obs-mtsho hierarch *chos-rje* 'Jam-dbyangs bSod-nams rGyal-po, who accompanied him in that year to Rwa-lung.^{xxxvi} Ye-shes Rin-chen's two sons Nam-mkha' dPal-bzang (1398-1425) and *rJe* Shes-rab Bzang-po (1400-1438), who became the 12th and 13th Rwa-lung hierarchs, were born to a Bhutanese woman who was a descendant of Pha-jo from the village of rNal-'byor gzhung, near Paro.^{xxxvii}

But when the ruling principle of the Tibetan 'Brug-pa sect shifted during the late 15th century to succession by reincarnation, the tradition of marital ties between its hierarchs and Bhutanese families from dGon-yul ceased. For many decades, the focal point of 'Brug-pa activity in Bhutan moved further to the west. Although the prominence of Rwa-lung became somewhat eclipsed by the advent of the *rGyal-dbang* 'Brug-chen incarnations, its patriarchs of the rGya clan continued their long-standing relationship with the communities of Bhutan.^{xxxviii} The great era of 'Brug-pa monastic foundations serving the agricultural valleys of western Bhutan stretched from the late 14th through the 16th centuries. Many of these began as family hermitages

belonging to descendants of Pha-jo 'Brug-sgom-zhig-po and were later enlarged by visiting hierarchs of Rwa-lung, including the 1st *rGyal-dbang 'Brug-chen* Kun-dga' dPal-'byor. In contrast, no major monasteries affiliated with Rwa-lung were constructed in the mountainous regions near 'Obs-mtsho, although smaller hermitages were established there from time to time.^{xxxix} The 'Brug-pa hierarch Padma-dkar-po (1527-1592) had students from 'Obs-mtsho,^{xi} but until the era of the *Zhabs-drung*, 'Obs-mtsho and its *chos-rje* families seem to have persisted quietly in the background of regional affairs, with little hint of the fame that still lay in their future.

Ngag-dbang rNam-rgyal (1594-1651) and His 'Obs-mtsho Followers

The rise of the 'Obs-mtsho lineage and its Amorimu successors to political prominence was tied directly to their support for the founder of the Bhutanese state, *Zhabs-drung* Ngag-dbang rNam-rgyal (1594-1651). Exactly how this came about is not described in the oldest source, the biography of the *Zhabs-drung* by *gTsang mkhan-chen*. Surprisingly, the *rnam-thar* of Se'u-la *Byams-mgon* based on family records is also silent. But by the time the first "standard" history of Bhutan was published in 1759, the *Lho'i chos 'byung* of bsTan-'dzin Chos-rgyal (1700-1767), the details had been laid out in the form followed by subsequent writers.^{xli} According to this author, when the *Zhabs-drung* fled from Rwa-lung in 1616, an invitation reached him from an unnamed lama of 'Obs-mtsho. The *Zhabs-drung* accepted his offer and the 'Obs-mtsho lama provided an escort into the country, offering him donatory estates (*mchod gzhis*) if he would remain as ruler (*dpon-po*), which the country at that time was said to lack.^{xlii}

The main 'Obs-mtsho figure of this period was a famous individual in Bhutanese history, a contemporary of the *Zhabs-drung* named bsTan-'dzin 'Brug-rgyas (1591-1656) who entered Rwa-lung monastery in 1601 where, in 1610, he was conferred the joint positions of *dbu-mdzad* (chant master) and *phyag-mdzod* (treasurer). Later, in Bhutan, these two

functions evolved into the office of civil head of state known as *sDe-srid Phyag-mdzod* ("Druk Desi" or Deb Raja of British colonial sources), of which he was the first incumbent.^{xliii} Whether it was he or a relative who was the unspecified 'Obs-mtsho lama, it is clearly a result of bsTan-'dzin 'Brug-rgyas's personal relationship with the *Zhabs-drung* that this family's political fortunes suddenly began to flourish. From 1616 until his death forty years later, bsTan-'dzin 'Brug-rgyas held responsibility for public administration within Ngag-dbang rNam-rgyal's ecclesiastic establishment.^{xliv} When the *Zhabs-drung* reached his decision in 1625 to expand this into a "state" (*gzhung*) on the model of Sa-skya, his role expanded accordingly. Construction of the great monastic fortresses of Punakha, Tashichhodzong and Wangdi Phodrang was carried out under his direction. He is further credited with planning the successful military defense against invasions from Tibet, against the coalition of long-entrenched lamas from opposing sects, and against independent district chieftains in central and eastern Bhutan. But he was also an educated monk, and his skill in sorcery based on intense study of the *Kalacakra* system with the *Zhabs-drung's* own teacher Lha-dbang Blo-gros was reputedly responsible for much of Bhutan's success in the wars against Tibet before 1651.^{xlv} At the time of his entry into final retreat (and death), the *Zhabs-drung* assigned to him the role of administering the state in his absence. As master of "external affairs" during this period he promulgated a famous code of conduct for the clergy and the lay administrative elite that became the model for future Bhutanese law codes.^{xlvi} In perhaps his most delicate political role, as one of the *Zhabs-drung's* two closest attendants he was responsible for concealing Ngag-dbang rNam-rgyal's death until a suitable successor could be found.^{xlvii}

The sensitivity and complexity of the task to expand the authority of the 'Brug *gzhung* in Bhutan no doubt demanded a cadre of close supporters of unquestioned loyalty. It is interesting that most of those assigned key positions during the early decades were either relatives, or other Tibetans and Bhutanese who had served with the *Zhabs-drung* in the monk

body at Rwa-lung. The long, personal relationship between him and *sDe-srid* bsTan-'dzin 'Brug-rgyas was a case in point, boosting his family's opportunities for other assignments. For example the brother of the first *sDe-srid*, 'Brug rNam-rgyal was appointed in 1623 to remain in Tibet as caretaker of the *Zhabs-drung*'s interests at Rwa-lung.^{xlvi} When the Fifth Dalai Lama's commanders expelled him from Tibet in 1647 he returned to Bhutan where he was appointed to the post of government steward (*gzhung mgron-gnyer*). Then in 1650 'Brug rNam-rgyal was chosen to coordinate the military offensive against Dagana in the south of Bhutan, which led to its incorporation into the emerging state.^{xlix} During this era other members of the family also gained powerful positions in service to the new government. Notable examples include dPal-ldan 'Brug-rgyas, the first *phyag-mdzod* at the newly-constructed capital fortress of Punakha, and the first *sDe-srid*'s nephew Ngag-dbang-rab-brtan (1630-1680?). The latter became an officer and minister of state under the third *sDe-srid* Mi-'gyur brTan-pa (1613-1681, r.1667-1680), famous in Bhutanese history for his deeds to expand the reach of the 'Brug-pa state.^l

Rivals of the 'Obs-mtsho

The favored position of men from 'Obs-mtsho in the emerging state hierarchy became a source of jealousy and opposition from other landed gentry families. The most powerful rival was a family from the dKar-sbis district along the west bank of the Mo-chu river north of Punakha. Dkar-sbis was one of the "eight communities of the Wang people" (*wang tsho chen brgyad*), a population stratum highly respected in western Bhutan for its antiquity and their early support for the *Zhabs-drung*. Nevertheless, no men from dKar-sbis are recorded to have served in the monk body at Rwa-lung in the decades before 1616. And in spite of their initial support for his cause, no dKar-sbis monks or headmen became as close to the *Zhabs-drung* as bsTan-'dzin 'Brug-rgyas and his relatives from 'Obs-mtsho.

The rivalry between the two families came to its first significant crisis during the war with Tibet of 1676, during which 'Obs-mtsho-pa Ngag-dbang Rab-brtan's superior generalship is said to have reversed a near defeat caused by the incompetence of dKar-sbis dGe-'dun Chos-'phel, the Punakha *rDzong-dpon* at that time.^{li} Dge-'dun Chos-'phel's resentment soon led him to assassinate one of Ngag-dbang Rab-brtan's brothers, an attendant upon the son of the deceased *Zhabs-drung*.^{lii} Meanwhile, their military successes in this war earned for the 'Obs-mtsho additional rewards from the third *sDe-srid*, whereas he severely scolded the Punakha Dzongpon dGe-'dun Chos-'phel for his jealous behavior. Consequently, in 1680 dGe-'dun Chos-'phel organized a *coup d'état* against the *sDe-srid* at Punakha.^{liii} The rabble crowd accused him and his other Tibetan expatriates of bringing nothing but hardships and warfare to Bhutan. The Bhutanese had been forced against their will to quarry stones to build the great fortress *rDzongs*, countless stupas and *mani* walls. The *sDe-srid* defended himself and the *Zhabs-drung* as having brought prosperity and religion to the country, but in disgust at what he saw as ignorance and ingratitude he resigned from office, warning his assailants of the bad *karma* which their actions would surely bring.

With the *sDe-srid* out of the way, the rebels next turned with vengeance against his allies from 'Obs-mtso. The state minister Ngag-dbang Rab-brtan was imprisoned at Wangdue Phodrang, publicly humiliated and shortly thereafter assassinated. His wife and two of their sons were driven into exile. It was only the intercession of the pious fourth *sDe-srid* bsTan-'dzin Rab-rgyas (r. 1680-1694) that stemmed the worst abuses, and temporarily restored the widow and her sons to their homes and property.^{liv}

Then, in 1688, dGe-'dun Chos-'phel requested permission to retire from his post as *rDzong-dpon* of Punakha. bsTan-'dzin Rab-rgyas assented only when dGe-'dun Chos-'phel agreed to retire to the fortress-monastery of Wangdue Phodrang, several miles south of Punakha, instead of to his ancestral estate

near his enemies at Amorimu.^{lv} Although supposedly now settled into a life of meditation, dGe-'dun Chos-'phel in fact continued to involve himself in politics. In 1694 he emerged from retirement and led a faction demanding that bsTan-'dzin Rab-rgyas resign as *sDe-srid* and remain only in a spiritual capacity. But bsTan-'dzin Rab-rgyas, suffering from failing eyesight and other illnesses, decided to retire altogether, whereupon dGe-'dun Chos-'phel got himself appointed as *sDe-srid*. Soon the feud resumed with vigor. On New Year's day of 1700, a dispute over a broken marriage commitment resulted in *sDe-srid* dGe-'dun Chos-'phel imprisoning the 'Obs-mtsho *chos-rje* Phun-tshogs on trumped up charges. This was followed by an aborted act of revenge to dethrone the *sDe-srid*. When that coup attempt failed another purge of the 'Obs-mtsho people took place, the family estate was burned, and the aged widow and her sons were again driven into exile near India while other family members were imprisoned or assassinated.^{lvi} The dispute finally went into remission only when dGe-'dun Chos-'phel died, in 1701.

From 'Obs-mtsho to Amorimu

In the course of these events (or perhaps because of them) the family abandoned once and for all the monastery and estates at 'Obs-mtsho and re-established themselves at Amorimu, where they continue to this day.^{lvii} The new government again restored the widow and remaining sons from exile, and even rebuilt their home by way of apology and in honor of the family's relationship to the respected first *sDe-srid* of Bhutan.^{lviii} But the 'Obs-mtsho *chos-rje* (hereafter of Amorimu) went on to regenerate themselves in subsequent decades, in a way that illustrates an important aspect of the adaptive interplay between religion and politics characteristic of Bhutanese society. Over the next three hundred years, the family refocused its energies on achieving prominence primarily within the religious sphere, where one may speculate that it felt less exposed to the direct heat of political competition. The seminal figures in this transformation were offspring of the assassinated chief minister Ngag-dbang Rab-

brtan, namely his eldest son *Byams-mgon* Ngag-dbang rGyal-mtshan (1647-1732) and his grandson *chos-rje* Ngag-dbang 'Phrin-las (1712-1770). Both led active religious lives, and contributed immensely to the status and scale of Se'u-la monastery. Each gave rise to a lineage of hitherto unrecognized reincarnations who, by tradition, have taken birth as scions of the former 'Obs-mtsho *chos-rje*, now of Amorimu. Although in the modern era Se'u-la has become a property within the state monastic system, by convention it remains the seat of these two incarnation lineages and thus closely linked to its founding family. In effect, what seems to have happened is that this ancient family of hereditary *chos-rje* transformed that role and title into one passed down through reincarnation and spiritual authority at Se'u-la.^{lix}

The Career of Se'u-la *Byams-mgon* Ngag-dbang rGyal-mtshan (1647-1732)

Byams-mgon Ngag-dbang rGyal-mtshan was born at Amorimu. As a boy he witnessed at Cheri the funeral of his great-uncle, the illustrious first *sDe-srid*. He entered the state of 'Brug-pa establishment through the workings of the monk tax, and in 1662 was among the last recorded novices to receive initiation at the hand of whomever was posing behind the screen as the now deceased *Zhabs-drung Rin-po-che* (whose death was still being concealed).^{lx} A natural talent for learning and for the arts quickly brought him to the attention of *rJe mKhan-po* bSod-nams 'Od-zer and of the 4th *sDe-srid* bsTan-'dzin Rab-rgyas, whom he served as an attendant. As a monk in the state monastery he helplessly witnessed his family's sufferings at the hands of political enemies, commanding no means to prevent them. But whereas lay members of his family served as generals and ministers, Ngag-dbang rGyal-mtshan pioneered a unique diplomatic role in service to the Bhutanese state, namely that of 'monk ambassador.' Appointed by bsTan-'dzin Rab-rgyas, his mission to king Sangs-rgyas brTan-pa of Derge in eastern Tibet took place over the years 1688-1695, in response to repeated requests from that king who had heard of the

mystery of the *Zhabs-drung's* long 'retreat' and wished to meet his personal representative.^{lxi} The equally fascinating account of his subsequent mission to the court of king Nyi-ma rNam-rgyal of Ladakh, his pilgrimage to Lahore in search of Buddhist artifacts, and of his imprisonment on return through Tibet provides important insight into the challenges attending Bhutan's attempt to formulate intimate religio-political ties with the states of western Tibet.^{lxii}

In between these missions Ngag-dbang rGyal-mtshan served as tutor to three of the young incarnations being groomed as spiritual successors of *Zhabs-drung* Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal as well as his own future biographer, the historian Shakya Rin-chen. Late in life he was also appointed to serve as Paro Penlop, though he resigned after only one year out of strong distaste for politics. In 1715 he founded the monastic residence of Chos'-khor rDo-rje-gdan at Se'u-la, where he retired and began the religious instruction of his nephew *Chos-rje* Ngag-dbang 'Phrin-las (1712-1770), who later succeeded him as monastic head. In his last years he completed the paintings and sculptures for his new monastery and constructed the magnificent memorial *mchod-rten* for the remains of his deceased teacher bSod-nams 'Od-zer which still stands near the entryway of Se'u-la.^{lxiii}

Successors of the 'Obs-mtsho *Byams-mgon* and Amorimu *Chos-rje*

The line of incarnations of *Byams-mgon* Ngag-dbang rGyal-mtshan remains to this day one of the most respected in Bhutan. They and the rebirths of his nephew *chos-rje* Ngag-dbang 'Phrin-las have periodically filled elite roles in the service of the Bhutan government, including one *sDe-srid* and no fewer than five abbots of the state monk body. Except for the 5th incarnation who died in his youth, each of the Amorimu *chos-rje* incarnations had risen from their monastic seat at Se'u-la to be elected to the high religious office of rJe mKhan-po. Similar honor has been extended to the rebirths

of *Byams-mgon Rin-po-che*, whose last reincarnation died in 1991/2.

Given the destruction and family vicissitudes of the 17th century, we may never have a detailed early genealogy such as that which Lam gSang-sngags has prepared for the gNyang lineage.^{lxiv} For now, we are dependent on the unpublished booklet about Se'u-la by the present Khenpo Karma Tshering, and on Lopon dGe'dun Rin-chen's outline of the two incarnation lines in his supplement to the 17th century history of Bhutan called *Lho'i chos 'byung*. In the balance of this paper I shall briefly summarize these two lineages.

1. The *Byams-mgon Rin-po-che* of Se'u-la Chos-'khor rDo-rje-gdan^{lxv}

1.1 Ngag-dbang rGyal-mtshan (1647-1732)

Discussed above.

1.2 Ye-shes rDo-rje (1757-1805)

He was born at Ba-lang-nang in the district of Goenshari. It was not until he was 25 years old that *chos-rje* Ngag dbang 'phrin las (1712-1770), nephew of Ngag dbang rgyal mtshan, recognized him as his uncle's rebirth.^{lxvi} He served as the 17th *rJe mKhan-po* for 6 years (1791-1797). After retirement, he continued to teach until his death.

1.3 'Jam-dbyangs bsTan-'dzin, *alias* bDud-'joms rGyal-mtshan (1831-1855)

He was born into the family lineage of Amorimu. The monastic faction installed him at age 24 (1854) as the 42nd '*Brug sDe-srid*, following the strife-filled years of the previous *sDe-srid* Dam-chos Lhun-grub. However, the Dzongpon of Thimphu, Umadeva, forced the reinstatement of the previous *sDe-srid*, Dam-chos

Lhun-grub, and so for a time there were two men in this position. During his shared reign a dispute arose with the British over alleged Bhutanese depredations along the southern Duars, committed by the servants of the Dewangiri Dzongpon. It seems that he attempted to play an honest role in settling these disputes, but the emerging power at this time was the Tongsa Penlop 'Jigs-med rNam-rgyal (1825-1881), father of the first king Ugyen Wangchuk. This *Byams-mgon sprul-sku* died in office in 1855.^{lxvii}

1.4 rGyal-mtshan

Died young, before he could be installed at the monastic seat.

1.5 rGya-mtsho (d. 1991/92)^{lxviii}

Dge-'dun Rin-chen writes, “this man has not proven of any value for the religion, since his disciples, out of bad *karma*, have turned away from him.”^{lxix}

2. The Incarnation Lineage of the A-mo-ri-mu Chos-rje^{lxx}

2.1 Chos-rje Ngag-dbang 'Phrin-las (1712-1770)

He was born at Amorimu and took religious vows from his uncle Ngag-dbang rGyal-mtshan and from his own father. He became an accomplished yogin. He served as a teacher in Nepal for a time, then returned to Bhutan and assumed the abbatial see at his uncle's monastery as *byams-mgon bla ma'i gdan tshab*. Upon the death of Ngag-dbang rGyal-mtshan, he enlarged the monastery and built a new temple building at Se'u-la known as the Byams-pa'i lha-khang. Following a stint as *rDo-rje-slob-dpon* in the state monk body, he was appointed as the 11th *rJe mKhan-po* in 1762. He retired in 1769 and died the following year. He

sponsored the writing of *Byams-mgon* Ngag-dbang rGyal-mtshan's biography by Shakya-rin-chen.

2.2 Chos-rje Shakya rGyal-mtshan (1790-1836)

He was born into the Amorimu family line, and studied with *Byams-mgon* Ye-shes rDo-rje, mKhan-chen 'Jam-dbyangs rGyal-mtshan and others. He was nominated as the 24th *rJe mKhan-po* in 1831 and served for 5 years. He died in office at the age of 47 (1836).

2.3 Chos-rje 'Phrin-las rGyal-mtshan (1839-1898)

He was born into the Amorimu family line. He studied with Tshul-khrims rGyal mtshan and others. He was appointed as the 42nd *rJe mKhan-po* in 1886, serving for two years, and served a second term as the 44th *rJe mKhan-po* from 1889 to 1891. He constructed and performed the artwork for the third major temple building at Se'u-la, known as the sKu-'bag Lha-khang. He died there in 1898.

2.4 Chos-rje Ngag-dbang 'Phrin-las *phyi-ma* (1916-1950)

He was also born into the Amorimu family line, and was a student of *sLob-dpon* dPal 'byor and *Yongs-'dzin mTshan-slob* dNgos-grub, and also of *rigs-bdag* Srid-zhi rNam-rgyal. He became a fully ordained monk at the age of 25, and was appointed as the 60th *rJe mKhan-po* in 1940. He served for 6 years, then retired in 1946. He died at the early age of 35. He was a teacher of the author of *LCB2*.

2.5 Ye-shes dNgos-grub (1951-1983)^{lxxi}

He was the son of Tshering Zangmo of Amorimu and Sangay of Kabjisa. He studied with *sLob-dpon* mKha'-

'gro of sTod-pa'i-sa (Punakha valley), *rJe mKhan* 'Phrin-las Lhun-grub, *rJe mKhan* dGe-'dun Rin-chen, *rJe mKhan* bsTan-'dzin Don-grub, and *Grub-dbang* bSod-nams bZang-po. He took full ordination and is said to have achieved complete meditative accomplishment.

2.6 Mi-pham Chos-kyi-nyin-byed (b. 1983)

He was born at Amorimu to Namgay Zangpo and Wangmo, younger sister of Gup Bangay. His teachers have included his cousin Karma Tshering, Khenpo of Se'u-la, and *slob-dpon* Jagith (ex *dBu-mdzad* of the central monk body of Bhutan). He received special teachings (*gdams-sngags*) from *rJe mKhan* dGe-'dun Rin-chen and from *sprul-sku* 'Jigs-med Chos-grags. He presently resides at Se'u-la monastery where his training continues.

Notes:

¹ The present paper is reprinted, with permission of the editor, from the forthcoming *Proceedings of the 8th Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies, Bloomington, Indiana (USA) 25-31 July, 1998*. This study benefited greatly from a brief visit to Punakha valley (Bhutan) in September, 1999, during which I was able to follow up several lines of inquiry with representatives of the lineage of 'Obs-mtsho presently residing at Punakha, at Se'u-la monastery and at the ancestral estate in the village of Amorimu. In particular I would like to acknowledge the hospitality and informed cooperation of Gup Bangay of Punakha, his father Jagar of Amorimu, his son Lopon Karma Tshering (Khenpo of the Se'u-la Shedra), and his nephew Lopon Kinlay Dorji, present head of the ancestral home at Amorimu. The family members express great pride in their ancestors and their historic contributions to Bhutan. I would also like to thank Dasho Tsewang Rixin of Thimphu and Karma Ura, Director of the Centre for Bhutan Studies, for facilitating this visit. Lopon Karma Tshering kindly made available for my use his unpublished booklet on the history and teaching curriculum of Se'u-la monastery. Appreciation is also due to my field assistants in Bhutan Tashi Lhendup and Karma Dorji.

¹ I refer here to such cluster toponyms as *Wang tsho chen brgyad* "The eight communities of the Wang," *Bum thang sde bzhi* "The four districts of Bumthang," *sPa ro bar skor tsho drug* "The six Bar-skor settlements of Paro" and many others (a recent partial listing of these is provided by Lopon Pemala in *BSGM*: 188). On the *Wang tsho chen brgyad* see M. Aris, "'The admonition of the thunderbolt cannon-ball' and its place in the Bhutanese New Year festival," *BSOAS* vol. 39/3, 1976: 625).

¹ Aris (1979): xxv, has expressed some surprise at the apparent sense of unity implied by this term for the Bhutan region, first encountered in a Tibetan text of 1431. But one must at least question whether a name emphasizing four nodes necessarily implies any particular degree of centralization, especially in the absence of clear identification of those nodes from an authentic, early source.

¹ The 11th month of the wood-ox year (1625/26), and not 1616 when he fled from Tibet, is the date given in his biography when *Zhabs-drung Rin-po-che* emerged from a three-year retreat at Cheri (*lCags-ri*) monastery and reached the definite decision to found a new state based on the familiar Tibetan principle of *chos srid gnyis ldan*. (Ardussi [1977]: 212; *LNDRR*, *Nga*: 52.b, 65.b).

¹ Aris (1988): 15-16. An important issue not addressed in Aris's analysis is the distinction between *chos-rje* as a hereditary title of the head of a *chos rdzong* (which in Bhutanese usage can mean the ancestral home of a religious lineage) and its more restricted use for only the reincarnate descendants within a family line. The history of 'Obs-mtsho illustrates a case where the usage seems to have changed from the former to the latter, in the course of time.

¹ Our knowledge of the history of the 'Obs-mtsho family depends heavily on the *rnam-thar* of Se'u-la *Byams-mgon Rin-po-che* Ngag-dbang rGyal-mtshan (1647-1732) composed during 1733-35 by the 9th *rJe mKhan-po* of Bhutan, Shakya-rin-chen (1710-1767). This unique text (hereafter *LNDRM*) is one of the most important historical sources for political events in Bhutan during the 17th and early 18th centuries. Another biography of Ngag-dbang rGyal-mtshan written in 1731 by the 1st *Phyogs-las sprul-sku* Phyogs-las-rnam-rgyal (*mKhas btsun bzang po'i bdag nyid mtshungs med chos kyi rjes* [sic] *ngag dbang rgyal mtshan kyi nam par thar pa'i rgya mtsho ngo mtshar gyi rba rlabs mngon par g.yo ba*) omits discussion of his clan and family background. (I wish to thank Françoise Pommaret for providing me a copy of this text).

¹ On the lDan-ma clan (*rus*), see E. Gene Smith (1969): 16; R.A. Stein (1961): 57, 75-77.

¹ PKTY: 177.a, 188.b. lDan-ma rTse-mang (~bTsan-mang) was the redactor of the *Thang-yig-chen-mo*, one of the sources of part two of the *bKa'-thang-sde-nga* (rGyal-po'i-bka'i-thang-yig: 2.a, 92.a). In the Tibetan history *mKhas-pa'i-dga'ston* (Ja, f. 125.a), he is mentioned as one of three senior translators (*lo-tsa-ba rgan gsum*) at bSam-yas under the tutelage of Padma Sambhava. He was also the scholar to whom Padma Sambhava dictated the famous legend of king Sindhara-dza (Sindhu Raja), for later rediscovery by one of lDan-ma rTse-mang's incarnations (translations in Aris [1979]: 43-48, and Olschak [1979]: 59-88; the MS is reproduced on pp.181-193).

¹ This line effectively began with rGyal-sras Padma 'Phrin-las (1564-1642?), grandson of Padma Gling-pa and founder of the Bhutanese Nyingmapa seat at Gantey monastery (sGang-steng gSang-sngags-chos-gling) near Wangdue Phodrang.

¹ The distinctive cursive script of Bhutan called *mg-yogs-yig* ("joyi") bears a close resemblance to the script of Tibetan documents from Tun Huang (examples are reproduced in van Driem [1998]: 51, and Olschak [1979]: 198-215).

¹ Guru bKra-shis, *Gu-bkra'i chos-'byung*: 173.

¹ Bikrama Jit Hasrat, *History of Bhutan. Land of the Peaceful Dragon*. Thimphu, Education Dept. of Bhutan, 1980: 30.

¹ Giuseppe Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, vol. 2: 662ff; Franco Ricca & Erberto Lo Bue, *The Great Stupa of Gyantse*. London: Serindia Publications, 1993: 14ff.

¹ dGe-bsnyen (chen-po) was the generic name of several local deities in the greater Himalayan region (see René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, London: Oxford University Press, 1956, p. 222). dGe-bsnyen chen-po Jag-pa Me-len was one of the chief local protectors in western Bhutan. His principal residence is the *dgon-khang* at bDe-chen-phug near Paro (see F. Pommaret, "On local and mountain deities in Bhutan," Anne-Marie Blondeau & Ernst Steinkellner, ed., *Reflections of the Mountain*, Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996, pp. 44-45).

¹ LNDRM: 15.a-16.a: *dge bsnyen chen pos spyir sangs rgyas bstan pa dang sgos sgrub brgyud snying po / khyad par chos rje'i slob brgyud bsrung bar khas blangs so //*.

¹ LNDRM: 15.b: *bu khyod kyī gdul bya'i zhing nyi ma lho phyogs su yod pas der song la dad ldan gyi tshogs pa re byung na 'ang skyongs shig khyod kyis 'gro ba la phan thogs par yod do zhes lung bstan //*.

¹ LNDRM: 14.a-b; Roerich, *Blue Annals*: 664f. On the life of Pha-jo, cf. Aris (1979): 168-170 and Ardussi (1977): 119-124.

¹ The name 'Obs-mtsho is of unknown origin. Its ruins are situated on a ridge several miles below mGar-sa rDzong near the track to Punakha, which lies two days' trekking distance to the south. The

date suggested for this foundation is based on the passage in *LNDRM*: 15.a-b, which places it shortly after the death of gTsang-pa rGya-ras.

¹ Dpal-sdings appears to have been located in the Khu-le valley of gTsang Myang-stod, which was also the birthplace of gTsang-pa rGya-ras (*LNDRM*: 17.a-b).

¹ *LNDRM*: 16.b-17.a.

¹ *Sangs rgyas dbon ras dar ma seng ge'i rnam thar*: 6.a, 14.a (reprinted in the *RKSP*, vol. 2). For a discussion of the various editions of this collection, see the preface by E. Gene Smith in Lokesh Chandra (1969), *The Life of the Saint of Gtsan*§, New Delhi, I.A.I.C.: 32ff.

¹ This *lha-khang* (actually a *mgon-khang*) is said to be one of the most sacred such locations in western Bhutan. There would appear to be a connection between the cult of sGo-mo and that of dGe-bsnyen, whom *grub-thob* gTer-khung-pa subjugated in Tibet. Images of gTer-khung-pa are found at rNam-rgyal-rtse *mgon-khang*, the three temple buildings at Se'u-la proper, and in the private chapel at Amorimu.

¹ Among these are included a beautiful set of statues of the sixteen arhants (*gnas-brtan bcu-drug*) attributed to the renowned expatriate Tibetan artist *sprul-sku* rDzing (d. ca.1673), and a magnificent set of appliqué thangkas of *Byams-mgon* Ngag-dbang rGyal-mtshan and other religious masters, probably dating from the 18th century. The three main temples also contain fine mural paintings that are 18th – 19th century.

¹ *LNDRM*: 18.b; 'Jam dbyangs ye shes rin chen gyi rnam thar: 5.a-b (in *RKSP*, vol. 3).

¹ *LNDRM*: 19.a.

¹ Pha-jo 'Brug-sgom-zhig-po's dates have yet to be worked out completely satisfactorily. Those given here are ones proposed recently by the Bhutanese historian Lupon Pemala (*BSGM*: 80-87), who also gives 1218 as the date of his entry to Bhutan. Other sources support birth dates as early as 1162 (Aris [1976]: 603), 1184 (*LCB2*: 92.a), or as late as 1208 (*Pha-jo*: 2.a).

¹ *Pha jo*: 9.a-b: *Khams nas khams phrug cig yong ba yod de nga dang mi 'phrad pa 'dug khyed kyis rjes su bzung nas u rgyan gyi mkhan po padma 'byung gnas kyi zhabs kyis bcags (9.b) pa'i yul phyogs nyi ma lho rong du btang zhig / sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa la phan thogs par yong ngo gsungs yod de /*. There was apparently even a third Bhutanese *chos-rje* lineage going back to a disciple of gTsang-pa rGya-ras named Pa-ri-ba, namely the Sha-la-brag Chos-rje descended from 'Jam-dbyangs Chos-kyi-don-grub who was Pa-ri-ba's *dbon-sras* (Aris [1988]: 15 fn).

¹ The *rnam-thar* of Pha-jo 'Brug-sgom-zhig-po is a *gter-ma* text uncovered in about 1623 (Aris [1979]: 170 suggests a different date).

¹ *Pha-jo*: 24.a-27.a; *LCB2*: 92.b-98.b; Aris (1979): 169f; Arducci (1977): 121-122.

¹ *LNDRR*, *Nga*: 4.a-b; *LCB2*: 98.b; *BSGM*: 80-85. Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal's biographer justifies his subject's use of black magic against enemies based on the model set by Pha-jo 'Brug-sgom-zhig-po (*LNDRR*, *Nga*: 21.a-29.b).

¹ *LCB2*: 97.b.

¹ It is tempting to identify Wang-ri-kha with the hamlet of Wang-kha, located several miles up the Pho-chu valley northeast of Punakha. However, my informants seemed uncomfortable making this connection, and it seems more likely that Wang-ri-kha will turn out to be located closer to 'Obs-mtsho.

¹ *'Jam pa'i dbyangs blo gros seng ge'i rnam thar*: 2.b-4.a.

¹ *Chos rje shes rab seng ge'i rnam thar*: 2.b (in *RKSP*, vol. 3). The mother was one *Sras-mo* bSod-nams-'dren, descendent of Pha-jo's son Nyi-ma.

¹ *'Jam dbyangs ye shes rin chen gyi rnam thar*: 4.b (in *RKSP*, vol. 3).

¹ *LNDRM*: 18.b.

¹ *rJe rin po che shes rab bzang po'i rnam thar*: 2.b (in *RKSP*, vol. 3). Her name was Ma-gcig Nam-mkha'-dpal-'dren.

¹ After gTsang-pa rGya-ras, the second incarnate of this lineage was *rGyal-dbang Kun-dga'* dPal-'byor (1428-1476), who belonged to the ruling house of Rwa-lung and was active in western Bhutan. His next two reincarnations, however, were born into Tibetan families that had no ties to Bhutan. Recognition of the fourth incarnation was disputed between supporters of *Zhabs-drung* Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal and a rival candidate, which led directly to his flight to Bhutan in 1616. (E. Gene Smith (1969), Introduction to Lokesh Chandra, ed., *Tibetan Chronicle of Padma-dkar-po*. New Delhi, IAIC, 1968: 2-3.

¹ The nearest monastery founded by a Rwa-lung hierarch seems to have been 'Brug 'Phrin-las-sgang, founded south of Punakha by Ngag-dbang Chos-rgyal, cousin of 'Brug-pa Kun-legs. A small monastery named Zab-gsal dgon-pa was also founded in dGon-yul by the hierarch 'Jam-dbyangs Kun-dga' Seng-ge near his wife's village.

¹ *Sems dpa' chen po padma dkar po'i rnam thar thugs rje chen po'i zlos gar*: 34.b-35.a (in *RKSP*, vol. 4)

¹ The original biography of the *Zhabs-drung* (dated 1675) by the exiled Tibetan author gTsang mKhan-chen merely notes his travelling to Bhutan under escort through the upper valleys of Punakha, then southward as far as 'Brug 'Phrin-las-sgang below Punakha (*LNDRR*, *Nga*: 11.b-12.a). The earliest notice of the role of the 'Obs-mtsho

lama appears to be in the brief biography of the *Zhabs-drung* written (no later than 1759) by *rJe* Sakya-rin-chen for inclusion in an edition of the *dKar-brgyud gser-'phreng* (*Dkar rgyud kyi nram thar gser gyi 'phreng ba lta bu las dpal ldan bla ma mthu chen chos kyi rgyal po ngag dbang mam par rgyal ba'i skabs*: 17.b-18.a, from vol. 1 of his *Collected Works*).

¹ LCB: 23.b

¹ LCB: 92.a-93.b; SDE-SRID 4: 58.b - 59.a.

¹ LCB: 92.a-b. At the time of the *Zhabs-drung's* arrival in Bhutan, we are told that the *sDe-srid* was already put in charge of the treasury and civil affairs “ *nang phyag mdzod kyi gnyer dang phyi 'jig rten gyi sgrigs nram gzahag byed mkhan thams* (92.b) *cad dbu mdzad chen mor bcol bas /....*”

¹ SDE-SRID 4: 58.b - 59.a.

¹ LCB: 50.a-b, 92.a-b.

¹ Aris (1979): 246; Ardussi (1977): 247-48, 285-56.

¹ LNDRR, Nga: 80.b; LCB: 42.a-b; SDE-SRID 4: 32.a; Ardussi (1977): 234.

¹ LCB: 48.b; SDE-SRID 4: 201.a.

¹ LNDRM: 33.a.

¹ LNDRM: 45.b - 48.a.

¹ This individual was *Drung* Ngag-dbang 'Brug-grags, whose death we place ca. 1677. Sorrow at this event led Ngag-dbang rGyal-mtshan to seek spiritual retreat at Cheri monastery in the year *me mo bya* (LNDRM: 48.a-b; however, this must be an error for *me sbrul*: 1677).

¹ LNDRM: 60.a-61.b.

¹ LNDRM: 66.a-67.b, 73.b.

¹ SDE-SRID 4: 201.a.

¹ LNDRM: 110.b-111.b.

¹ There is nothing in the written literature that discusses the specific timing or circumstances of the migration from 'Obs-mtsho, and the Amorimu family apparently preserves no oral traditions. Moreover, they are not the only family that abandoned 'Obs-mtsho at this time. Damcho Dorji of mGar-sa, a lawyer with the High Court of Bhutan, related to me an oral tradition attributing his family's departure to more supernatural causes. According to this account, during the performance of certain rituals at 'Obs-mtsho the ceremonial *gtor-ma* were several times seen to be carried off by ravens flying in the direction of mGar-sa *rdzong*, motivating his ancestors to move there. He further states that mGar-sa families with historic ties to 'Obs-mtsho still make an annual trek to the ruins where certain rites are performed (interview in Paro 25 Sept., 1999). The connection, if any,

between the families of mGar-sa and Amorimu remains to be explored.

¹ The ancestral home now located at Amorimu is said to be the one constructed at this time. It is a large, traditional Bhutanese farmhouse having substantial rooms on three levels, with an attached kitchen building. A family altar room with a shrine to *grub-thob* gTer-khung-pa is found on the upper level. This private home is said to be the only one in Bhutan except that of the Dungkar *chos-rje* (the ancestral home of the present royal family, in Kurtoe) entitled to install a circular iron roof ornament (*ral-gri*) to mark its historic status (statement of Gup Bangay), although we did not observe it on the day of our visit. (Most private homes in Bhutan are surmounted by a single wooden sword, the conventional *ral-gri* roof ornament).

¹ Aris (*Ibid*: 20) calls this type of development one where the principle of the recognized rebirth was “used to strengthen and reinforce a lineage from within.” Worth further inquiry is the extent to which this development may also have affected patterns of patriliney versus matriliney in the area of inheritance. Information that I collected during brief interviews with the family in September, 1999, suggests that the estates at Amorimu are now passed down through daughters, who marry men from outside the family. The Amorimu *Chos-rje* incarnations are always born to one of these women. The one instance during the 18th century when the other incarnation, the *Byams-mgon Rin-po-che*, was recognized outside the core family, as the son of a Ladakhi king, created a significant problem whose resolution will be described below.

¹ *LNDRM*: 31.b. On the *Zhabs-drung*’s concealed death see Aris (1979): 233ff.

¹ *LNDRM*: 80.b-96.b

¹ dKon-mchog-bsod-nams (1994), vol. 1: 101; *LNDRM*: 127.a - 167.b. This mission took Ngag-dbang rGyal-mtshan to Ladakh, Zangskar, and Lahore, and provides a fascinating window into life in those territories. It is said that images of Ngag-dbang rGyal-mtshan are still to be found at sTag-sna monastery. (Tashi Rabgias [1984]: 282-287).

¹ *LNDRM*: 185.a-b. Chos-’khor rDo-rje-gdan is a beautiful hermitage overlooking the Punakha valley, and remains the residence of the presiding lama of Se’u-la. Several of *Byams-mgon* Ngag-dbang rGyal-mtshan’s original murals still adorn its walls.

¹ Bla-ma gSang-sngags, *’Brug gi smyos rabs gsal ba’i me long*, 1983. This work has been thoroughly reviewed in Michael Aris (1988).

¹ *LCB2*: 133.a - 135.b.

¹ An interesting story is told that the rebirth of Ngag-dbang rGyal-mtshan was first recognized as a prince of Ladakh. Hearing of this,

Ngag-dbang 'Phrin-las is said to have slapped the face of the protective deity sGo-mo, for having permitted this intrusion on what the Amorimu family treated as its prerogative. sGo-mo then transformed himself into a bee and flew to Ladakh, where he stung the prince and removed his conscious principle (*rnam-shes*). The prince died, and the bee flew back to Bhutan and injected the *rnam-shes* into the womb of a local woman, who gave birth to Ye-shes rDo-rje. A *gter* image of sGo-mo with crooked nose is still kept in the *mgon-khang* (oral account of Karma Tshering; see also the account in *LCB2*: 136.a).

¹ *BSGM*: 460-463; Aris (1994): 55-56.

¹ Date given in *Karma Tshering*.

¹ *LCB2*: 135.b.

¹ *LCB2*: 135.b - 137.b.

¹ *Karma Tshering*; interview with Karma Tshering on 20 Sept., 1999 at Se'u-la monastery and with Gup Bangay of Amorimu in Punakha, Bhutan, on 17 Sept., 1999.

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ANCIENT TRADE PARTNERS: BHUTAN, COOCH BIHAR AND ASSAM (17th - 19th centuries)

*Françoise Pommaret **

Abstract

Western writers have often projected the image of Bhutan as an isolated country, a kind of autarchic mountainous island. This article is an attempt to show that, in fact, Bhutan carried out a substantial trade with her southern neighbours – Bengal (Cooch Bihar) and Assam (Kamrup) – at least from the 17th century, if not earlier. This trade is documented in British reports and Bhutanese historical sources, although for the latter, references have been found dispersed in biographies. Bhutan also appears to have been influenced by the weaving and silk techniques of north-east India. Because of trade links and the fact that Cooch Bihar minted money for Bhutan, the latter was able to play a political role in Cooch Bihar until this region was taken over by the British in 1773. From that date, Bhutan was pressed by the British to open her roads to traders, as it was the shortest route to Tibet and Lhasa. However, Bhutan resisted but continued trading in North Bengal and Assam, selling horses, wool products, and musk, while importing cotton cloth, broadcloth, tools, spices and tobacco.

Through this trade with Cooch Bihar and Assam, and by acting as an intermediary for some of the Tibetan products, Bhutan did play her part in the commercial exchanges in north-east India.

Bhutan which practised a policy of isolation especially towards the West, was nevertheless engaged in commercial

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and political relations with her neighbours since a long time. Even though, for religious, cultural and geographic reasons, Tibet was the favoured destination, trade with the south was just as active. In this article we will examine the trade with Bhutan's immediate neighbours to the south: Cooch Bihar situated in the west and Kamrup situated in the east (which today are two Indian districts in West Bengal and Assam respectively). According to the Bhutanese Law Code of 1729^{lxxii}, two "Clerks for India" (*rGya drung*), were posted at the frontier with India, to the east and to the west. These posts show that, for the Bhutanese, the circulation of goods was large enough to justify the presence of these officials.

Research in this domain is difficult due to the lack of written sources on the subject in Bhutanese literature, which is essentially of a politico-religious nature. It is only through remarks scattered in some Bhutanese and Tibetan sources as well as the accounts and correspondence of British officials that we can reconstitute a picture, although still sketchy, of the links between Bhutan and her neighbours.

Cooch Bihar (Bengal)^{lxxiii}

According to Rhodes^{lxxiv}, during the reign of the Cooch Bihar King Nara Narayan (1555-1587), "there was a major trade route between Bengal and Tibet passing through Cooch Behar and Bhutan. This was recorded by the English merchant and traveller Ralph Fitch in 1583, who noted that musk, wool, agate, silk and pepper were purchased." After the 16th century, the *Narayani tanka*, called rupee by the British, which was probably first struck around 1583 and took its name after the dynasty, became the most used currency in Cooch Bihar, Assam and Bhutan.^{lxxv}

One of the first contacts mentioned in Bhutanese literature took place in the years 1619-20 when the hierach of Bhutan, the *Zhabs drung* Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651), at the request of one of his patrons Darchug Gyeltshen, went to Chapcha which is located to the south of Thimphu on the

route to Buxa Duar^{lxxvi} in Bengal. ^{lxxvii} His benefactor knew Prana Narayan (Pem Narayan according to Bhutanese sources) (1633-1665), the Raja of Cooch Bihar, and informed him that the *Zhabs drung* was in Chapcha. The Raja replied by sending the *Zhabs drung* a letter and gifts: silver trumpets, ivory, gold and silver coins and cloth. This is the first report of coins from Cooch Bihar reaching Bhutan.^{lxxviii}

To express his thanks, the *Zhabs drung* sent a friendly letter and gifts, including amulets, silk and Tibetan horses with saddles to the Raja. Later the *Zhabs drung* wrote to Prana Narayan asking him to convert to Buddhism. The Raja replied by sending him a volume of the *Prajnaparamita* composed in 8000 verses (*brGyad stong pa*) written on palm leaves. The Bhutanese obtained the right to raise taxes in a part of the territory of Cooch Bihar along their frontier near Buxa Duar.^{lxxix}

From this date the two states had close relations. When Tenzin Rabgye was appointed the 4th Temporal Ruler (*sDe srid*) of Bhutan in 1680, an emissary of the daughter of the late Raja Prana Narayan was present at the ceremony and presented 700 gold coins and 1000 silver coins.^{lxxx}

In 1682, Mahendra Narayan, the Raja of Cooch Bihar and great grandson of Prana Narayan, appealed for Bhutanese military aid to fight a Mughal expedition. This expedition had been launched by Aurangzeb who wanted to impose a tax on the small states of Bengal to finance his military campaign in the Deccan. Tenzin Rabgye sent two small detachments commanded by Zhidar, the "Chief of the Guests" (*mGron gnyer*) of the Paro dzong and Trinley Lhungrub, the chief of the Dalingkha dzong. It was at that time that a permanent Bhutanese representative, the Gya Pchila (*rGya spyi bla*), was posted in Cooch Bihar to look after Bhutanese interests.^{lxxxi}

The Mughal army routed the Cooch Bihar forces, which led to a conflict between the two branches of the Cooch Bihar

royal family. The Bhutanese found themselves involved and it was in their interest to support the ruling branch. However, their representative, Chamberlain (*gZims dpon*) Norbu drung, made an unsuccessful attempt to mediate between the two factions. Then the Bhutanese government sent a military detachment to support the ruling family.^{lxxxii} But this action proved to be of no use as the Raja of Cooch Bihar had to submit to the Mughals again in 1685.

However, these events show that Cooch Bihar and Bhutan had some political interaction and that both the branches of the royal family considered Bhutan as a potential ally. This view was confirmed in 1690 when Prince Rupa Narayan (1695-1715) of a collateral branch visited Bhutan and was officially received by Tenzin Rabgye at the Tashichhodzong fortress^{lxxxiii} in Thimphu. Presents comprising gold, silver, silk and horses were exchanged on this occasion. Rupa Narayan ascended to the throne in 1695 and the good relations between the two countries continued in the 18th century. They were further accentuated by the fact that coins from Cooch Bihar circulated in Bhutan and that Cooch Bihar minted coins for Bhutan, for which it took a commission. However, it is not yet known when the Bhutanese started having their coins minted in Cooch Bihar by sending silver ingots there.

This practice, which existed in 1785^{lxxxiv}, continued till 1789, when the British closed the Cooch Bihar mint. In 1783 S. Turner mentioned^{lxxxv} the "commodiousness of this small piece (the narainee, a base silver coin), the profits the people of Bhutan derive from their commerce with Cooch Bihar". The coins minted in Cooch Bihar didn't have a true monetary value in an economy based essentially on barter, but they were among the objects gifted by the Bhutanese rulers during the distribution of gifts (*man 'gyed*) to lay persons and monks. One such example is the distribution of 47,000 silver coins to all Bhutanese who paid taxes, officials, monks and soldiers during the enthronement of the *Zhabs drung* Jigme Dragpa in 1747.^{lxxxvi}

Since the 1650's Cooch Bihar had suffered revenue losses when the Malla kings of the Kathmandu valley had imposed themselves by force as the exclusive intermediaries for trade between Tibet and India. All merchandise had to compulsorily pass by the Kirong-Kathmandu or Kuti-Kathmandu routes.^{lxxxvii} Cooch Bihar had therefore all the more reasons to stay on good terms with Bhutan, with which it could continue to trade and obtain certain goods from Tibet.

It was also in the interest of Bhutan which, as we have seen, collected taxes in certain parts of Cooch Bihar, and which considered Cooch Bihar as a market for her products, to nurture these relations. An example, among others, is that of Sherab Wangchuk, the 13th Temporal Ruler (*sDe srid*) (r.1744-1763), whose generosity is known of from other sources, gave gifts, particularly cloth, horses and musk regularly to the Cooch Bihar royal family as well as the chieftains along the frontier.^{lxxxviii}

The products that Bhutan imported or exported transited mostly through Cooch Bihar, and through the town of Rangpur, which is in present day Bangladesh. In the 18th century Rangpur was the destination of the grand annual caravan, which came from western Bhutan. The most used entry point to Bhutan was Buxa Duar (Pasakha). During the time of the 13th Temporal Ruler Sherab Wangchuk cloth formed a large part of the imports (Benaras silk, cotton, English flannel) and exports (Tibetan wool, Chinese silk, Bhutanese cloth).^{lxxxix} Horses, lac (*Laccifer lacca*), madder used for dyeing, ivory, musk, gold dust, silver, amber, spices and tobacco (even though it was theoretically prohibited by the Law Code of 1729^{xc}) were also traded.

J.B Tavernier, a Frenchman who spent few years (1752-1765) roaming the region before becoming the governor of the French establishment of Chandernagor near Calcutta, was offered a small land in Cooch Bihar and built an earthen and bamboo fort a few miles south of Jaipalguri in

1757.^{xc} From there, he noted the presence of the Bhutanese coming to acquire salt. He also tried, without success, to trade with Bhutan. He remarked on the pinewood from Bhutan, which would have made great masts for ships, the fine woolen products, the aloe wood^{xcii}, and especially on the quality of the musk. However, he deplored that the Bhutanese did not hunt the musk deer enough to generate a good trade.^{xciii}

The French presence in this area was felt mostly through the Arcot rupees from which the Narayaini coins were made and, according to Rhodes, some Arcot rupees can still be found in Bhutan and Cooch Bihar.^{xciv}

During the later part of the 18th century, Bhutan became more and more involved and influential in Cooch Bihar affairs. In 1770 the king Dhairyendra Narayan (1765-1770 & 1775-1783) who had displeased the Bhutanese was deposed and taken prisoner to Punakha. The Bhutanese installed their own protege Rajendra Narayan on the throne but he died two years later. Upon his death, the Bhutanese installed Dharendra Narayan on the throne but this angered many at the Cooch Bihar court.

The anti-Bhutanese faction who considered Dhairyendra Narayan as a rightful heir, asked the assistance of the British, who seized the occasion to reinforce their domination over the region. Indeed, for the British, Cooch Bihar was technically under their dependency as the East India Company had governed Bengal since 1765.^{xcv} A military detachment, which was sent to Cooch Bihar, defeated the Bhutanese and in 1774 Dharyendra Narayan was released by Bhutan. Cooch Bihar passed under British sovereignty. Dharendra Narayan remained on the throne but died in 1775 and was replaced by Dharyendra Narayan.

It is therefore in 1773 that Cooch Bihar disappeared effectively as a state and the Bhutanese found themselves face to face with the British. A period marked by acrimony

and punctuated with skirmishes and wars settled over Bhutanese-British relationships which did not improve until the end of the 19th century.

Kamarupa / Kamrup (Assam)

The exchanges with this region allowed Bhutan to have access to raw material and technical know-how which she imported and transformed for her own use, as well as goods from Burma and Yunnan.

Kamarupa, or Kamrup, on the south-eastern border of Bhutan was a famous and prosperous kingdom since a long time and, in fact, included what would become Cooch Bihar in the 16th century.

Inscriptions dating from the 5th to 13th centuries indicate that agricultural products, specially the areca nut (*tambula*; latin *Areca catechu*) and betel (*pan*; Latin: *Piper betel*) were commonly traded and they would later become a favourite of the Bhutanese.^{xcvi} The cultivation of silk worms was also common.^{xcvii} The silk produced was mainly for local consumption. However, a part of the produce was exported and a small quantity reached eastern Bhutan, as is the case today.

Lahiri wrote: "From very ancient times, Kamarupa was noted for her textiles, sandal and *agaru* (Aloe trees) and it seems likely that there was a route, although no archaeological evidence is available, between Kamarupa and Pundravardhana (North Bengal) along which these commodities were taken to the main business centres in Northern India. It is also possible that the route did not terminate at Kamarupa, but may have extended eastwards to South China through the hills of Assam or Manipur and Upper Burma".^{xcviii}

The Ahoms defeated the Kamarupa in 1228. The Ahoms were Shans, a branch of Thais who came from Yunnan

through Burma. They gave their name, which became Assam, to this part of the Indian sub-continent, but the part of Assam to the south of the border with Bhutan retained the name Kamarupa, which was later abbreviated to Kamrup.

Kamarupa was on the trading route between south-west China and India. Even though the existence of this route seems well established, its importance as a trading route and its age are controversial. Lahiri writes "There is nothing to suggest that this route was in vogue in the late centuries BC or the early centuries AD [...] Clear historical light on this route is available for the first time in the 7th - 8th centuries AD when Hieun Tsang and Jia Dan wrote their records".^{xcix}

Hieun Tsang, the famous Chinese Buddhist pilgrim who visited what he called Ka-ma lu-po learnt from the people of Kamarupa that the south-west borders of Sichuan " were distant about two months journey, but the mountains and rivers were hard to pass, there were pestilential vapours and poisonous snakes and herbs".^c The route existed and was known but was less than engaging!

In an earlier article Liebenthal affirms that a route; the "Tsang-k'o route" existed before the 7th century AD: "Before 644, perhaps already much earlier, there existed a route leading into north-eastern Assam (Kamarupa) from Shu (Szechuan). It began in the Yun-ch'ang district and led north to the frontier which was always formed by the Chin-sha-chiang (the upper Yangtse river). Then it led west, perhaps through the Shih-men pass into Po-nan, on the western side of the Mekong. Further west, it must have passed the Namkin range before descending into the Brahmaputra valley near modern Sadiya [east Assam]".^{ci} However, Liebenthal added: "Pilgrims to the holy places of Buddhism therefore tried to bypass Tibet in the south. They succeeded in some cases, but the Tsang-k'o route never became a trade route".^{cii}

Lahiri makes the same remarks, based, among others sources, on more recent documents: "For an insight into the natures of routes and the mechanism of trade contact through them, we have sifted some British records of the 19th century. There is, of course, a clear picture of routes in these records but the routes by themselves do not suggest significant contact and trade. These routes were not always used for regular commercial traffic, and although there was a certain amount of interchange of goods throughout this region, this was achieved through a system of inter-community barter".^{ciii}

Even though it was short, and its existence confirmed by Chinese travellers in the 7th and 8th centuries, this route does not appear to have developed as an important commercial axis because of its natural difficulties. However, it is certain that a certain amount of merchandise was exchanged between the two countries via Burma by inter-community barter as well as by long distance caravans, through the initiative of enterprising merchants. As for the techniques of silk production, it propagated along this route from south-east China to north-east India at the beginning of the Christian era.^{civ}

Centuries later, in the 19th century, when maritime trade was well established between Calcutta and China, this route was still being used: "Assamese merchants also went to Yunnan in China by the line of trade through Sadiya, Bisa and across the Patkoi range of mountains, and through the Hukong valley to the town of Munkong from where they ascended by the Irrawady to a place called Catmow. The goods were disembarked at Catmow from where they were conveyed on mules over a range of mountainous country inhabited by the Shans into the Chinese province of Yunnan".^{cv}

Regional trade was very active as Captain Welsh who led a British military expedition to Assam (1792- 1794) reports. A list of merchandise drawn up by this officer in 1794

indicates that exports of the mountainous regions of Assam existed: "From the eastern confines of Sadiya, there were cotton, copper, spring salt and Agar (Aloe wood); from the southern confines, the Nagas brought cotton, luckibilla (a silk cloth), toat-bound (a silk cloth), and Kapor (embroidered silk cloth)".^{cvi}

It is known that the Kapor; the "Kavach Kapor", was a cloth used as a talisman-cloth by Ahom warriors when they went to war.^{cvi} The term "Kapor" is probably the same as "Kapur", used in eastern Bhutan to designate a raw silk cloth with supplementary-warp threads.

The Indian Marwari merchants were already present in this region of Upper Assam in 1838 and very active, as Captain Pemberton remarked in his *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*: "[There were] Merwaree merchants from the western extremity of India at Sadiya. These merchants imported broadcloth, muslin, longcloth, coloured handkerchiefs, chintzes, and various other kinds of cloths, salt and opium, liquor, glass and crockery ware, tobacco, betel nut and rice for the troops".^{cvi}

Another route also contributed to commercial exchanges in the region: the Mon yul corridor. It was the shortest route linking the south of Tibet to the Assam plains. It passed through Tshona dzong (mTsho sna rdzong) and Tawang (rTa dbang) to the east of Bhutan.^{cix}

This sketch of trade routes in north-east India allows to visualise the age old exchanges and the commercial context which the Bhutanese found in this region. Although they were quite isolated by the mountains, which made access to the plains difficult, this did not prevent them from reaching the plains. Historical sources attest to ancient relations, which existed between eastern Bhutan and Assam. This Bhutanese source is the "Gyalrig" (*rGyal rigs*) written by the historian monk Ngawang in 1728 who relates the ancient history of eastern Bhutan.

According to this text it appears that on numerous occasions clan chieftains from eastern Bhutan, and particularly the Wang ma clan, whose land holdings are listed, had fiscal and survey rights on the Assam Duars.^{cx} The dates are not very precise but could go as far back as the 12th century. This implies that products from Assam, particularly textiles arrived in Bhutan in relatively ancient times. The "Gyelrig" even mentions a place, which seemed to be in eastern Bhutan, where a market had been established: "A market was established at Bhumpayer and the Atsaras of India, the Tibetans, the Khampas and all the people of Monyul gathered there".^{cx}

Other than the political links, which existed between the chieftains of eastern Bhutan and Assam, some Bhutanese travelled to Assam for religious and commercial reasons, the two being often combined. The people from the east used to go on pilgrimage to Assam in winter. Hajo, near Gauhati on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra was and still is a Buddhist pilgrimage site, which, according to local belief, is Kusinagara, the site of Buddha's historical "death". It is interesting to note that the site was opened apparently at the end of the 16th century by Ngarig Gyelpo, a chieftain of eastern Bhutan and his religious master. The "Gyelrig" explains that "the Lama Tashi Wang and the chief of the Yodung wang ma clan, both of whom were patron and chaplain, opened the route to the sacred sanctuary of Kusinagara, in India, in such a way that in our days it is the meeting place of pilgrims from India, Tibet, Kham and (of all the regions) below Toe Ngari (western Tibet)".^{cxii}

As for the site of Singri (Shing ghi ri), thirty kilometres to the west of Tezpur in Upper Assam and mentioned by the great master Jigme Lingpa in the 18th century^{cxiii}, it was a pilgrimage site for Tibetans and Bhutanese at least since the 14th century.^{cxiv}

Hajo was from the 17th century a thriving pilgrimage and trading place in Assam. The town was holy for the Hindus,

the Muslims and the Buddhists, which gave it a cosmopolitan population. The Muslims practised metal casting and the nearby town of Sualkuchi became an important centre of silk trade.^{cxv}

Trade, linked among others, to pilgrimage, was active because in the 19th century^{cxvi} "a person called the Wazir Barua, of the Kalita family, had a hereditary charge of the intercourse with Bhutan. He lived at Siliambari, one day's journey north from the house of the Darang Raja. He had some lands, and paid nothing to the king except presents. All the messengers and traders of Bhutan, all servants of the Deva Raja (Temporal ruler of Bhutan), must first go to Siliambari. The Barua there levied no duties, but received presents in order to prevent his throwing impediments in the way of business, and no one was allowed to purchase at Siliambari without employing him as a broker. The Bhutias [= Bhutanese] were allowed to take a part of their goods for disposal to Hajo which they visited every winter, being a place of sacred pilgrimage".

Speaking of trade between Assam and the neighbouring countries, including Bhutan, Bogle wrote in 1775 that "the Bhutanese, the inhabitants of the country of the Gorkha Rajah [Nepal], the people of Lhasa, and those of several other countries located to the north west of the Brahamaputra carried out uninterrupted trade with Assam" ^{cxvii}, and he mentioned particularly the gold of Tibetan origin brought by the Bhutanese.^{cxviii}

During their pilgrimages the Bhutanese traded with locals and imported products in the different markets of Assam: Sadya, Barhat, Odalguri, Daranga, Siliambari. The east Bhutan-Assam axis was particularly important for the trade of cloth, with exchanges based on cotton, silk and dyes. It is known that at a fair in Assam in 1875^{cxix}, the Bhutanese exchanged woollen blankets, madder, bags and more than four tonnes of lac for cotton and raw Assamese silk textiles.

The raw material used for making textiles were woven and the motifs were adapted to Bhutanese tastes. It is probable that Assam had a decisive technical and stylistic influence on Bhutan. Spinning and weaving was widespread in Assam as is reported in 1897: "From times immemorial the inhabitants of this province have spun cotton thread and woven cotton. Weaving among the Assamese forms a part of a girl's education and part of a woman's ordinary household duties".^{cxx} As in Bhutan, weaving is a prestigious activity in Assamese society where an experienced weaver is respected and admired even today.^{cxxi} Dyeing was also widespread in Assam and the technique is the same in Bhutan. It consisted of dyeing the threads and not the whole cloth once it had been woven. The dyes were obtained from wild plants, which were boiled in cauldrons to obtain the colour in which the threads were soaked.

Assam was a great producer of the famous *lac* or shellac (*Laccifer lacca*) which gave much prized red colour. For example, in 1808, 10,000 *maunds*^{cxxii} of lac, valued at Rupees thirty five thousand, were exported to Bengal.^{cxxiii} It must be from Assam that the eastern Bhutanese imported the technique of using the secretion of this insect, which also lived in their region, to produce lac. It was called "gyatsho" (*rgya tshos*) in Bhutan and the translation of its name indicates its origin as it means "colour/dye of India". The method used to collect the lac was the same as in Assam.

One particular population, the Kacharis, also called the Bodos in Assam and the Meches in west Bengal^{cxxiv}, had close contacts with the Bhutanese because of their geographical position. The Bodos settled down in a stretch of land just to the south of what became the border of Bhutan in a region called the Duars of Assam by the British. The Bodos were very active in the cultivation of silk worms from which they obtained a raw silk called *Endi*. The Bodo women spent a large part of their day weaving on a dorsal strap loom. The other members of the family carried out domestic

tasks for them. A good weaver could weave half a yard per day and the price obtained for the cloth contributed significantly to the family economy.^{cxxv} This silk was prized for its softness, solidity and warmth. When the Duars were under Bhutanese jurisdiction in the 18th century and till 1865, the Bodos paid their taxes to the Bhutanese government in grain and cloth. They manufactured two types of textiles, the *kharu* and the *dunko lepa* especially for Bhutan.^{cxxvi} The remarks of Bogle in 1775 on the Duars applied to Bodo products^{cxxvii}: "where the land is cultivated, it produced rice, mustard seeds, tobacco, a bit of opium and about 40,000 *maunds* of fine cotton per year; to the east it produced black pepper and *munga* silk (Latin: *Anthera assama*)".

A Pawn on the Regional Chessboard

From the end of the 18th century and George Bogle's mission, the reports of British officials who travelled in the region provide more and more precise details on the trade between Bhutan and her southern neighbours. This interest was due to several reasons: on one hand, the East India Company was the ruler of the region; on the other hand, the trading conditions between Tibet and her southern neighbours had changed. It must be recalled that the kingdoms of the Kathmandu valley were the exclusive intermediaries for trade with Tibet. However, in 1769 the Malla dynasty was defeated by the Gurkha dynasty who evicted the Indian merchants from the Kathmandu valley and decided that the Nepali routes would be reserved for Nepali traders.^{cxxviii} Thus the route from central Tibet to Bengal through Bhutan, which was the most direct, became important for commercial exchanges.

Bogle wrote in 1774 that "the annual caravan which goes from here [Bhutan] to Rangpur is first of all the business of the Deb Rajah^{cxxix}, his ministers and provincial governors. Each of them sent an agent with his *tanyar*^{cxxx}, musk yak tails, rough red blankets or half-yard wide striped woollen

cloth. The other Bhutanese travelled under their protection. Almost all the goods they brought back in return – mainly fine woollen cloth, spices, dyes, Malda^{cxxxii} fabrics – goes to the country of the Teshu Lama^{cxxxii}, either as a tribute or for trade. In the latter case they were exchanged for *pelong* scarves, flower printed satins, tea, salt, wool etc".^{cxxxiii}

For Bogle, preoccupied with British interests, Bhutan was of no interest except as a centre and the route for Tibet-Bengal trade. Its importance as a trading partner was insignificant. He noted in a realistic manner that Bhutan was not an outlet for products from Bengal.^{cxxxiv}

In 1783, Captain Turner noted while crossing Cooch Bihar on his way to Bhutan^{cxxxv}: "Coarse cotton cloths I understand to be the staple commodity, and that they furnish the most considerable part of the large returning cargo, which is carried by the Bootea caravan annually from Rungpore".

Thus, at that time, Rangpur was the most important commercial centre for the Bhutanese who arrived there in February and March and left before the monsoons in May-June.

In 1794 Captain Welsh^{cxxxvi} gave us the same list of imports from Bhutan. They consisted of musk, woollen blankets, yak tails (used as fly swatters), small horses, borax, rock salt, *nainta* (a type of cloth), *goom sing* (a brocaded cloth), and *doroka* (a green, red and yellow coloured silk).

Kishen Kant Bose, who travelled in the western part of Bhutan in 1815 lists the products exchanged: "Bootan produces abundant Tangun horses, blankets, walnuts, musk, chowries or cow tails, oranges and manjeet (madder) which the inhabitants sell at Rungpore; and thence take back woollen cloth, pattus (?) indigo, red sandal, asafoetida, nutmegs, cloves, nakhi, and coarse broad cloths. From the lowlands under the Hills and the borders of Rungpore and

Cooch Bihar, they import swine, cattle, paan and betel, tobacco, dried fish and coarse broad cloth".^{cxxxvii}

In his turn, Captain Pemberton who crossed Bhutan from the east to the west in 1838 commented on the state of the Bhutanese economy, and once again noted the importance of products from the plains: "The wealth of the country consists almost entirely in the cotton cloths, silk and grain, drawn from the Dooars in the plains".^{cxxxviii} He mentioned also that "coarse cotton cloths are made by the villagers inhabiting the southern portion of the country above the Duars".^{cxxxix}

According to Pemberton, Bhutan imported cotton cloth, silk, dried fish and rice from Assam, flannel and corals from Bengal. These merchandises were then partly exported to Tibet, from where Bhutan imported salt, musk, silk, tea, gold and woollen blankets.^{cxl} A part of these merchandises served as currency for exchange of products from Bengal and Assam.

In 1905 White wrote that during his visit to the residence of Tongsa Penlop (Krong gsar *dPon slob*) in Bumthang, many young girls wove cotton cloth, but particularly silk cloth, and the threads came from Assam.^{cxli} J.C. White also noted in 1906 that "there is a great deal of stick lac grown in the valley of Tashigong"^{cxlii} and that is was, along with madder, a source of export towards Tibet. The two substances, the first of animal and the second of vegetal origin, which were used to dye cloth red were, and still are today, exported to Assam, but on a small scale.

Between the years 1920 and 1950 Nepali traders, the Nyishangbas, also known as "Manangis" carried out lucrative trade between Nepal, Calcutta, Assam the border of Bhutan and vice versa. These enterprising businessmen contributed to the exchanges in the region, particularly that of cloth and dyes. Van Spengen described their trading: "Proceeding northeastward by train (from Calcutta) into Assam, a whole range of small and medium-sized towns came within reach of the Nyishangbas, where they sold a variety of commodities to

the local population. In this way, the Assamese towns of Dhubri, Gauhati, Nowgong, Dimapur and Tinsukia were visited regularly between January and March each year. Here the Nyishangbas sold their Calcutta produced wares like needles, safety-pins and synthetic dyes, and to spread the risks involved, quantities of corals and imitation stones [...]. The dyes were sought after up to the Bhutanese border where the better *anday* was produced. Here Tibetan Dupka [Bhutanese] visited the Bhutan *mela* (fair) along the Indian border, selling herbs and musk to the occasional Nyishangba trader [...] The Nyishangba women searched the Bhutan *mela* for wool which they converted to mufflers and blankets".^{cxlili} Towards the end of the 1940's these traders entered the interiors of Bhutan to bypass the middlemen and to access simples (medicinal plants) and musk. They went till Deothang (bDe wa thang) and Tashigang (bKra shis sgang) in eastern Bhutan, where they exchanged cloth, dyes, and imitation stones.

The importance that these exchanges with Assam represented for Bhutan, specially the east, is still reflected today by the toponymy. A market called "Godama" exists at the border. In fact, this name is a deformation of the English word "godown", which designates the warehouses used to stock merchandise.

According to these reports, it appears that, far from being an inward looking country, Bhutan had well established commercial relations with Cooch Bihar and Assam, which can be dated to before the arrival of the British in these regions at the end of the 18th century. Through local markets in north-east India, which since centuries had often been at the crossroads of different trading routes, the Bhutanese had come into contact with products from other regions. Bhutan was also known as a potential, though limited, market by foreign traders. But, in fact, it is her easy access to Tibet which made Bhutan interesting for the British from the 18th century. However, from the 1880's, the British seemed to be suddenly disinterested by Bhutanese trade routes to Tibet.

Without trying to explain this disinterest solely by commercial reasons, it must be noted that the railway from Calcutta to Darjeeling through the Bengal plains was constructed in 1882. Thus Kalimpong, Sikkim and the Chumbi valley offered the fastest and most direct access to Central Tibet. The desire to set up trade links with Tibet was one of the main reasons for the military expedition led by Colonel Younghusband in 1904. It led to the establishment of British trading posts at Gyantse (rGyal rtse) and Yatung (Shar sing ma) in Tibet.

This Bhutan-Tibet trading routes, complementary to the Bhutan-Bengal/Assam routes, should be examined^{cxliv} in order to have a more complete and accurate picture of the trading exchange network in this region.

Transliteration of Persons and Place Names as They Appear in the Article

For research purposes, the personal names have been kept in transliteration in the notes and bibliography.

Ngawang Namgyal = Ngag dbang rnam rgyal

Darchug Gyeltshen = Dar phyug rgyal mtshan

Chapcha = sKyabs kra

Tenzin Rabgye = bsTan 'dzin rabs rgyas

Zhidar = bZhi dar

Trinley Lhungrub = 'Phrin las lhun grub

Norbu Drung = Nor bu drung

Paro = sPa gro

Dalingkha = brDa gling kha.

Tashichhodzong = bKra shis chos rdzong

Jigme Dragpa = 'Jigs med grags pa

Sherab Wangchuk = Shes rab dbang phyug

Ngawang = Ngag dbang

Ngarig Gyelpo = lNga rigs rgyal po

Tashi Wang = bKra shis wang

Toe Ngari = sTod mNga' ris

Jigme Lingpa = 'Jigs med gling pa

Notes:

¹ *dPal 'Brug pa rin che mthu chen Ngag gi dbang po'i bka' khirms phygos thams cad las rnam par rgyal ba'I gtam*, "Law Code" written by bsTan 'dzin chos rgyal, 10th *rJe mkhan po*, Folio 109b translated by Aris 1986 : 149.

¹ Also spelt Cooch Behar, Koch Bihar. The name Koch comes from the dynasty who seized power in this region at the beginning of the 16th century. The Koch dynasty was originally Bodos from Bihar who had converted to hinduism and claimed to descend from Shiva. Cf. Jacquesson 1999 : 232 and Nath 1989.

¹ Rhodes 1999 : 2-4.

¹ Rhodes 1999 : 15.

¹ Buxa Duar is called Pasakha (*dPag bsam kha*) by the Bhutanese.

¹ Aris 1979 : 214, and *Lho'i chos 'byung*, folio 28a-b.

¹ Rhodes, personal letter dated 2nd February 98.

¹ *mTshungs med chos kyi rgyal po rje rin po che'I rnam par thar pa bskal bzang legs bris 'dod pa'I re skong dpag bsam gyi snye ma*, biography of bsTan 'dzin rab rgyas, written by Ngag dbang lhun grub (1670-1730), 6th *rJe mkhan po*, rTa mgo, folio 161b-162a and Ardussi 1977 : 390.

¹ *Op Cit.* biography of bsTan 'dzin rab rgyas, folio 127b and Ardussi 1977: 368.

¹ *Op Cit.* biography of bsTan 'dzin rab rgyas, folio 149a and b and Ardussi 1977: 389.

¹ *Op Cit.* biography of bsTan 'dzin rab rgyas, folio 161b-162a and Ardussi 1977: 390.

¹ *Op Cit.* biography of bsTan 'dzin rab rgyas, folio 231b-232a and Ardussi 1977: 390.

¹ Rhodes 1977: 3 citing the "Calendar of Persian Correspondence", vol . VI, n° 1583.

¹ Turner 1971: 143.

¹ *Op cit.*, biography of Shes rab dbang phyug, folio 30b-40a and Ardussi 1977: 507.

¹ Boulnois 1997: 171-172.

¹ *Chos rgyal chen po Shes rab dbang phyug gi dge ba'I cho ga rab tu gsal ba'I gtam mu tig do shal*, biography of Shes rab dbang phyug, written by Yon tan mtha' yas, 13th *rJe mkhan po* (1724-1783), folio 84a-b and Ardussi 1977: 519. cf. also Mynak Tulku : 1997.

¹ Aris 1994: 39-40. Cf also Mynak Tulku: 1997.

¹ *Op cit.* , "Law Code", folio 107a translated by Aris 1986 : 141.

¹ This fort was called Fort Bourgogne. Deloche 1984 : 48.

¹ Latin: *Aquilaria agallocha*.

¹ Deloche 1984 : 135-136.

- ¹ Rhodes 1999 : 25.
- ¹ Boulnois 1996: 16.
- ¹ Pommaret 2000.
- ¹ Lahiri 1991: 97.
- ¹ Lahiri 1991: 134.
- ¹ Lahiri 1991: 163-164.
- ¹ Jacquesson 1999 : 221 quoting Watters 1904.
- ¹ Liebenthal 1956: 11-12.
- ¹ Liebenthal 1956: 15.
- ¹ Lahiri 1991: 165.
- ¹ Liu 1991: 69.
- ¹ Basu 1970: 190.
- ¹ Basu 1970: 186 and 190.
- ¹ Das 1985: 230.
- ¹ Lahiri 1991: 135.
- ¹ The subject has been briefly addressed in Myers and Pommaret 1994: 47-69.
- ¹ This term designates "Gates", viz. the plains regions which allowed access to the eastern Himalayas. There are 18 Duars from Bengal to Assam.
- ¹ Aris 1986: 71, citing the *rGyal rigs*, folio 49b.
- ¹ Aris 1986: 71, citing the *rGyal rigs*, folio 50a.
- ¹ Aris 1995: 17 and 66 n. 15.
- ¹ Aris 1979: 113 and 188.
- ¹ Jacquesson 1999 : 254-255.
- ¹ Basu 1970: 192.
- ¹ Bogle 1996: 80.
- ¹ Bogle 1996: 82.
- ¹ Hunter n.d.: 1, 144.
- ¹ Basu 1970: 162, citing a *Monograph on the Cotton fabrics of Assam*, 1897.
- ¹ Das 1985: 229.
- ¹ The *maund* is an anglo-indian measure of weight whole value varied from region to region, but was generally 82 pounds. *Hobson-Jobson* 1968: 563-564.
- ¹ Basu 1970: 187.
- ¹ This Mongoloid population which must have arrived from the east among the first waves of immigration into Assam is prehaps related to the Garos of the Shillong region.
- ¹ Endle 1990: 21-22.
- ¹ Hunter n.d.: 1, 144.
- ¹ Bogle 1996: 77.
- ¹ Bogle 1996: 207.

¹ term used by the English to designate the Temporal Chief of Bhutan, the Desi (*sDe srid*).

¹ small horses.

¹ A town in north Bengal.

¹ Title used by the English to designate the Panchen Lama in Tibet. The word "Teshu" is a deformation of Tashi (*bKra shis*) which referred to the monastery of Tashilunpo (*bKra shis lun po*), near Shigatsé (*gZhis ka rtse*), where the Panchen lama lived.

¹ Bogle 1996: 73-74.

¹ Bogle 1996: 207.

¹ Turner 1971: 7-8.

¹ Basu 1970: 190.

¹ Bose 1972: 350.

¹ Pemberton 1976: 34.

¹ Pemberton 1976: 45.

¹ Pemberton 1976: 46.

¹ White 1971: 164.

¹ White 1971: 190 and 201.

¹ Van Spengen 2000: 181-182.

¹ A preliminary study of the Bhutanese trading network was carried out by Myers and Pommaret 1994: 47-69.

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CHANGE IN THE LAND USE SYSTEM IN BHUTAN: ECOLOGY, HISTORY, CULTURE, AND POWER

*Tashi Wangchuk**

Abstract

In this two part analysis I attempt to answer questions with reference to historical land use and tenurial systems in Bhutan. The first part throws light on the popularly held view that land tenure in Bhutan was feudal prior to the advent of moderisation. By looking at the lived experiences of peasants in Bhutan, as human agents at the nexus of social, political, economic, and ecological forces, a nuanced and complex picture of land use systems in Bhutan emerges. I argue that in contradistinction to a feudal tenancy mode, historically land has been held in private for the most part although other arrangements existed alongside private property ownership. Monastic estates, and estates belonging to the handful of nobility were worked by tenured serfs and slaves.

In part II, I have tried to build an analytical framework for an alternative explanation to feudalism in Bhutan. Rather than relying on the 'Tibetan model' and the 'empty land model' which are closely linked, I instead build a layer model for the explanation of land use systems in Bhutan.

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Introduction

There is much confusion today as to the land use system in Bhutan prior to 1960. When one looks at the lived experiences of the day to day lives of the peasantry, questions as to what exactly was happening arise. Was Bhutan a feudal society prior to the advent of modernisation? Or was the land tenurial and distribution system more akin to tribal organisation? How did the current land use systems in Bhutan come into being? What were the forces of change affecting land tenure? What role did the farmers play in the land and ecosystem management decisions historically?

I will attempt to answer these questions by an analysis of the social and ecological history of Bhutan. For analytical purposes, the study is divided into two parts. The first part will look at currently practised systems, which will be compared to the period prior to the advent of modernisation in 1960. This will constitute a comparative analysis both in space and time. Feudalism as practised in Europe will be looked at and compared to the land use systems in Bhutan prior to 1960, which is generally dubbed as "feudal" Bhutan.

The second part of the analysis is more of a research proposal to generate some clues to the questions that arise in the first part and more speculative in nature. It is an attempt to look back deeper in history and find the "origins" of not only the diverse peoples of current day Bhutan but also to the land use systems that they practised prior to state formation in the 1600's. The nation state of Bhutan came into existence only in the mid 1600's prior to which the region consisted of "one valley kingdoms" ruled by hereditary kings, chiefs, or lamas (Aris, 1979). The second part then is a more general look at Bhutanese origins. It is assumed that by looking at the deeper, older layers of Bhutanese land use history, current systems can be better understood.

In the first part, the land user, the peasant or minap^{cxlv}, will be viewed as an actor among a multitude of kings, chiefs, and

priests in my story. On these actors ecological, social, political, and economic forces are constraining structures. Also, rather than viewing the farmer as a passive victim of history, the role of the peasant themselves played in structuring the land use systems, by resisting and strategizing against the constraints will be explored (Scott, 1985). This approach is inspired by several scholars (Baviskar, 1997; Burch, 1997; Isaacman, 1996; Siu, 1986; Worby, 1985) who have looked at human experiences at the nexus of political, historical, social, economic, and ecological systems. By doing this however, I do not mean to romanticise resistance as Babiskar (1997) citing from Marx (1852) makes clear:

...people make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are confronted...

Attempts to balance and play off the tension between constraints and resistance will be made in the analysis.

Part I: Was Bhutan Ever a Feudal Society?

Many western scholars studying Bhutan (Rose, 1970; Pommaret, 1984; Aris, 1987; Aris, 1996) label the period prior to the rule of the third king (1952) as feudal Bhutan as opposed to modern Bhutan. They generally assume that Bhutan was a feudal society much like Europe was in the Middle Ages before the Enlightenment. In Bhutan's case the enlightenment is thereby implied to have dawned with modernisation. This view is largely accepted as a historical fact by both Western and western educated Bhutanese scholars. This pre-modern, "dark age" is seen as a stage from which Bhutan just recently emerged to embrace modernity. High-modernist discourse of social systems and states progressing and developing along a trajectory are implicit in such views.

I argue that under scrutiny, the above distinctions show that pre-modern Bhutan was certainly different from present day Bhutan but was not feudal either in the 'general or technical' sense as Goody (1971) distinguishes. Why then have so many scholars assumed Bhutan to be a feudalistic society? Certainly there were elements of oppression, reminiscent of feudal Europe. However, as shown below the tenurial system and property rights can hardly be labelled as feudal in Bhutan. Perhaps it is a result of scholars preferring a high-modernist ideology, which sees feudalism as preceding modern societies. Such scholars are bounded by this evolutionary framework and as Goody writes '...the Western European starting-point heavily influences the outcome of the analysis.'

Another compelling explanation for Bhutan to be labelled "feudal" may be that western scholars who study Bhutan have been trained as Tibetologists. They look to Tibet for causal explanation of not historical events in Bhutan but also the country's entire socio-cultural systems in general. This is understandable in light of the fact that there was strong religious and cultural influence on Bhutan from Tibet. However, this does not mean that Tibetan systems were wholly transplanted onto Bhutan. Rather, a hybridity between "roots" and "routes" (Clifford, 1997) of rooted cultures and cultures on the move offer a more complex understanding. This is further explicated in Part II below. My main aim here is to problematize both the "high-modernist" European evolutionary model and the "Tibetan model." I offer a counter narrative based on the lived experiences of farmers in Bhutan. Due to the recentness of the introduction of development, most middle aged and older Bhutanese peasants today lived through the transformation. As such there is a wealth of knowledge, undocumented and existing mostly in peoples memories. As Isaacman (1996) writes, accessing this is to create space for alternative perspectives and as Worby (1990) explains, observing the problem with a different "conceptual lenses" can reveal new insights and answers.

What is Feudalism?

I first begin with a working definition of feudalism as understood in Europe and then compare this to the situation in pre-1960 Bhutan. Defining feudalism is a much debated topic even in the European context. Bloch (1961), however, is seen as authoritative and offers the following:

A subject peasantry; widespread use of the service tenement (i.e the fief) instead of salary ...supremacy of a class of specialised warriors; ties of obedience and protection which bind man to man; fragmentation of authority; and in the midst of all of this, survival of other forms of association, family and State.

Applied to pre-modern Bhutan, there is a subject peasantry in the sense of being subject to heavy taxation in kind and labour by the state. State authority was increasingly fragmented after the death of the first Shabdrung, the monk statesman who unified Bhutan after 1616. This fragmentation seems to be the basis for Aris (1994) to describe Bhutan as fiefdoms ruled by regional governors under limited authority of the centre. However, there never was service tenement or the existence of a class of specialised warriors.

This becomes clear when we consider Peter's (1997) explicit division of feudal Europe into a tripartite society consisting of the clergy, knights, and peasants. In particular he highlights the importance of the knights and lords to feudal Europe: 'kighthood bound the men of war together and contrasted them with the men of work...These individuals often combined the social status of high birth with old royal titles of service (count, duke, viscount) and landed wealth that enabled them to attract and bind subordinates to them by oaths of vassalage....they assumed control of ...public legal and financial powers which made the aristocracy....private lords and public authorities.' Bhutan never had a kighthood but rather a "church bureaucracy" (Carrasco, 1959) to administer public legal and financial matters. According to

Deby (1980) it is only when the 'rights of government (not merely political influence) are attached to lordships and fiefs that we can speak of fully developed feudalism.'

On the issue of a "subject peasantry" and land tenure, Bhutan clearly had a system vastly different from feudal Europe. I argue that rights in property have always been held in private by the peasantry. In feudal England, there were estimated to be about a thousand lords who shared the landed property amongst themselves (Peters, 1997). By contrast Bhutan had only about 5000 serf/slave families, all of whom were granted manumission in 1959 by the third king (Karan, 1963). Karan writes that the third king "...freed the 5000 slave [families] giving them choice of remaining with their masters as paid servants or accepting land from the government and setting up as farmers." Further support for this figure is provided by Rose (1977) who writes that the "estimates vary from 700 to 5,000 families.

Even if the higher estimate of 5,000 families is taken and an average family size of 10 is assumed, a figure of roughly about 50,000 people results. If one projects backwards from the current population of 600,000 and population growth rates between 1959 and now (varying between 0.5% to 3.1%), the population in 1959 is roughly about 500,000 people. Consequently, slaves and serfs formed roughly about 10% of the population. The others were mostly *kheap*, free peasants who paid taxes to the government in kind and labour. This basic division is reflected in the composition of many villages in Bhutan today, although detailed surveys are needed to verify this. Inordinate amounts of attention have focused on the slaves and serfs and their masters and hardly any on the vast majority of the peasantry, the *kheap*, in Bhutan.

The *zasen* or slaves were descendants of people captured from India. Wealthier peasants occasionally bought some slaves from traders. Most were attached to monastic lands, which the slave families cultivated. Some of their descendants

to this day continue to farmland owned by the central monk body and sharecroppers.

This has often been confused with the entire peasantry being labelled as serfs and a feudal model used to explain the rest of society. Rose (1977) writes ' The traditional landholding system in Bhutan was feudal...tenancy which was the norm earlier in most of Bhutan has been much reduced in scope...what is more important perhaps is that the character of the tenancy system has changed....more often than not now it is families that are already landholders in their own right'. In short Rose tells of a revolutionary change not only in the land tenurial system but the entire society at large. He does not explain the factors behind this purported revolution but assumes that they occurred based largely on an erroneous reading of the existence of slaves, tenancy, and elites in the traditional system.

The vast majority of peasants were freemen (to use a feudal term), either owing private lands or sharecropping for wealthier families, monasteries, and other elite. They are even today referred to as *minap*, loosely translated as "ignorant people" or "people in the dark" but nevertheless free. Some were *drap* or serfs in the true feudal sense, attached to estates of the handful of hereditary nobles "*choje*" or lords of religion in central and eastern Bhutan. Ura (1995) explains their situation: '*drap* worked without any payment on the master's land in return for a piece of land allocated by the master for their own use ...*drap* families did not pay any tax [to the state] because they were only answerable to the master. It is important to keep in mind that they constitute a notable minority to the free peasants. Others were *zasen* or slaves as explained above. Ura distinguishes them from the *drap*: '*zab* [*zasen*] were in a worse situation: they worked entirely for the master who gave them only food and clothes.'

Thus, a mixture of landholding systems existed at the same time between the *minap*, *zasen*, and *drap*^{xlvi}. The important point is that the slaves and serfs constituted only about 10%

of the total population at the time of their manumission in 1959 (Karan, 1963).

The Burden of Tax

Most of the free *minap* were poor, yet heavily taxed. In eastern Bhutan, some are said to have fled to Arunachel Pradesh in India to escape this heavy tax (Aris, 1980). Lopen Kinley (1985) of Ramena village, a monk in his late fifties, recalls from his childhood days, the immense loss felt by the yak herders at the time of taxation.

The *boeds*^{cxlvi} would come to our village, *pata ben* [sword] at their sides. They did a *pu-yig* and counted each family's yaks and then demanded butter and meat taxes on this basis. Some of the harsher *boeds* would point out live yaks and demand that they be slaughtered for the *sha thray* [meat tax]. It did not matter if the selected ones were milching *bjim* [females] or *zhuli* [seed stud yaks], as long as they were fattened enough. I remember my mother crying and pleading with the *boed* but to no avail. Of course some *boeds* were kind and did not force the issue. The lifting of the *sha thray* and *ma mi-sayr* [public]. It was the kindest *kidu* [welfare] granted to us *bjops* [yaks herders] by the government.

The amount of tax was determined by animal census or *pu-yig* when representatives from the central government would count each family's holdings and tax them accordingly. However, this was changed to a light monetary tax system with the families reporting the number of animals they own. The animal census was dropped since the tax collected was nominal and the census expensive. People thus report much lower numbers than they actually own in order to evade taxes. The change in the tax system freed the pastoralists from central government control to a certain extent.

Thus taxes were a heavy burden on the people and it was only during the third king's reign that they were alleviated. Depending on the agro-ecological zone people lived in, they paid taxes for what they produced. For instance, as shown above in alpine regions, taxes were paid in yak butter and meat. In the lower farming valleys, taxes were paid in rice, maize, or wheat. In addition, peasant households also had to render labour services, such as transporting goods to the centres of administration in the monastic fortresses or the *dzong*.

Thus as another informant Aum Thinley Bidha says: 'We had to pay taxes from the *Utse* [gold roof] of the *dzong* all the way down to the *tari* (stables).' This is a metaphorical reference to a system where the entire state administrative apparatus was supported by the taxes of peasants.^{cxlvi} However, it was only after 1952 that taxes in kind were completely abolished, thereby lifting a great burden off the peasantry. Today, only nominal token taxes are collected in monetary terms and these "rural taxes" collected from the peasantry only account for less than 5% of total government revenue.

Under heavy taxation, evasion tactics were common practices by the people. For instance, many older tax paying Bhutanese today recall several tactics used. Since unhusked rice was collected, in many cases peasants mixed in *shupa* or chaff with the actual kernels of grain. Grain was not weighed but measured according to volume of a measuring container, the *drey*.

Can Bhutan be Explained by Tibet?

In *Land and Polity in Tibet*, Carrasco (1959) looks in detail at the 'systems of land tenure as related to political organisation' in Tibet. What is of great relevance for the present purpose is that it is one of the few studies, which compare land use systems in Tibet with what he calls the "Lesser States" such as Sikkim, Ladakh and Bhutan. Other Tibetologists have assumed that land distribution and tenure in Bhutan can be

explained by the Tibetan model, notably Aris (1994) writes: 'the land itself was divided into provincial units and sub-units, and each was given its own administrative designation on a Tibetan model'.

Turning to Carrasco (1959), Aziz (1978), and French (1990), a very different picture between Bhutan and Tibet emerges. Carrasco concludes his analysis on Bhutan by writing:

In comparison with other Tibetan states, the most remarkable trait was the absence of hereditary landed estates as the main source of income for the officials, and the apparently greater social mobility within and into the official class. In this respect, the officialdom of old Bhutan closely resembled the monk officials of Lhasa but without a class corresponding to the lay nobility of Tibet.

Although there has been a disproportionate amount of attention focussed on the handful of *choje* and other landed hereditary nobility ^{cxlix} in Bhutan, the vast majority of peasants lived a life closer to that described by Carrasco. It is important to keep in mind that until the instituting of the monarchy in 1907, the ruling class was non-hereditary. Bhutan's numerous civil wars are wars of succession simply because there was no hereditary ruling family along which the secular regentship and powers were passed. After the Shabdrung's death was revealed in 1705 and until 1907, Bhutan was in a 'perpetual cycle of conflict' with very few secular rulers, the Druk Desi, being able to serve the full three year term in office (Aris, 1994). Many were assassinated and still others were exiled. The most ruthless and conniving emerged as the most powerful. Since there was no hereditary ruling elite, very often peasants starting as lowly count attendants, stable boys, and messengers managed to find their way to the top.

In Tibet, 'the underlying right of ownership to all the land in Tibet was in the person of His Holiness the Dalai Lama....all

land grants were conditioned on the continued goodwill of the government toward grantee.' (French, 1990). Peasants were attached to estates directly administered by the state, to estates owned by nobility and monasteries, or farmed small plots on which they paid 'a sixth part of the field' as taxes (French, 1990). Also, peasants could not vacate these lands without permission and in the case of not having an heir who both inherited the land and the tax obligation, peasants adopted children to fill in for them (Aziz, 1978). Among the 'three classes of commoners' described as agriculturists, traders, and itinerants such as artisans, Aziz writes of the agriculturists as: '...all are tax paying tenant farmers, working holdings leased from the government or another landlord.' In short there is no private-property owning peasants. The nobility too is hereditary including the men of religion, *ngag-pa* or hereditary priests (Aziz, 1978). These priests own estates farmed by tenants. Aziz explains the aristocracy of Tibetan society as *per-pa*, 'the term *ger* means private, designating the exclusive property rights members enjoy as private landlords.'

The situation in Bhutan is very different; there is no *ger-pa* or *ngag-pa* class. The agriculturists worked their own private land as tax paying subjects. Monks were recruited from the peasantry as were the government servants.^{cl} This is not to say that there was no social stratification in Bhutan. The basis of stratification was different; it was not hereditary, and was not determined by the quality of tenancy or land holdings. Rather, it was the quantity of land owned that determined one's social position. This of course depends on several factors but is open to manipulation. Another important distinction is that land inheritance in Bhutan is passed through the daughter, a matrilineal system, where as in Tibet it was patrilineal. Suffice is to say that while Bhutan and Tibet have many similarities, fundamental differences remain and the Bhutanese land tenurial system cannot be explained by Tibetan models.

Current Practices

In a comparison of three villages in three different ethnic zones in Bhutan, Sangay Wangchuk (1998) summarises the current land use practices in Bhutan. Citing Ura (1995) he writes that after 1953, the distinction between private and public property was made official or legalised through the passage of the *Thrimshung Chenmo* or Supreme Laws. 'The official recording of agricultural land after 1953 separated private and community property rights...prior to this, property rights were loosely defined.' This can be understood as the State making the country more "legible" for easier control. Previously, customary law regulated land use practices. Currently, this customary law has been overlain with various national legislation such as the Land Act (1978), Forest Act (1969), and Livestock Act (1980). However, this does not mean that customary laws have disappeared. At the local level, customs or *luso* still determine everyday decisions in many significant ways. For instance, village sacred groves and forests, which may not be distinguished from other forest by state laws, are protected by customary laws. E.P. Thompson (1991) writes:

Agrarian custom was never a fact. It was ambience. It may be understood with the aid of Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' - a lived environment comprised of practices, inherited expectations, rules...norms, and sanctions...Within this habitus all parties strove to maximise their own advantages. Each encroached upon the usages of others.

In Bhutan, such a habitus is also the nexus where customs meet formal laws and are negotiated, contested, used and abused by the local actors. Thus to acknowledge the existence of only one system is to deny history to a rich process. For instance, to look at the Forest Act and to assume forest usage existing on the ground as legislated in the Act would be an incomplete picture.

However, the general effect of the legislation resulted in private property being measured, recorded, and titled in a systematic way. This can be misinterpreted as the granting of private property and instituting a change in land tenure practices from a feudal to private property relationships. It is important to keep in mind that these activities are state schemes at rationalisation and ordering. In *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, Scott (1998) shows the need for states to simplify the complex in order to exert control. Consequently, the schemes should be seen as an exercise in "administrative ordering" and making legible a complex society. Today the effort continues with the use of more sophisticated cadastral equipment, and computerisation of the entire land records of the country into a database. Peasants have lost rights over common property resources such as forests and pastures with the enactment of the Forest Act. Sangay Wangchuk (1998) explains:

The enactment of the Forest Act in 1969 whereby all forests became the property of the state, had a profound impact on the tenurial system. However, this did not have an immediate effect on forest resource use by the local communities, as the state did not have adequate machinery to implement the provisions of the Forest Act. Therefore the informal tenurial relationship continued. Over the years...the state's enforcement of the respective laws has increased. This process has led to the widening of the gap between the state who owns video camera, talked to her surviving children and other village elders. The story is important since it reveals the dynamics of land tenure in Bhutan during a time when most historians dismiss as a "feudal" state.

Thinley Bidha was born in 1908 in the village Wang^{ch}i Simu in west Bhutan. As the eldest and only daughter she inherited the ancestral property from her mother who died at the young age of 29 when Thinley Bidha was only 11. Various maternal

aunts served as the *nangi aum* in the household until she took over at the age of 26 after the death of her aunts. The peasant household revolves around the *nangi aum*. This term is variously translated as mother at the core and anchor mother. Although sometimes upstaged by a forceful husband, the *nangi aum* still retains some control since the husband joins the household as an outsider and the property owner is still the wife. The division of labour ideally is that the husband handles the outside work while the *nangi aum* the inside work. Outside work can range from dealing with the state, tax collectors, performing the labour tax, serving in the militia recruited during times of war, resolving disputes in court, and sometimes going on trading expeditions. Inside work reflects work not only in the house but also all work related to the land such as making decisions about planting, harvesting, and day to day work schedules of the land.

Thinley Bidha's lost her husband to an illness when she was 43. Her younger brother increasingly took on outside work on her behalf but could not be fully committed since he had married out and was responsible for his wife's household duties also.

In 1947, after she had lost her husband and her younger brother had already married out, a distant relative filed a *labzhi* case against her. Seeing her household strong male representation, the relative took advantage of this to grab not only her valuables but also her property. Without a fair trial, the court granted all the movable valuables such as jewellery to her enemies. She however, refused to hand over the *Phazhi* citing ancestral claims and invoking the protection of guardian deities. Her brother was taken as a prisoner due to her refusal to move out of the house. By doing so she would have symbolically given up her rights to the land. She was personally threatened with eviction but the relative nor the court could not do so simply because the land and house were her personal property and everyone in the village acknowledged this ownership. At one point after her brother was taken prisoner, she almost relented but finally sought

protection from the queen. Her brother had served as a personal attendant to the queen. Citing the folk saying 'in my house I am king' Thinley Bidha was given a fair trial eventually. Serving as her own *jabmi* or solicitor she not only managed to hold on to her property but also won back her valuables.

Two important points become clear, that the nature of ownership and 'legal relations are between persons...a person owns not an object itself but a right to do certain things with or in regard to that object' (Gluckman, 1965). In this case Thinley Bidha's land could have been coerced from her by her enemies but the rights would still have been vested with her as per customary law as acknowledged by fellow villagers. Secondly, if the land was held in a feudal tenancy mode, the case would not have arisen at all. The landlord would simply have reassigned the land to another tenant without so much fuss.

Farmer as Land Owner

What are the implications of this fact that farmers in the past have always made land use decisions themselves, including crucial forest and pasture resources? There is no feudal lord to manage the estate. The state until the 1960's did not intervene in local resource use and management choices. But with increasing legislation and rationalisation on a Western model, as recommended by development experts, local resource use is increasingly regulated by the state. Farmers legally lost common property resources such as pastures and community forests through such legislation. However, the state's lack of resources to completely monitor and enforce the legislation has created space for farmers to continue to manage the resources within certain constraints imposed by the legislation.

For instance, even today, in most villages in Bhutan, customary rights still govern access to village forests. There is clear demarcation between one village and the next by the use

of *laptsap*, cairns of stone serving both as boundary markers and village entrance guardian spirits. People from other villages may not collect firewood, timber, or graze their cattle beyond these boundaries. If they do so, they are made to pay compensation and in the case of illegal grazing, cattle are retained until the fine is paid. The fine is used for community activities such as sponsoring numerous village ritual ceremonies in the village monastery.

The community forest is held as *masa* or public land on which villagers collectively pay a tax to the state. Thus, village members themselves cannot abuse the resources in the common forests with impunity. There are sacred groves where trees may not be felled. Also, the resource extraction process should not harm a neighbour's property such as felling trees from near a neighbour's house. Excessive felling of timber for commercial profit would not be permitted unless the whole village benefited. Additionally, some villages enforce a *ridum* or forest closure during certain times of the year. When a *ridum* is in force no one may enter certain parts of the forest since it is believed that the *rigamem* or forest spirits are not to be disturbed during these times. Interestingly, these times also correspond with times when trees and other forest plants are flowering and seeding and disturbances would interfere with the production and growth cycle. These customary regulations are sometimes overridden by state laws such as the Forestry Services Division granting permits to collect timber and other resources from a village's traditional common forest, causing much resentment among the villagers.

Can farmers regain historical resource use rights? The answer to this is difficult given the new dynamics and market forces in action. There is much to be gained for short-term profit and the fear of losing all control over Bhutan's natural resources has prevented the state from moving towards handing over community forests back to the farmers. However, the important distinction is to be made between open access resources and common property resources. If the

latter pattern is legalised then the former is not a threat since rights in the land and resource belong to a village and they are responsible for any decisions they make.

With regards to this, Ostrom (1990) debunks Hardin's (1968) myth of tragedy of the commons, which has become an 'accepted way of viewing problems' with common property resources. She shows that these models view individuals as prisoners with constraints imposed on them, which they cannot change. She instead gives the actors in her models agency who are viewed as being able "to change the constraining rules of the game". Ostrom's model shows alternatives to overcoming the problem of the commons other than privatisation and state control. Actors have the ability to negotiate with each other and discuss best strategies for the use of the resource. They then enter into a contract agreed to by all parties, and this results in an equitable sharing of resources on a sustainable basis.

From the description of the village forests above, they are far from being open access resources, which are free for all. Rather, strict customary laws govern their use. This is often undermined when outsiders impinge on the rights a village through bureaucratic procedures or with state approval. Thus, rather than protecting and controlling resources, state laws undermine traditional customary laws which are recognized by a village and its members. In effect, they create a situation whereby previously common property resources are turned into open access resources.

As a first step, the government can re-recognise customary laws operating in a village forest and stop issuing resource use permits to outsiders from such forests. The village institutions are already in place and are recognised for other purposes such as for *gewog yargay tshochung* or village development purposes. In a very simple process, the village forests can be handed over to the villagers for their own management and use without state interference.

Part II: Origins

In Part I, I have attempted to deconstruct the existing representations of Bhutan as a feudal society prior to the advent of modernisation. The next question then arises, if not feudal, then what? I use different conceptual lenses to answer this question, as Worby (1995) writes 'the solution to this puzzle lies less in a changed reality that has suddenly been registered in the 'data' and more in the changing observational and conceptual lenses through which that reality has been viewed and represented.' The different conceptual lenses are analytical tools developed from a multidisciplinary approach. Thought processes from ecosystem and landscape ecology, paleoecology, social history, and political economy are stitched together to present a varied and patched mosaic of lived experiences on the landscape of Bhutan. To the conventional tools of the historian, that of narrating significant events in a temporal sequence, I add spatial dimensions.

'The total effect of austere mountains, rock, and river was that nature had laid out a grand and eternal stage for human action' (Burch, 1997), is the central them on which this dimension is built. When looking at the early history and origins of Bhutan, most historians write of obscurity and myth and lament the lack of written sources. Aris (1979) in a bold attempt not only gathered existing written Bhutanese and Tibetan sources but also conducted interviews and visited places of historical curiosity to him. The product was a doctoral dissertation and a book titled 'Bhutan: the Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom' (1979). Commendable as his work is one might raise questions about what constitutes history. Does it consist only of the collection, analysis, and interpretation of written "primary" sources into a structured narrative? Whose history is it anyway? In a country where oral traditions are the preferred mode of sharing stories and experiences even today, among an increasingly literate populace, dependence on written sources alone is "annoying" as Aris himself admits. Nonetheless, Aris has presented a

basic temporal structure based on the available written sources. I will attempt to add to this temporal framework some spatial history and "thick description". What dramas did human actors play on nature's stage? By looking at history through the lens of landscape ecology, and adding multi dimensionality, will a more nuanced and fuller picture emerge?

The Thesis

The current model of the origins of the different ethnic groups in Bhutan are that Tibetan people invaded western Bhutan, pushed out the indigenous people and extended their influence over other indigenous groups in eastern Bhutan. No one claims this model since it is too flimsy and most importantly, unauthenticated. However it has become accepted such that even guidebooks for tourists visiting Bhutan reproduce this model for popular consumption. The latest one gives the following version (Armington, 1998):

The Sharchops, who live in the east of the country are recognised as the original inhabitants of Bhutan. They are Indo-Mongoloid; it is still unclear exactly where they migrated from and when they arrived in Bhutan. The Ngalong are descendants of Tibetan immigrants who arrived in Bhutan from the 9th Century. These immigrants settled in the west of the country...The third group is the Nepalis, who began settling in the south of Bhutan in the late 19th century...Minority Groups: several smaller groups many with their own language form about 1% of the population...

This "empty land" model which gets filled with various ethnic groups is problematic for several reasons. For one, the area's prehistoric era is completely dismissed. For another, historical complexity is simplified and the forces impinging on the historians themselves are seen as neutral. The "original inhabitants" or the Sharchops are more accurately described as Tsangla. This denomination is derived from being the clan

descendants of Prince Tsang-ma of Tibet (Aris, 1979). The Tsangla identity emerged only in the 17th century as a conscious construction of a monk-historian, Ngawang, and his works (Aris, 1979). Meanwhile, the "Tibetans" in the west couldn't be more anti-Tibetan. Several wars were fought with invading Tibetan armies. Ballads, songs, and stories ridiculing the Tibetans became popular. Most importantly, the land tenurial system cannot be explained by the Tibetan model as shown above. Yet the empty land model is unquestioned largely since the Tibetan bias of Tibetologists, which assumes everything in Bhutan came from Tibet, is not challenged. The empty land model is an untested assumption built on another untested assumption.

Instead of the 'empty land' model, I am more comfortable with Clifford's representation^{clii}, which introduces a new dynamics to the system, of layered hybridity. Cultural patterns are conveyed and altered along routes of immigration, trade, and war leading to new "roots" or communities and identities. There is no "original inhabitant" existing in a cultural vacuum, unchanged and unique. Rather I 'focus on hybrid...experiences as much as on rooted' ones. In this model during prehistoric times, Palaeolithic peoples dispersed from east to west, from the upper reaches of the Yellow River in China to present day Yunnan province and thence east to Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Shillong, Myanmar, and as far west as central Nepal^{cliii} (Allchin, 1982; Marshall, 1997; Ross, 1990). Kosambi (1965) writes: 'eastern parts of India...were penetrated by prehistoric people from Yunnan and Burma.' The movements of these peoples, how and in what patterns they occurred are explained by Fagan (1990):

Population movements associated with *Homo sapiens*...should not be thought of as migrations, certainly not in terms of the kind of mass population movements that characterize later migrations in human history. These millennia-long population movements were gradual, dictated in large part not by

the innate human curiosity of what lay over the next horizon, but by a myriad of complex environmental, climatic, and entirely pragmatic factors...they were short term responses to ever changing local conditions, often triggered in turn by larger global climatic fluctuations throughout the last (Wurm) glaciation...our remote modern ancestors were part of a complex world ecological system that affected all animal species on earth.

One can then imagine this gradual movement from east to west and later from north and south, adding layers to the previous layers. It is also important to keep in mind that if there is movement in, then movement out is also possible. The focus has entirely been on the north to south influence, that of Tibet on Bhutan. But earlier records also show important refugee princes from India seeking refuge in Bhutan, for instance the Sindhu Raja fleeing and establishing a kingdom in the 7th century. Most historical personalities arrive as refugees, written sources document their arrival, and their exploits in detail. The sources never mention mass migrations of people as popularly imagined. The idea of mass population movements within a short period of time is problematic. In this empty land scenario, then the Tibetans arriving in west Bhutan would simply have filled up the land and carried on as in Tibet. The land tenurial system should reflect this similarity but it does not. Rather, a more sensible explanation is that singular Tibetans scholars, saints, and princes, arrive in Bhutan as refugees, bring "high Tibetan culture" and religion which is layered onto existing native practices.

Chhoki (1994) differentiates this habitus as the nexus between the "sacred" and the "obscene". The sacred is represented by Tibetan Buddhism, which is adopted as the state religion while the obscene is the animistic religion, which the people practiced in the villages. Chhoki finds the coexistence of the two in a village in west Bhutan, she writes: "The *nenjorm-pawo* (indigenous ritual specialists) themselves

describe their complex as having native origins, in contrast to the monastic tradition which came to Bhutan from Tibet.'

The prehistoric and historical landscapes of Bhutan can then be thought of as consisting of mosaics or patches of diverse peoples. This diversity is not only in space across the landscape but also in time and "depth". By this I mean that if we look under one layer of religion, culture, and land use practices, we will encounter other vibrant layers of local practices as Chhoki's (1994) work makes clear. With this I attempt to build an analytical framework for exploring this thesis below.

Mosaics and Connectivity

Mosaics are perhaps most simply and clearly described by E.O. Wilson (1995) in a forward to Forman's (1995) book 'Land Mosaics: The Ecology of Landscapes and Regions:'

...the real world consists of finely fragmented habitats. The pieces range from radically altered urban parks and gardens to remnant pockets of the original environment. Across periods, living species arrive, impinge, dominate, yield, and disappear in this kaleidoscope. The vast majority of the inhabitants we never see, because they are too small and obscure: creepy-crawlies, immense in diversity, from insects to fungi and bacteria.

All together, they are as important as the towering trees and the birds on which our attention is ordinarily focused.

This conceptualisation of land and landscape as patches or mosaics provides an understanding of the processes occurring on the human cultural and historical landscape in Bhutan. Forman (1995) explains patch as a 'particular type that differs from adjacent land.' A mosaic then is an aggregated pattern of patches, within the patches there is

internal micro heterogeneity as well. Prior to Bhutan's unification, people constantly 'arrive, impinge, dominate, yield, and disappear,' changing the nature of the patches. The whole country was what Aris describes as 'one valley kingdoms' with fixed and jealously guarded and well-recognised borders (*sa-tsam*). On a larger scale these one-valley kingdoms may be seen as patches on a complex landscape.

At a continental level, Bhutan is a mountainous frontier land rising abruptly from the Gangetic plains of India and ending again at the edges of the Tibetan plateau. Over the years, refugee kings, princes, priests, and monks fled to the safety of the mountains from north, south, east and west. An ancient name by which the Tibetans referred to Bhutan is *Lho-mon Kha Zhi* roughly translated as the southern barbarian land of four approaches. So at this larger scale, the plains of India, plateau of Tibet, and mountains and hills of Bhutan may be viewed as three patches across which kings, saints, traders, and lamas moved both in and out of Bhutan as political, economic, and ecological circumstances demanded.

The comings and goings are recorded by Bhutanese, Indian, and Tibetan sources, scantily and in some cases with biased political motives. Patch dynamics can explain these patterns and processes even if the details of specific and particular events are unknown or unrecorded. For explicative purposes, history is thus released from the tyranny of the few and biased written "primary" sources. One can at least imagine what were the general patterns and processes across these landscapes.

By connectivity, I do not mean to impose a totalising master narrative, which unifies these diverse mosaics into a single monolithic understanding of Bhutanese national history. Connectivity in landscape ecology is understood as 'how connected an area is for a process' (Forman, 1995) such as understanding how and why species "arrive, impinge, dominate, yield" and how the people in these patches

interacted with people from other areas. We know that they traded, exchanged ideas, fought, married, formed alliances, and eventually were unified into the peoples of the nation state of Bhutan. It is the legacy of these actions, which are reflected in the land use systems.

People as Ecological Beings

In calling for a 'humanist environmentalism' Cronon (1998) laments the nature and culture dualism that Western societies view the world with. He instead expounds a holism in which humans are intrinsically connected by complex webs of linkages and are a part of nature. Cronon (1992) writes:

...human acts occur within a network of relationships, processes, and systems that are as ecological as they are cultural. To such basic historical categories as gender, class, and race, environmental historians would add a theoretical vocabulary in which plants, animals, soils, climates, and other nonhumans become the coactors and codeterminants of a history not just of people but also of the earth itself.

This basic realisation, which gained ground only recently in Western thought through the efforts of postmodernist thinkers, has always been the way pre-modern peoples viewed their place in the world and in history. Chief Seattle's call is echoed worldwide and finds common ground with diverse beliefs from Hindu and Buddhist mythology to Dayak swidden cultivators. In a strange way then, the post-modern ideal is a lived reality of pre-modern peoples.

For the task at hand, such a holism and connectivity allows for an ecological interpretation of history or as Worster (1992) writes, using 'ecology to help explain why the past developed the way it did...this new history rejects the common assumption that human experience has been exempt from natural constraints.'

Landscape Ecology due to its integrative and spatial nature is my choice from the various ecologies for the analysis. This provides an alternative way of looking at Bhutanese history since the narrative texts that exist are few and as Aris (1979) writes of one such text, the *Gyalrig*, '...the schematic preoccupations of a local historian can so color his writings as to alter the true order of reality.'

The substantive nature of the narratives are not disregarded, they are the 'data' or evidence I will rely on. However, the cause and effect interpretation is from an ecological and political economic perspective and not from 'schematic preoccupations.' (Although why Ngawang, the Author of the *Gyalrigs* wrote what he did is of interest.) Narrative as Cronon (1992) writes '...succeeds to the extent that it hides the discontinuities, ellipses, and contradictory experiences that would undermine the intended meaning of its story. Whatever its overt purpose, it cannot avoid a covert exercise of power: it inevitably sanctions some voices while silencing others.'

Layers Upon Layers, but Still Pockmarked

In this section I look first at the larger regional population dynamics of people from prehistoric times to the present. I will then try to explain what the origins of the people of Bhutan are using the regional analysis and spatial landscape patch dynamics. The underlying assumption is as presented in the thesis above, of 'millennia-long population movements (that) were gradual, dictated in large part...by a myriad of complex environmental, climatic, and entirely pragmatic factors.' By this, I reject the idea of local autochthony and instead, depend on paleoecological evidence, which has more or less established the east to west movement in the eastern Himalayas and the later historical evidence of strong Tibetan influence.

In the absence of written evidence, what the landscape would suggest is that the current identities of the various ethnic groups are a complexity of layers upon layers of history, as

described above, and a single 'pure' lineage and identity is not tenable for any of today's politically defined ethnic groups. By the same token then, the land use systems are a reflection of these layers and simple labels such as 'feudalistic' does not capture the complex nature of land use.

Specifically, external influence cannot be discounted but neither can they explain everything. One can only conjecture that as Clifford writes 'hybrids' are the norm. Of external influences impinging on existing native 'tribal' ones and thereby producing a 'uniquely' Bhutanese land use pattern and identity. Languages in Bhutan provide some clues and linkages to understanding this situation. In Bhutan, today, there are 19 languages grouped under four main language groups; Central Bodish, East Bodish, and Bodic language of the Tibeto-Burman family and an Indo-Aryan language (van Driem, 1994). Nineteen is a conservative grouping which can be divided further into dialects, literally by the major river valleys that flow north-south through the country. How can this situation be explained? If the analytical framework developed above is applied, one can then imagine a 'sacred language' made dominant through regional power dynamics and layering onto existing languages. Regional dominant lingua franca such as Ngalop in west Bhutan, Bumthap in central Bhutan, and Tsangla in east Bhutan gained ascendancy but did not totally wipe out earlier languages. Thus, a layer model emerges. There are subordinate local groups, dominated by a larger regional identity such as Ngalop, Bumthap, and Tsangla, which finally is overlain with a national layer, 'Bhutan' extending across the entire country. Even in eastern Bhutan, popularly believed to be the original inhabitants, as explained above, if we look under the layer of the Tsangla language, various local dialects are discernible such as Dzalakha, Chalikha, and Brokpakha. Needless to say these language speakers are bilingual, speaking both their local dialect and Tsangla.

In the same way, land use systems of earlier local patterns and systems are layered as a regional system, onto which is

layered a national system. Thus, the evolution of land use systems from tribal to feudal to modern is not supported. Rather, they exist all at the same time but in layers. Looking at the national level, the Land Act and various other legislation would seem to be in effect, but a closer look would reveal customary laws governing land use systems. The pattern of connectivity informs that there may certainly have been borrowing and exchanging but the existence of one 'original' system evolving into a multitude of others is not supported.

Conclusion

In contradistinction to a feudal system, historically land use decisions especially regarding forests have been made by the people themselves without major state intervention as is being done today. The past generations of villagers have bequeathed to us a pristine environment and it would be well worth the effort to learn from them and share the burden of managing and conserving Bhutan's natural resources. Also, causal explanations for land use systems in Bhutan need to be rethought giving preference to indigenous 'layer models' rather than Tibetan ones.

Notes

¹ The word minap today is loosely used to refer to any one from a rural area. It has acquired the meaning, which literally means person in the dark or ignorant person.

¹ Ura (1995) refers to them as *drami*.

¹ Attendants of the regional governors recruited from the peasantry themselves.

¹ Some many argue that this is evidence of a feudal society (Weber, 1947) but if we look at the United States, tax dollars similarly support the entire state apparatus. Yet no one would dare call the US a feudal society.

¹ During the reign of the second king, Ura (1995) mentions the following nobility to whom people paid taxes: "the king, the Elder Queen, the powerful aunt of the second king ,... and Lame Gonpa Dasho Phuntso Wangdi.

¹ Usually recruited as children, they start "work among the lowest menials...fetching firewood and water" designated as "tozen, literally, 'food eaters'" and work their way up to *zingap* or attendants in general, to *changgap* or personal attendants to the governor, to junior chamberlain, to junior chamberlain, to chamberlain, and sometimes to the governorship itself (Aris, 1994). The former of the present monarchy, Jigme Namgyal, rose through the ranks in a similar way although his final ascendancy depended on "tactics of blunt coercion" (Aris, 1994).

¹ The wang have been variously describes as a "tribe" and clan and several explanations as to their origins exist. The most popular is that they came to Bhutan as part of an invading Tibetan-Mongolian army, fell in love with the country, married the local girls and settled down.

¹ ... the representational challenge is seen to be the portrayal of local/global historical encounters...one needs to focus on hybrid, cosmopolitan experiences as much as on rooted, native ones. In my current problematic, the goal is not to replace the cultural figure 'native' with the intercultural figure 'traveller.' Rather, the task is to focus on concrete mediations of the two...

¹ Interestingly, faunal penetration from east to west in the Himalayas also extends as far as central Nepal. One such example is the red panda (*Ailurus fulgens*).

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ECONOMY OF YAK HERDERS

*Pema Gyamtsho**

Introduction

It is widely accepted that an understanding of the environmental and socio-economic conditions of an area is a prerequisite for the identification and formulation of appropriate research and development strategies. It is important to know 'why people do what they do' especially in traditional societies which have remained relatively unchanged by the forces of modern technological advancement. The general belief that traditional pastoral practices need to be improved has largely shaped pasture development policy throughout the world (Sanford, 1983). According to Miller (1995), agricultural policies in the Himalayan countries have generally ignored the role of livestock in development, and failed to appreciate the efficacy of traditional pastoral systems. Ives and Messerli (1989) dwelt at great length on the need to develop policies and programmes that are sensitively attuned to, and supportive of the local people who are the prime actors at the interface of man-nature relationship. The need to conduct systematic research before introducing innovation in the name of progress is further stressed by Goldstein et al. (1990). Sustainable innovations for economic enhancement of the people or ecological improvement of the environment in which they live can only be introduced if there is a high degree of relevance to prevailing local cultural and production practices and traditions.

In the high altitude areas of Bhutan at elevations higher than 3000 m above sea level, yak production has been and continues to be the main source of livelihood for people inhabiting this rugged landscape who are known as *Brokpas*

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in central and eastern Bhutan, *Jops* in Western Bhutan, *Lakhaps* in West-Central region and *Dakpas* in the remote gewogs of Merak and Sakteng under Trashigang Dzongkhag. All these names, in one way or other means 'pastoralists' and underscores the dependence of the people on the pastures (known as *Tsadrok* and *Tsabrok* in Eastern and Central Bhutan or *Tsamjo* in western Bhutan) and the mountains (La). Yak rearing is practiced throughout the northern belt of the country extending from Haa in the west to Trashigang in the east and the production systems vary considerably from place to place. Nevertheless, there is no denying that yak is the lifeline of all these communities and is aptly referred to as the 'camel of the snows'. It is a multi-purpose animal providing milk, meat, draught and manure. It also adds to the aesthetic value of the Himalayas. Without it, one cannot imagine how humans could survive in this beautiful but hostile region.

This paper describes the yak rearing and production system prevailing in the remote areas of Laya, Lingshi and Lunana in north-western Bhutan. It is based on the field research carried out as part of the requirement for a doctoral study by the author. It narrates the importance and historical development of yak rearing in these areas, the management practices being followed, the production and processing methods of yak products and analyses the constraints and opportunities associated with yak rearing. This paper also looks at the long-term economic and environmental viability of yak production, and offers recommendations on necessary policy changes and technological adaptations if the future of yak production and that of the herders are to be protected. The conclusions, views and recommendations are entirely those of the author and do not in any way reflect those of the agency in which he is employed.

Sources of Information

Most of the descriptive information is drawn primarily from personal observations and impressions as well as from

lengthy tales narrated by knowledgeable residents of yak rearing areas of Laya over a period of three years (1992 to 1995). Information concerning common issues and problems faced by the inhabitants were collected during village meetings. Personal contact with members of the community was established and views were exchanged, and information provided voluntarily by these contact persons. Quantitative data on population, demographic features, land and livestock holdings were obtained directly from the respondents through structured interviews.

Specific information and data on yak production were collected during field visits to individual herds and recorded on pre-designed forms. Actual measurements of milk and hair yields and body dimensions of individual animals were carried out.

The information on the ownership and management of pastures were obtained from individual households during informal discussions and from formal meetings with the community members.

The study focussed primarily on the situation in Laya but included Lunana and Lingshi, when relevant data could be collected or obtained from assessments carried out by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) during the same period.

Physical Features

Laya, Lunana and Lingshi together cover a total area of 432,003 ha. Snow and glacier cover account for 30%, 38% and 11 %, forests including scrub forest for 35%, 28% and 14% and natural pasture for 12%, 3% and 39% of the respective total areas of the three gewogs. Arable land area is insignificant.

The altitude of the study area varies between 3000 m at the lowest points to over 7000 m at the snow peaks. The topography is characterised by rugged mountain with snow-

clad peaks, steep slopes, narrow gorges and flat, narrow valley bottoms. The permanent snowline varies between 4700 m on the shady faces to over 5500 m on the sunny eastern and southern faces. Tree line lies at 3700 m on south facing slopes to nearly 4000 m on the shady northern slopes.

Table 1: Land cover of Laya, Lunana and Lingshi gewogs

Land cover	Area (ha)					
	Laya	%	Lunana	%	Lingshi	%
Agricultural land	50	0	61	0	22	0
Conifer forest	12215	12	40283	14	3634	9
Broadleaf forest	209	0	3691	1	274	1
Scrub forest	22177	23	39792	13	1459	4
Natural pasture	11557	12	8460	3	15122	39
Snow/glaciers	29209	30	113682	38	4077	11
Rock outcrops	18127	18	38639	13	9311	24
Land slips/eroded areas	3886	4	46322	16	4588	12
Water spreads	752	1	4239	2	95	0
Marshy areas	4	0	116	0	0	0
Total	98186	100	295285	100	38582	100

Source: Land Use Planning Project (LUPP, 1995)

Climate

Laya has a distinctly wet and rainy summer and a dry, cold winter with short spring and autumn seasons. Annual average precipitation excluding snowfall varies from 400 to 600 mm. Mean monthly temperatures vary between -8°C in January to 16°C in July.

Population and Demographic Features

The main villages and the number of households are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Main villages and number of households in Laya and Lunana

Laya		Lunana	
Village	Households	Village	Households
Pashi	22	Thansa	29
Toko	16	Dotag	10
Lubja	12	Tencho	31
Naylo	15	Tshoshong	28
Chongra	12	Hedi	27
Lungo	20	Thega	18
		Wache	8
Total	97	Total	151

The population of Laya in 1994 was 723 with a male to female ratio of 1.1: 1

Table 3: Demographic features of Laya and Lunana

	Laya				Lunana			
Age group	M	F	Total	%	M	F	Total	%
< 10 Yrs.	119	95	214	30	68	75	143	22
10-25 Yrs.	120	112	232	32	63	93	156	24
26-50 Yrs.	96	84	180	25	94	107	201	31
> 50 Yrs.	50	47	97	13	70	82	152	23
Total	385	338	723	100	295	357	652	100
Percentage	53	47	100		45	55	100	
No. of Household	40	35	75		20	24	44	

On average, a household in Laya has 7.4 members with a range between 1 to 14 members. The population of Lunana was 652 with a male to female ratio of 0.8:1 and an average household size of 4.3 persons. This difference in demography between Laya and Lunana is a reflection of the social structure. In Laya, the polyandrous marriage system encourages larger families and lesser fragmentation of

households whereas in Lunana, polyandry is not practised, and therefore, households are continuously sub-dividing into new units of smaller sub-families. According to Johari (1994), the population of Lingshi in 1994 was 515 with a male to female ratio of 1:1, living in 86 households with an average size of 6.0 persons.

Population Distribution and Employment

In 1994, 91% of the population of Laya including almost all the women were engaged in farming.

Table 4: Occupation of people in Laya

Occupation	Male	Female	Total	% of total population
On farm	323	332	655	91
School	38	8	46	6
Monastery	15	0	15	2
Government	9	1	10	1
Service/business				
Total	385	338	723	100

The Economy

Agricultural grain products are used for their own purposes and do not make a significant part of the income. 84% of households benefit from farm sales. 65% percent of the households earn wages for agricultural and non-agricultural labourers within and outside Laya, 81% in porter services and 68% in business dealings with non-farm goods and 32% in tourism. These figures compare favourably with the results of surveys carried out by the World Wildlife Fund (Caron, 1994). As expected the income from livestock production is considerably higher than in other parts of the country. Guenat (1991) obtained income estimates of 5% and 10% respectively for Bumthang and Sephu, two other important livestock rearing areas in Bhutan. The contribution of

livestock production to national GDP was 10% in 1994 (Dorjee, 1995).

The main source of income is the sale of yaks and yak products as shown in Table 5.

Barter Trade

Bartering yak products, incense and medicinal plants for rice and other is an important form of trading still widely practised. Barter trade is carried out between the households, between the nomadic communities of Laya, Lunana and Lingshi and between the people of Punakha, Wangdi Phodrang and Thimphu. Standard forms of exchanges and their equivalent values in cash are shown in Table 6.

Yak Production System

Laya and Lunana *gewogs* have a combined yak population of 2924 heads. The data on the yak population of Lingshi could not be collected personally and was not included.

The yak production systems in Laya, Lunana and Lingshi do not differ considerably. While the descriptive details in the following sections cover Laya as well as Lunana, quantitative assessments of the productivity of yaks was done only in Laya. Table 8 shows the annual yak production schedule followed by the herders of Laya.

History and Development of Yak Rearing

The present domestic yak is descended from wild yak caught and tamed by ancient Quiang people in the Quaiantang and other areas of Northern Tibet in the late Stone Age about ten thousand years ago (Li and Wiener, 1995).

Table 5: Sources and estimates of annual income including cash value of bartered goods in Laya (1993-94)

Sources of Income	Mean income (Nu.)	% of total income	% households involved
Farm sales			
Yaks	9532	30	55
Horses	581	2	10
Bajos	258	0	13
Butter	2097	7	68
Cheese	1484	5	68
Meat	1316	4	45
Hair products	290	0	26
Grains	177	0	6
Chang	123	0	29
Sub-total	15858	49	84
Labour wages			
Agricultural labour in Laya	1384	4	48
Agricultural work outside	700	2	35
Non-agricultural work in Laya	1564	5	42
Non-agricultural work outside	1148	3	35
Sub-total for labour wages	4797	15	65
Porter Services			
Porters	77	0	19
Pack yaks	3110	10	58
Pack horses	1277	4	58
Sub-total for porter services	4464	14	81
Business (Non-far items)	5896	18	68
Tourism	1129	4	32
Grand Total	32177	100	100

Table 6: Barter and cash values of commonly traded goods in Laya

Goods	Butter (Sang)	Chugor (shey)	Rice (bje)	Barley (bje)	Mustd. (bje)	Chilli (kg)	Meat (kg)	D/ fish (kg)	Wages (days)	Kheyak (days)	Kheta (days)
Butter (Sang)		3.0	2.0	3.0	1.0	0.5	3.0	0.5	1.0	0.3	0.5
Chugor (shey)	0.3		0.5	1.0	0.3	0.2	1.0	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.2
Rice (bje)	0.5	2.0		2.0	0.5	0.25	2.0	0.25	0.5	0.2	0.3
Barley (bje)	0.3	1.0	0.5		0.3	0.2	1.0	0.2	0.3	0.15	0.2
Mustd (bje)	1.0	3.0	2.0	3.0		0.5	3.0	0.5	1.0	0.3	0.5
Chilli (kg)	2.0	5.0	2.5	5.0	2.0		6.0	1.0	2.0	0.5	1.0
Meat (kg)	0.3	1.0	0.5	1.0	0.3	0.2		0.2	0.3	0.1	0.2
Dry fish (kg)	2.0	5.0	2.5	5.0	2.0	1.0	6.0		2.0	0.75	1.0
Wages (days)	1.0	3.0	1.5	3.0	1.0	0.5	3.0	0.5		0.3	0.5
Kheyak (days)	3.0	10.0	5.0	10.0	3.0	2.0	10.0	2.0	2.0		0.75
Kheta (days)	2.0	6.0	3.0	6.0	2.0	1.0	6.0	1.0	1.0	0.075	
Cash Nu.	30	10	20	10	30	60	10	60	30	100	60

Table 7: Population of yaks in Laya and Lunana (1994/95)

Gewog	Yaks
Laya*	2158
Lunana**	766
Total	2924

* data collected in 1994

** data collected in 1995

Table 8: Annual yak production schedule in Laya

Activity	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Herds moved to summer pastures												
Calving												
Main milking period												
Shearing of hair												
Mating												
Hay making												
Selling/culling of animals												
Herds moved to winter pastures												
Supplementary feeding												
Marketing of products												

In the study area, yak rearing on the present scale has a relatively young history. In Laya, presently 75% of the households own yaks ranging from less than 10 to over 300 with an average ownership of 29.5 heads per households. According to village elders, around 30 years ago, there were less than 5 families who owned their own livestock and 3

families who tended the herds belonging to Kabji Dzong, Talo Gompa and Central Monastic Body in Punakha (Gup Tshering and others, personal communications, October, 1993). Only two households kept horses while the majority owned a few heads of cattle.

Cropping was much more important than yak rearing in those days. Buckwheat (*Fagopyrum tabaricum* L.) was extensively cultivated on *tseris*, and much more barley (*Hordeum vulgare* L.) was cultivated then than it is today. This is evident from the abandoned fields around the villages. Engagement in trading and transporting goods on the then active trading route between Bhutan and Tibet were other sources of income.

Informal discussions with village elders consistently pointed out the following main reasons for the increase in yak population in Laya.

i) The Closure of the Tibetan Border Following the Chinese Invasion

The people of Laya were no more required to provide compulsory porter services for Bhutanese and Tibetan Government dignitaries, religious figures and other nobles. As a result, they had more time to engage in their own affairs. Fleeing Tibetans drove their yaks across the border and sold them at give-away prices, as they could not take the yaks with them below Gasa. Many new herds were established during this period.

i) The Abolition of Heavy In-Kind Taxes in the Form of Livestock Products and Porter Services

In the past, the inhabitants had no incentive to rear livestock as they were heavily taxed on the basis of livestock holding and often ended up remitting more products than they could actually produce. Those who owned a female yak or a cow were taxed in the range of 20 *sangs* (6-7 kg) of butter

regardless of its productivity status, and those with a pack yak or a horse were required by law to provide porter service to Gasa Dzong and other authorities as and when required without any compensation (Ap Kesang Tshering, Sangay Dorji & others, personal communications, July 1993). Once these taxes were abolished and herders could keep their products for themselves, they started keeping yaks and horses.

iii) Distribution of Female Yaks by the Government

During the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1982-87), households who did not own yaks were given two female yaks each as *soelra* or grants from the Government. Some of the recipients of this scheme were able to multiply their yaks and establish new herds. This scheme was repeated during the Seventh Plan (1992-97) and over 100 female yaks were distributed between 1993 and 1995.

iv) A General Improvement in the Economy

Economic development elsewhere in the country during the last two decades has enhanced the market for the products as well as brought in revenue through other sectors such as tourism and development projects. This, combined with the flourishing albeit illegal cross border trade in Chinese and Indian goods had greatly enhanced the purchasing power of the people.

The people of Lunana unfortunately did not benefit from the changes brought about by the events in Tibet, as there were no routes from Tibet into the area. Most of the yaks were bought from the neighbouring areas of Laya and Sephu in Wangduephodrang district. Yak distribution schemes have not fared so well and many families who were beneficiaries of the scheme in 1982-87 did not have yaks in 1995.

Herd Sizes and Composition

Table 9 shows the size and composition of 24 randomly selected herds in Laya. The analysis of yak herds by age and sex shows that 50% of the animals were above 8 years with a male to female ratio of 1:1.2. The low proportion of yaks below 4 years of age is an indication of heavy calf mortality. It is noteworthy that the proportion of male to female animals below 4 years is almost equal indicating that culling of males does not occur below this age. The high number of male yaks is kept as they are economically as important as the female ones providing transport and draught power. They are also a standing insurance against bad times as they could be easily sold in times of need and fetch good prices.

Table 9: Composition of yak herds by age and sex in Laya (n=24)

Age	Male No.	%	Female No.	%	Total No.	%
< 2 Yrs.	131	8	161	10	292	18
	<i>5.5</i>		<i>6.7</i>			
2-4 Yrs.	102	6	129	9	231	15
	<i>4.2</i>		<i>5.4</i>			
4-8 Yrs.	123	7	173	11	296	18
	<i>5.1</i>		<i>7.2</i>			
> 8 Yrs.	293	21	462	28	755	49
	<i>12.2</i>		<i>19.2</i>			
Total	649	42	925	58	1574	100

1) *Figures in italics indicate the average number of animals per herd*

2) *Percentages of animal groups are calculated across herds and not of the total of the sample populations.*

Further sub-division of the adult females into milking and dry animals shows that the ratio of dry to milking animals is almost equal (Table 10) indicating that herders have nearly constant milk production from year to year. The relatively high number of animals is due to the inclusion of four of the largest herds in the area with more than 150 animals each.

The proportion of adult female animals in this observation is much higher than those earlier reported by Harris (1987) in Soi Yaksa and Pelela in western Bhutan and is closer to the figures of Miller (1988) for herds in Merak Sakteng in eastern Bhutan.

Table 10: Production status of female yaks in 24 sample herds in Laya

Production status	Average number per herd	Average percentage per herd
Milking females	194	51
Dry females	191	49

Type and Breed of Yaks

Yaks in Bhutan are not yet categorized into breeds. There has not been an investigation to see whether the differences in appearance between yaks of different region within the country are due to genetic difference. From appearance, however, the Laya type most probably is descendant of the Henduan Alpine type found in the south-eastern part of Tibet as described by Li and Wiener (1995). Most of the yaks have black coats with few light brown ones. Other distinguishing marks are white faces, white legs and white tails. Exceptions from these are brown, or light brown in colours with or without tails and legs. The yaks in Lingshi are observed to be bigger than those in Laya, which in turn are bigger than those in Lunana. However, these differences are probably due to the difference in breeding and feeding management rather than any inherent genetic differences. Table 11 shows the linear body dimensions of different age groups of yaks measured randomly in different herds.

Table 11: Height at withers and body length of different age group of yaks

Age group	(n)	Ht. Withers (cm)	Body Length (cm)
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< 2 months (mixed)	11	62.5	74.1
12 months (mixed)	8	86.3	109.4
24 months (mixed)	5	103.0	133.2
> 4 years female	12	115.4	170.8
> 4 years male	11	138.7	189.4

The females are much smaller and also carry less hair than males. The horns of the males are long, round and curve out wide and evenly towards the tips. The females have shorter and thinner horns than males.

In comparison to the body dimensions of yaks in Tibet and China quoted by Li and Wiener (1995) from various studies, the size of yaks in Laya are similar or bigger. The height at withers of the Jinglong breed, which is the largest of the Chinese breeds, is 138 cm and the body length 178 cm. Since heart girth measurements were not taken, it is not possible to compare correlation with body weights as done in the Chinese studies (Li and Wiener, 1995).

Reproduction of Yak and Breeding System

The female yaks are mated for the first time at the age of 3 years or during the fourth warm season after birth. The survey results show that most of the females give birth in their fourth or fifth year (Table 12). The calving rate depends as much on feeding management as on genetic factors. Most of the females (81%) are reported to calve only in alternate years and only 18% annually. The females have a long reproductive life extending to over 15 years. Yaks are seasonal breeders and oestrus is affected by climatic factors, pasture growth and altitude. The yak females in Laya improve in body condition with the onset of spring in May and attain peak condition towards August when they come into heat. Hence most of the breeding takes place in July and August. Breeding is carried out naturally by the herd's own breeding yak or a more dominant and stronger bull from neighbouring herds. Breeding bulls are not restrained and roam freely among the different herds of females constantly challenging rivals. Hence herders generally are unsure of the male

pedigree of progenies apart from judgement of phenological features. Yak bulls are selected from the herder's own growing bull stock, purchased from neighbours or from Haa in western Bhutan. Performance of young bulls below 6 years is affected by the presence of stronger bulls around and they do not attain peak performance until they are around 7 to 8 years old and are able to fend off older challengers.

Conception rates are reported to be good with most females in heat, successfully conceiving after being served several times either by the same or different bulls. Under the circumstances, it is not unrealistic to estimate that the conception rate in a herd is around 80% or more although herders constantly reported achieving 100% conception of 0 females, which come in heat. The gestation period of yaks is shorter than those in cattle. Most of the calving occurs in May and June thus accounting for a gestation period between 8 to 9 months (approximately 240-270 days).

Due to the difficulty in monitoring the exact time of conception of a female yak, which generally occurs on the range and out of sight of herders, it is difficult to keep accurate records of individual animals. Robinson (1994) described similar reproductive characteristics in Nepalese yaks and by Li and Wiener (1995) in Chinese and Tibetan yaks demonstrating that there are no fundamental differences in the reproductive performances of yaks between these countries. In Mongolia, for example, conception rates of 94.4% had been observed (Magasch, 1990) and in China, 94.3% (Yu et al. 1993). No cross breeding with other bovine species are carried out in Laya, Lunana and Lingshi as in other parts of Bhutan. Although, herders are aware of the higher milk yields from crossbred animals, they prefer to maintain pure yaks, as the crossbreeds carry the stigma of producing inferior quality of milk and meat and infertility in male progenies.

When the time for parturition, which normally takes place during the day, approaches, the female yak isolates herself in

a sheltered spot such as a depression in the ground, under a tree or in secluded spots behind rocks. Delivery is done either while lying on her side or standing up. The dam licks the newborn calf until the calf attempts to stand up and suck. The placenta is ejected within half an hour to half a day after parturition. Bonding of dam and calf depends mainly on smelling and licking and a yak cow can differentiate her calf by smell from among large groups of calves. Abortion is reported to be rare and often related to disorders from disturbance by other animals or predators rather than due to reproductive disorders.

Table 13: Reproductive characteristics of female yaks in Laya

Age	Calving No.	Number of animals	Calving interval	Years
			1	2 or more
3	1	2	Not applicable	
4	1	8	Not applicable	
5	1	10.0	Not applicable	
6	2	10	3	7
7	2	4	1	3
7	3	6	2	4
8	2	4	0	4
8	3	13	3	10
9	3	9	1	8
10	3	1	0	1
10	4	2	0	2
11	3	1	0	1
11	4	4	1	3
12	3	1	0	1
12	4	3	0	3
13	4	2	0	2
13	5	3	1	2
14	5	1	0	1
		84	12 (18%)	52 (81%)

Source: Herders interviewed during milking time

The survival rate of the calves appears to be very low. Herders repeatedly reported losing more than 50% of the previous year's calf crop either to infection by gid disease, weakness over winter or from predation by wild animals. Calf survival is improved by not milking the dams for several days to weeks following parturition and allowing the calves to suckle. Once a day, they are milked as a strategy to improve the survival rate. In winter, they are fed with supplementary feed such as buckwheat dough, porridge and alcohol by-products.

Production Characteristics of Yaks

a) Observations on Growth

Herders estimate birth weight of yak calves in the range of 10-15 kg. This low birth weight is possibly a consequence of the relatively short gestation period and also of the poor nutrition during late pregnancy, having to survive mostly on frozen ground without much supplementary feeding. The growth rate of the calves is slow. At the age of 12 months, the height at wither and body length show only small differences from newborn calves of less than two months. Malnutrition appears to be the main cause of slow growth. According to the herders, growth rate is much faster between 2 and 4 years of age when the animals are strong enough to seek out better pastures. This is probably due to natural selection resulting in the survival of the strongest of the lot. Peak size in males is attained around 5 years of age and in females at around 4. All the animals attain peak weight and body condition annually towards the end of the warm season in September and October and are in their poorest conditions in March and April at the end of the dry harsh winters. Lack of adequate care and fodders during winter are reportedly as the main reasons for the poor growth rate and condition of animals. The estimated weight of a fully-grown bull is around 400-500 kg and of cows around 250-300 kg. From various sources, Li and Weiner (1995) reported live weight ranges between 235 kg

to 594 kg for males and 190 kg to 314 for females among different breeds of Chinese and Tibetan yaks.

b) Milk Production

The milk yield of cows shows an average of 1.2 kg a day per cow in the peak production period of July when the yak cows are milked twice a day and around 0.9 kg in October when they are milked only once (Table 14). The age of the cows as well as the lactation stage and the number of calvings influence the milk yield. Highest milk yields were obtained from those cows between 7-10 years of age in their third and fourth calving. Those calving annually give a higher daily milk yield than those calving in alternate season but the latter give higher lactation yields. From a wide range of data, the highest daily milk yield of 2.6 kg per animal was recorded from Bazhou yak in Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China and the lowest yield of 0.9 kg from Alpine yak in Tibet, recorded in summer months (Li and Weiner, 1995). However, this difference was believed to be due to the difference in supply of herbage, which was abundant in Xinjiang and scarce in Tibet.

Lactation yield per se has little meaning unless the period is defined since the number of days a cow is milked varies between herds. Annually, calving cows have an average milk production period of 120-180 days and therefore, average lactation yield of 130 to 150 kg of milk, while those calving in alternate years have a milk production period of 300 to 360 days and a yield of 220 to 250 kg based on the following calculations:

June to September = 120 days at 1.2 kg per day = 144 kg

October to November = 60 days at 0.9 kg per day = 54 kg

December to March/May = approx. 120 or 180 days at 0.25 per day 30-45 kg

The daily milk yield per animal and per herd varies little in autumn. In a herd of 13 milking cows, the average daily milk yield was 0.95 kg per animal and 11.1 kg for the whole herd and these yields varied little over 8 consecutive days.

Table 14: Average milk production of female yaks by number of calving and age of animals

No. of calving	Mean age	Average daily milk yield (kg)		
		Jul., 93	Oct., 93	Mean
1	4.4	1150	868	1009
2	6.8	1193	854	1024
3	8.4	1308	881	1095
4	11.3	1195.0	938	1067
	12.8	1125	1006	1066
Mean		1194	909	1052
Sample (n)		98	136	234

c) Hair Production

Hair production is not given as much importance in Laya as it is in Lunana and Lingshi. The average hair harvested (not potential yield) from male yaks is around 1 kg per year and in females around 0.3 kg from measurements made from hair shorn of 8 males and 22 females. The males are clipped of all the wool growing inside the outer layer of long hairs at the upper and lower flanks, whereas the females are stripped of all the hair. Hair is usually clipped in June/July and the staple length varies from 20 to 40 cm. Yak hair is much more valued in Tibet where other fibres are not as readily available as in Bhutan. Average hair yield is reported to range from 1.7 to 13.9 kg in male and 0.5 kg to 2.9 kg in female yaks (Li and Wiener, 1995).

d) Meat Production

October and November months are considered the best time for slaughtering animals for meat. The animals are considered to be in prime body condition and the temperature is cold enough for preserving fresh meat over longer period of time, which is essential for delivery to markets. The average dressed weight of fully-grown yak is around 200 kg. The

average weight of different portions of 6 carcasses weighed in October 1993 is shown in Table 15.

Table 15: Average weight of different portions of meat from yak carcass

Portion	Average weight (kg) (n=6)
Hind legs (2)	70
Front legs (2)	48
Ribs (2)	32
Chest	18
Intestine and stomach	12
Liver, kidney, heart, etc	10
Head	12
Total	206

The hide is usually stored for processing into leather and leather goods. It is also used as rug with the hair left intact and often as a substitute for meat after elaborate preparation.

e) Draught Performance

The male yaks mostly provide draught power. Young yaks are castrated when they reach around 4 years of age. A hole is pierced through their noses, which is used for fixing a wooden nose ring. This secured with a rope, enables herders to handle them easily. The young yaks are trained to carry loads and plough fields. While training them as pack yaks, they are secured by ropes to a dominant yak, and to plough, they are paired up with stronger and dominant yaks. On average, a yak carries 60 kg of load, loaded in equal halves on either flank of their back upon a saddle. A pair of yak ploughs as much as 3 times the area ploughed by a pair of bullocks in a day.

Management of Yak Herds

a) Seasonal Activities

Activities in early spring include supplementary feeding of weak and young stock, supervision of calving and subdividing of herds (refer Table 8). In summer, milk production and processing, supervision of mating, and hair production activities are carried out. Hay making is the main activity in September and supplementary feeding of weak animals in winter.

b) Grazing Management

The following factors determine the type of grazing management practised by herders:

- i) ownership of grazing areas
- ii) size and topography of grazing areas
- iii) vegetation and productivity of grazing areas
- iv) size and ownership of yak herds.

Generally, there are summer and winter pastures with small areas of autumn and spring grazing areas in the intermediate zone. Summer pastures are usually located at the top of the mountain ridges while winter pastures are closer to the permanent settlements, in more sheltered areas and on south facing slopes at lower elevation. Spring and autumn grazing areas are occupied for relatively short periods while on transit between summer and winter grazing areas. However, in Laya, there are no fixed criteria for differentiating summer and winter pastures. Animal movements from summer to winter pasture are often along a horizontal altitudinal plane rather than vertical as is the case in some other parts of Bhutan. They may be separated by several mountain ridges and valleys or lie within the same ridge or valley.

i) Ownership of Pastures

Table 16 shows the area of registered pastureland in Laya and Lunana. As per law, the herders only have grazing rights in areas registered in their names and referred to as *Tsadrok*. The land itself belongs to the state (The Land Acts, 1980). However, to all ends and purposes, herders with grazing rights over large areas consider the land as their own while those with less, insufficient or no grazing rights interpret differently.

Table 16: Area of private and community registered pasture

Gewog	Private	Community	Total
Laya	10,682	3,503	14,185
Lunana	8,368	1,640	10,008
Total	19,050	5,143	24,193

Source: Land Record Data, Survey of Bhutan, from LUPP (1995)

Depending on the number, size and locations of pastures owned, herders can be divided into four categories as shown in Table 17. Grazing management varies between these groups. The first group, which consists of 23% of the herders in Laya, has fixed seasonal migration patterns from one pasture to another along routes followed annually. The duration of grazing on particular sites is as much dependent on the condition of the grass available as on historical tradition. The journey between summer and winter grazing grounds can vary between fractions of an hour to a week. However, those covering large distances between grazing grounds have stoppages at the villages following harvest of crops or autumn and spring grazing camps en route. The direction of movement and the route chosen is usually the same every year. The herders move with their tents and belongings until they reach the new campsite. Winter camps have permanent hutments of stone and mud walls with a thick layer of mud packing on the roof to protect from snowfall. Those with summer and winter pastures on the same ridge or valley are found in Tsherjathang and

Tashimakhang areas. The total number of sites owned determines the number of movements. The second group consisting of 29% of the herders in Laya and 21% in Lunana winter their herds in the community pastures around the villages after utilising their own summer pastures. The third group which accounts for 19% of Laya and 61 % of Lunana herders have group grazing rights in seasonal pastures and move from one pasture to the next on mutually agreed dates.

Table 17: Category of herders according to type of pasture ownership

Category of Herders	Laya		Lunana	
	No. of Herders	% of Herders	No. of Herders	% of Herders
Owning sufficient private pastures	17	23	0	0
Owning some of but not adequate pastures and dependents on community pastures for some season	29	29	22	21
Owning group pastures	14	19	63	61
Owning no pastures all year round	21	29	19	18
Total	73	100	104	100

This is typical of the arrangement found for pasture in Omtsa and Gangitey pastures. Disputes arise when a member of the group defaults on such agreements. The fourth group consists of those who took up yak herding only recently or of sub-units of families with no grazing rights. They use the community pastures around the villages all the year around or lease grazing lands from others for part of the year. The community pastures are shared by cattle and horses as well, and therefore, are the most heavily grazed of all the pastures. Following crop harvests, the animals have also access to grazing in the fields and the surrounding crop fallows.

Three herders in Laya still graze their herds on *tsadoks*, belonging to owners who live in Punakha, together with the animals belonging to these owners. The herding arrangement is on the basis of an old institution known as *keme shime* meaning 'no birth-no death' whereby the herder remits the product of a fixed number of animals every year and that any increase or decrease in herd numbers is the gain or loss of the herder. The other form of yak tenurial arrangement is called *puyig*, which is no more practised in Laya. In this system, the herder accounts dairy products to the owners according to the number of calves borne each year (verified by the owner or his/her representative annually). In both forms, the quantity is 30 sangs (10 kg) of butter for every milking cow.

ii) The Physiography and Area of Grazing Sites

The time and duration of grazing on a particular site is also influenced by the topography, slope exposure and gradient and the size of the grazeable area. The area registered in an individual herder's name has very little relevance or correlation to the area actually utilised for grazing by the herder. Registered grazing sites ranges in area from 0.04 ha (0.1 acre) to cover 202.4 ha (500 acres). Actual grazing area on a 0.04 ha site may be more than a kilometre's radius; similarly on a site registered as 200 acres, actual grazeable area may be less than half if the shrub cover and other unusable areas are deducted. Hence grazing time and duration is determined more by other physical factors than registered area. Sites on the valley bottom with riparian vegetation are grazed early in the summer to utilise the early growth. This period is determined by the fodder availability and by the time remaining before joining others at summer pastures. The topmost ridges are used for male animals during peak summer and the steep slopes are used more in dry season to avoid accidents from slipping. Likewise, most winter pastures are located in sheltered or sunny faces of the slope.

iii) Herders' Historical Knowledge of the Productivity and Quality of Pasture

Through their long history of using grazing sites, herders have developed some basic thumb rules to determine the time and duration of grazing on particular sites when they are not restricted by lack of alternative sites. They move to summer grazing sites when the *Primula sp* start blooming and move out of these areas to alternative sites when only unpalatable species of *Senecio* and *Therrnopsis* are visible, and milk yields drop significantly. Usually, the productivity and vegetation types do not differ significantly from year to year and herders move the animals after grazing for approximately the same number of days every year. Movement to winter grazing areas starts in September/October when barley harvesting is completed in the cropped areas.

In the case of herders owning enough independent grazing sites, the grazing system closely resembles rotational grazing management. The sites are in relatively healthy condition as compared to those grazed all the year round by the whole community.

iv) Herd Size

The larger herds are divided into two or more sub-herds. The pack yaks and growing male stock are separated from the main herd of females and young calves; the latter is further subdivided into milking and dry females in the case of two herds in Laya. The pack yaks are driven to the uppermost reaches of the ridge for the whole summer rounding up only when required. The dry female, young bulls and heifers occupy marginal pastures away from the main campsites and the milking females and calves are allotted the best and most accessible pastures. In Lunana, where the herd sizes are smaller, yaks are often combined from several herds and driven to a common summer pasture. In summer, between July and August, the calves are driven in a separate direction

from the dams so that they do not suckle the milk during the day.

c) Grazing Habits

Yaks are very versatile animals and consume nearly every type of herbage vegetation apart from few known toxic species of *Aconitum*, *Thernnopsis* and *Senecio*. However, these supposedly toxic species are also consumed when they are dry and herders do not consider them problematic. Yaks are able to feed on very short growth and are able to survive on herbage allowances less than 400 kg DM ha⁻¹ or herbage height of less than 3 cm as is commonly found in the community grazing areas for most part of the year. The preferred species according to the herders belong to the *Gramineae* and *Cyperaceae* families. Among the forbs, *Saussurea spp* are ranked highly and taken as an indication of good pastures and associated with high milk yields.

Yaks rarely browse on shrubs, which are readily eaten by other ruminants like cattle and goats. Only when hunger forces them during heavy snowfalls do they browse lightly on these plants. Yaks are also observed to dislike grazing in forests and tend to prefer the open meadows. Because of their surefootedness yaks are able to access fodder on very steep slopes. They can easily cross narrow footpaths and reach isolated grassy spots between rocks thus utilising fodder, which would otherwise be wasted.

d) Problems of Overgrazing

The problem of overgrazing is not recognised by most herders. Many herders, however, claimed that grazing resources have deteriorated for the following reasons:

- An increase in the number of new herders and encroachment in their grazing areas
- An increase in the area of shrub vegetation due to ban on fires

- An increase in the number of wild ungulates particularly blue sheep due to the decimation of wolves in the 1980s

The problem of overgrazing is particularly evident in the community grazing grounds where not only yaks but horses and cattle also graze all year round. These areas are also grazed by flocks of blue sheep particularly during mornings and evenings as they come down closer to human habitation to take refuge from predators like leopard and wild dogs. The private pastures on the other hand are not subject to the same intensity of grazing and are spelled for certain months of the year.

Erosion and grassland deterioration is particularly strong in areas where large herds of yaks are joined by flocks of blue sheep and large numbers of marmots. The marmots are found to be very destructive as they dig numerous burrows, which set off the process of erosion. The holes become larger under the hooves of yaks until they become large enough to be used as bull pits. In times of heavy rainfall, the soil from these open spots is washed down often causing landslips. The pastures around Laya, Lungo, Jarila and Lingshi are particularly affected by this phenomenon.

e) Supplementary Feeding

Supplementary feed consists of hay, barley straw, barley grain, mustard oil cake, buckwheat flour, and residues from alcoholic brewing. Hay is made from grass and other herbage growing around cropping fields and from forest undergrowth. The main species used for hay-making are *Elymus nutans*, *Poa spp* and *Vicia tibetica* in the plots around the fields. *Pleurospermum ambile*, *Selimum cortiodes* and *Heraculem nepalensis* from forest floors and winter camps as well as *Stipa* and *Festuca* grasses from grassy knolls on steep cliffs are also cut of making hay. The plants are cut with a bow sickle, collected and twisted into thick ropes and hung on the branches of trees around the fields and winter camp to dry.

Hay and barley straws are fed to draught yaks and pack horses whenever they are employed for ploughing or transporting. Milking female yaks and calves are given supplementary hay in winter in the mornings and evenings in smaller herds. Other concentrates are given only to calves going through their first winter or very weak females in early spring. The level of supplementary feeding is very low and inadequate to meet the nutrient requirements of animals in winter. On the other hand, herders spend considerable time collecting grass for hay in the range of 60-100 working days per year.

f) Equipment, Enclosures and Pens

Yak herders need very few equipment. Their milk churner, milking pans and butter containers are made of canes and brought from lower areas. Large pans for cheese making and cooking utensils are other important equipment besides their camping gear consisting of yak hair tents and floor mats. Ropes for tethering and handling animals for different purposes are other essential gears. In winter, young calves are sheltered in simple mud wall pens and in summer, tethered around the camp on a long rope. No enclosures are used for adult animals although a stone wall is usually found around the herder's winter home where hay and other supplements are fed to weak and young animals.

g) Controlling the Herd on the Range

Yaks are more difficult to control than cattle. They scare easily and when disturbed unexpectedly react by running over long distances. Daily, they cover large areas of grazing grounds but they rarely stray too far away from each other in a group. The bulls are aggressive and can be wild tempered. The females are very protective of their young ones and can be temperamental at these times.

All animals are known by names to the herder and his family. The names are usually linked to their coat, colour or some

other particular characteristic. Common names for male yaks are Chung-due, Jukar, Zekar, Nado, Khampa, Dawa, etc. The females are called Yangchen, Jugchen, Dongtham, Zangjen, Nalem, etc. When rounding up, yaks who stray out are called by name, accompanied by throwing of small stones either by hand or by a yak hair sling. Stones can be accurately thrown over long distances with this sling. Yaks respond to its loud cracking noise although they may not always be hit by stone.

Male yaks and growing stock are allowed to graze freely day and night and rounded up only when administering salt or for other purposes. Regular observations are made to ensure that wild animals do not predate upon them. The milking females are rounded up every evening in summer for milking and then allowed to graze during the night until dawn when they are again rounded up for milking. Young calves and yearlings are penned or tethered to a long rope at night so that they do not suckle their dams or get predated upon. After milking in the morning, they are usually driven in a different part of the pasture so that the milk is saved for the evening. After peak lactation, the calves are allowed to graze with their mothers during the day.

h) Daily Schedules

The daily schedules generally followed in Laya are shown in Table 18. Daily activities differ depending on the number of times the cows are milked in a day.

Management of Individual Animal

a) Calf Rearing

Special attention is given to young calves. Upon parturition, they are encouraged to suckle and feed on the colostrum few minutes before milking to encourage milk letdown and after milking, to finish off what is left. It is also fed with a ball of buckwheat or wheat flour dough, usually weigh about 250 g at each milking. Fostering is attempted when a young calf has

lost its dam by smearing the calf with the milk of the intended foster mother, usually a cow which has lost its calf. The calves are penned at night or tethered to long ropes near the herders' tent or hut to protect them from predators. Weaning takes place between the age of 6 month and 12 months or more depending on the reproductive status of the dams. A nose ring, which is designed to obstruct suckling, is used when weaning calves, which persists in trying to suckle.

Table 18: Daily schedule in yak herding in Laya

Time	Twice daily milking (July-Sept)	Once daily milking (other seasons)
0500-0700	Yak cows rounded up from night grazing to the camp sites	Yak cows rounded up from night grazing to the camp sites
0700-0800	Milking; calves are released from overnight tethering or shelter one by one	Same as above
0830-1730	Yak cows and calves driven to separate grazing sites and allowed to graze freely	Yak cows and calves released and allowed to graze together freely
1730-1900	Yak cows and calves recalled from grazing for evening milking	Yak calves rounded up for penning and tethering
1900-2000	Milking; afterwards cows let loose to graze and calves are penned or tethered	Supplementary feeding of weak calves
2000-0500	Yak cows allowed to graze freely near campsite	Yak cows left to graze freely over night

b) Milking

The udder and teats are usually but not in all cases, washed before milking. Milking is done in a fixed order according to the tethering arrangement of the calves. When the calf is

released, it runs to its mother and suckles. After about half to one minute, it is held back and tethered or held by children. The hind legs of some cows need to be tied by a short rope. The teats between the fingers are squeezed since the teats of yaks are smaller than cows. A little quantity of barley powder mixed with salt is given to each cow before milking to win its cooperation.

c) Breeding Bull Selection and Management

Breeding bulls are selected from within the herds' growing male stock or purchased from other herds on the following selection criteria.

Body size -	the breeding bull should be bigger than other bulls of the same age
Body conformation -	it should have a proportionate body and not possess any deformity
Colour -	black with white tail and spot on the face is the most preferred colour
Horns -	the horns should be large and symmetric as they are highly correlated with the fighting ability of the bull
Temperament -	the bull should be dominating and aggressive to be able to fend off challengers

The breeding bull is given feed concentrates such as mustard oil and oil cakes at the end of the mating season. It is allowed to wander about at will and graze freely on its own. It is not shorn of hair or combed of its wool, which help to enhance its size when compared to the shorn bulls. Usually, the productive life of a breeding bull is up to 12 years of age after

which it becomes incapable of defending its status and is castrated or culled.

d) Castration of Males

All the young males other than the breeding bull are castrated. This is done when the bulls are about 3-4 years of age. The animal is tied up and grounded on its side. The lower part of the scrotum is then sliced open and the testicles pushed out. The cords are crushed and the wound, sterilised with boiling mustard or iodine solution. Most of the herders conduct castration.

e) Harvesting Down and Coarse Hair

Yak hair is shorn in early summer. The animal is secured by the horn with a short rope to a post. The front legs are tied together. In the case of male yaks, the upper section of the breast is clear cut while only the inside portion on the lower flank is cut. The tail is trimmed. Down is pulled out by hand which comes off easily at that time. Female yaks are clean shorn except for the hairs on legs.

f) Feeding Salt

Yaks do not take salt voluntarily and it has to be fed forcefully. The head is secured to the post by a short rope. The front and hind legs are tied together and the yaks brought to the ground on their sides. While one person holds the head and turns the mouth upwards, another person pours the salt down the animal's throat and follows it up with a mouthful of water to wash it down. Salt is fed thus to every animal monthly at the rate of 300-350 g per adult and 150-200 g for yearlings.

Mortality and its Causes in Yak Herds

Mortality rates are very high in yak herds particularly in the young stock. Average loss per herd in Laya was 6 animals

(20%) from an average herd size of 30 animals and in Lunana 4 animals (50%) of an average herd size of 8 animals (Table 19). This high mortality reported on Lunana was due to lack of winter fodder after the occurrence of the flood in October 1994, which swept across most of the winter pastures. Mortality in young stock accounts for 68% and 48% respectively in the two gewogs. Mortality in Laya is reported to be caused mainly by an infection of gid disease (47%), while in Lunana other sickness mostly related to weakness from poor nutrition (48%) is the main cause. Other causes are from predation by wild animals and accidental falls.

Yak Products and Their Utilisation

a) Milk Products

Yak milk in larger herds is churned every day using a cylindrical cane bucket called **zum** and wooden churner. In smaller herds, milk from successive milkings is accumulated in the churner until sufficient quantity is reached for churning. Depending on the size of the churner and the corresponding quality of milk, it takes two to three hours before butter is formed. The butter is skimmed off using a flat wooden spoon and then drained of liquid by slapping it against a flat wooden box with the spoon. It is then shaped into circular or rectangular biscuits and wrapped in large leaves or pressed into a cane container called **sibang**. If done properly, butter preserved with these methods can keep for long periods without becoming rancid.

Table 19: Mortality in yak herds from different causes in Laya and Lunana

Gewog	Herds surveyed (No.)		Cause	Mortality			%
	Total	Avg. size		Young	Adult	Total	
Laya	73	30	Gid	2.7	0.1	2.8	47
			Other sickness (weakness)	1.4	1	2.4	40
			Accidents/predation	0	0.8	0.8	13
			Total	4.1	1.9	6	100
			%	68	32	100	
Lunana	104	8	Gid	1.2	0.2	1.4	35
			Other sickness (weakness)	0.5	1.4	1.9	48
			Accidents/predation	0.2	0.5	0.7	18
			Total	1.9	2.1	4	100
			%	48	53		

The buttermilk is then poured into a large pan (size depend on quality) and gently heated to boiling point. As it coagulated, a small quantity of whey from previous making is added and the solution gently stirred by a ladder in a circular motion. It takes between a half to an hour (depending on quality) before cheese formation takes place. The whey is then drained out from the pan using a ladle and a sieve. The cheese is then wrapped in the cloth and pressed between two large stones and left overnight to get rid of all liquid and becomes compact. The cheese is then either used fresh or processed further into hard cheese for marketing.

Two types of dried hard cheese are made, *chugo* and *hapi ruto* depending on the market for which they are intended. *Chugo* is made by slicing the circular cheese into small pieces of

approximately 2 cm by 3 cm cubes and hanging them in strings of twenty pieces on a yak hair string. After boiling it in milk, the strings are hanged on a pole in the tent and allowed to dry until they become rock hard. *Hapi ruto* is made in larger pieces of around 8 cm square by 1 cm thick and dried again in strings of 20 pieces. To obtain uniform drying, wooden sticks are used to separate the pieces. Such cheese can be kept for a very long time, and is easy to transport. They are light and resistant to damage from handling. *Chugo* is sold in local markets in Punakha and Thimphu and *hapi ruto* in Phuntsholing to Indian dealers.

In Lunana, a product called *phuelu* is made from milk. The process involves pouring of milk from every milking into a container in which a coiled piece of juniper or birch twig is placed. The accumulation of milk cream over a period of time results in formation of a thick layer of cheese-like material on the wooden coil. This is scraped off and stored in a *sibang* and has the same market value as butter. The average annual production of butter and cheese from a female yak is estimated to be 30 *sangs* (10 kg) of butter, 40 *sheys* of *chugo* and with an additional 2-3 kg of *phuelu* in Lunana.

b) Meat Products

Yak meat is considered a delicacy and eaten as dried venison or cooked into stews and curries. It is often consumed as '*masha*' (red meat) by preserving a piece of leg in winter wrapped in a cotton cloth and kept in a warm place. Almost every part of the yak carcass is consumed after processing in various ways. The legs below the knee are separated from the thighs together with the skin. Similarly, the head is severed at the neck without skinning. The hairs on these parts are burned over an open fire and scrapped off with a sharp knife until the skin becomes clean of any hair stubbles. The hooves and horns are then removed by heating, which makes the outer sheaths to come off. The head is then split along the center dividing it into two equal halves and dried on a rake above the fireplace if it is to be consumed later. It may also be

cut into smaller pieces and boiled overnight. When the pieces are thoroughly cooked, the meaty part comes off the bones and is then fried in oil and treated with chilli and black pepper and other spices to make *gushapa* (head meat dish). The legs are usually left for a long time and used for making *kangju* (bone marrow soup) on festive occasions or religious ceremonies. Spices and other condiments are added and then served together with the pieces.

The gut and the intestines are thoroughly washed to remove all excrements. The gut is sliced into thin strips and dried for later use. The intestines are used to make sausages by filling them with a mixture of blood from the slaughtered animal, fat, wheat flour, and chilli and black pepper powder. The filled intestines are then boiled until they are cooked and become solid. They are prepared together with oil and spices for meal or dried by hanging them on ropes secured to the ceiling for future use. The livers, heart and kidneys, if free of any lesions and flukes, are cut into fine pieces and fried together with spices and eaten as snacks with alcoholic drinks.

c) Yak Hide

The fresh skin is stretched on a smooth dry ground by holding the ends with wooden pegs stuck into the ground. After it is dried, it is stored in the attic until the owner finds time to process it into floor mats, leathers, glues or *kosha* (hide meat - a substitute when meat is not available). It is also used as mats. The flesh and fat inside the skin is scraped off, oiled with mustard and softened by rubbing it under the feet until it becomes flexible. To make leather, the skin is soaked in cold water for several days until the hair comes off easily when pulled by hand. All hair on the skin and flesh inside it are scraped off thoroughly often using coarse sands or rock grains. Then it is treated with mustard or vegetable oil, folded and rubbed by feet until the outer part turns into a golden brown tan. The leather is used for making bags for storing and transporting grains, flour, shoe soles and saddle straps. The rejected ends are used as fine strings for

sewing leather bags. Poor quality leather is stripped into very fine ropes and used for carrying loads of firewood, hay and straws. Strips of raw hides are also used for binding wooden fittings of houses to secure them in position.

d) Yak Hair Products

The hair from the yak is a valuable item essential for the daily life of the herder's household. The long hair is washed, dried and spun into thick yarns and used for weaving tents, bags, rugs, slings and ropes. The products are waterproof and very durable. Often, the yarn is dyed red particularly for making rugs and bags when it is combined with white and black yarns to make colourful striped pieces. The soft hair is used for making garments and blankets. Usually it is dyed red black or deep maroon for making dresses.

Yak Production Constraints and Issues as Perceived by the Herders

Shortage of winter fodder is ranked as the most serious problem in both gewogs (Table 20). Heavy mortality as a result of weakness from malnutrition is attributed to this factor. Gid disease continues to be a major health problem. Inability to obtain new bloodlines of breeding bulls is considered a major cause of decrease in yak sizes. Lack of sufficient pasture and increasing number of blue sheep and marmots are listed as other production problems. Marketing is not perceived as a problem.

Table 20: Yak production constraints and issues as perceived by the herders

Constraints/issues	Ranking		Causes/Reasons
	Laya	Lunana	
Lack of winter fodder	1	1	Insufficient land for hay making, poor grass growth
Insufficient pasture	2	2	Land tenureship, shrub invasion, flood damage (Lunana)
Unavailability of breeding bulls	3	3	Lack of sources; distance
Gid disease infection	4	5	Poor veterinary services
Increase in blue sheep	5	8	No population control
Increase in shrub/forest cover	6	6	Banning of forest fires and shifting cultivation
Predation by wildlife	7	7	More cover for stalking
Religious beliefs	8	4	Restricts culling (Laya); annual animal sacrifices limits nemrical increase in herd (Lunana)

Conclusions and Recommendations

Yak rearing will continue to be the main source of livelihood for the people living high altitudes in Bhutan. New and emerging issues confronting the country in general and the remote yak rearing, areas in particular leaves no doubt that yak rearing and with it the lifestyle of many nomadic and semi-nomadic communities, are under threat. Increasing human population, exposure to new culture and changing social norms, climatic changes, soil erosion and land degradation, genetic degradation of yaks and dwindling grazing resources etc. are all manifested in one form or other, much more seriously in these areas than in other parts of the country.

Rapid fragmentation of family herds and grazing land is just one example which not only leads to the establishment of economically unviable units of operation but also increases environmental degradation through breakdown of traditional institutions for sustainable utilisation of grazing resources. There are, however, no immediate solutions. What is required is a multi- disciplinary approach to tackle social, legal, economic and environmental issues.

Diversification of employment of the local people will be one of the key social strategies to reduce pressure on the scarce resources. To do so, access to education must be given top priority so that the future generations of *Jops* could become competitive in non-traditional jobs. Establishment of a 'Reserve Seat System' for children from these disadvantaged communities in national institutions like Sherubtse College, Natural Resources Training Institute, Royal Bhutan Polytechnic, Royal Institute of Management, Royal Health School and the National Institute of Traditional Medicine will go a long way towards furthering this cause. Population planning rather than family planning, whereby the population of the community within the given area is taken as the unit of planning, should be given equal priority to halt unsustainable levels of population growth.

On the legal agenda, laws pertaining to inheritance of family property, taxation on livestock and pastures, grazing rights etc. need to be revised. Yak rearing units, if not checked through appropriate inheritance legislation, will not be economically viable or environmentally sustainable. The present taxation system is not conducive to responsible management of livestock and grazing resources since very little value is given to them because of the extremely low taxes. An upward revision of the taxes would not only limit the increase of livestock and encourage off-take of excess animals through culling and thereby increase the economic viability of yak production but also encourage greater responsibility on the part of herders to manage grazing resources. Simultaneously, the existing policy of allocating

grazing rights to herders need to be replaced by a new policy of either leasing out pastures to herders on long- term lease or passing on full ownership to the herders. Without such a policy, it would be futile to attempt any technological innovation to improve rangelands. One of the key constraints to improve yak production is the deteriorating condition of rangelands and their declining productivity. This phenomenon is caused by several factors; the ban on fire (Forest Act, 1969) as a management tool to control invading shrubs like dwarf juniper and rhododendrons, the poor recycling of nutrients due to removal of dung for manuring crops and for fuel, and the continuous grazing by both yaks and wild ungulates like blue sheep. A policy change to allow controlled prescribed burning to reclaim some of the areas under shrubs will relieve pressure off the open meadows and reduce soil erosion. Better management of soil nutrients retaining and distributing the manure over the pasture will help replenish soil fertility and increase pasture production. Reorganisation of herders into User Groups to re-establish seasonal rotational grazing of pastures is recommended to control overgrazing. Of immediate benefit to the herders will be the establishment of intensively managed small plots of hay meadows using highly productive but non-aggressive exotic species of grasses and legumes, viz. Italian ryegrass, cocksfoot, tall fescue, red clover, crown vetch, milk vetch etc., together with the application of limited quantity of chemical phosphorus fertiliser and fencing to protect from uncontrolled grazing.

Genetic degradation of yaks is manifested in their decreasing size and productivity. This needs to be addressed through introduction of new bloodlines, if possible, imported from the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China, and through selective breeding. Breeding needs to be controlled by monitoring the movement of breeding bulls of different herds so that more accurate records of their progenies could be kept.

Gid and tick-borne diseases continue to be major causes of mortality in yaks especially in spring when they are in their

weakest condition. Adequate veterinary health coverage to control these diseases would go a long way in improving the health and productivity of the yaks. To this end, the services of a qualified and dedicated veterinarian would greatly strengthen herders' faith and confidence in government initiatives. Unfortunately, no veterinarians so far have ventured to take up this challenging and undoubtedly fulfilling assignment.

Yak products like meat, butter and cheese will continue to command premium prices in the local market for some time to come. However, to sustain the production in future, improved processing, preservation and marketing methods needs to be developed so that the market niche for yak products can extend beyond local consumers. Production of smoked meat, Swiss type of cheese and salted butter may already be carried out with minimal investment.

Finally, the future of yak rearing appears to be rather bleak if appropriate steps are not taken now. It would indeed be a pity if we allow yak rearing to cease as an occupation. Not only would our future generations be denied the sight of the magnificent and lovable yak gracing the dizzy heights of the Himalayan meadows, but a whole culture and tradition revolving around it will be lost.

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF TANGO MONASTERY

*Tshenyid Lopen Kuenleg**

I pay obeisance to the wrathful Hayagriva, in whose form is assembled the prajna (transcendental wisdom) of body, speech, and mind of all the Buddhas. The key of the sacred place is here, so that it may open the door of faith to myself and to others.

The history of Tango (rTa-mgo) Monastery will be related here in three parts:

1. How great and important the sacred place is, including an eulogy.
2. How the successive great saints came to this place.
3. How the monastery was constructed by Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye.

How Great and Important the Sacred Place is, Including an Eulogy

Generally speaking, this kingdom of the Sandalwood Valley is the second Copper-coloured celestial palace or the hidden holy land of the Second Buddha Guru Padmasambhava. Through the miraculous powers of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the earth and all the rocks, stones, hills and mountains are manifested in the form of tutelary deities, both peaceful and wrathful, indicating how the sentient beings were subjugated and protected. Likewise, this is the place where the Compassionate Universal King Avalokitesvara revealed Himself in the self-emanated form of the Wrathful Hayagriva. Therefore, this is the holy place for retreats, the Siddhidhara, which was blessed by Guru Padmasambhava.

**The present master of logic and metaphysics (Tshenyid Lopen) of the Central Monastic Body.*

When the divine son Ngawang Tenzin opened the door of this holy place, he said the following:

“Om! Let there be peace and happiness. Let the precious Kargyud be victorious. Let the past Buddhas remain in the sacred sphere of the Dharma: let the future Buddhas consider the well-being of the sentient beings: let the present Buddhas undertake the service of the sentient beings. Let me pay obeisance to the past, present, and future Buddhas.

The appearance of this extraordinarily sacred site of the horse-head was predicted in Tibet. In the spacious southern valley, this horse-head is like a chaitya (chorten) come down from the 33rd heaven. It was emanated like a wishfulfilling gem from the palaces of the Nagas underneath the earth. It stands on this earth like a tutelary deity. The triangular mandala below the horse-head signifies that it will be a place conducive to meditative accomplishments. The majestic height and space behind the horse-head indicates the greatness and glory of the Kargyudpa sect. In front, it has the appearance of a heaping of precious jewels, symbolising the best utilization of endless hidden treasures. The sacred unvarying Vajrasana falls at its right, pointing to the immortality of morally up-right people. At its left is the oblation of the river like the Ganges, possessed of eight attributes, reflecting the satisfaction of all noble sons of the land in the Dharma. At its centre, the unshakeable Vajrasana represents the everlastingness of the Dharmakaya. Below is the dzong of *Kiphug nyima* a symbol of the increase of samadhi. Above is the super-natural horse in space, embodying the subjugation of the 3 sensual worlds. The rugged and steep hill to its right signifies the subjugation of heroes. At the left, Mahesvara is shown to be within the power of Hayagriva, signifies the subjugation of heroines. At the centre, the sacred secluded spot of

dakini indicates the purity and protection of the Dharma. The Silwatshel (cool grove) temple of Mahakala below symbolizes the subjugation of all the Dharmapalas. The upper part of the sloping valley held by a *Lhatsen* stands for the offering of siddhi to the yakshas. The lower terrace of the plateau is protected by *Mentsuen*, auguring good and plentiful harvests, while the wealth of the people on the land is indicative of the abundance of food. In front, the meandering of rivers represents voluntary oblations, and the leafy tree of the forests reflect the increase in experience. The crolicking of monkeys serves as consolation to the yogis. The flutter of wings of birds in the sky offers inspiration to them. Like one rock may have a thousand mouths, so also a religion may have manifold sects, but its reality or the essence is aggregated in the mind.

Oh! what a wonderful place it is ! The very hearing of its name is enough atonement for one' sins. The possession of faith will make one blessed. Seeing it, one will be enlightened. Residing in it, one will attain nirvana. There will be contentment and tranquillity. May peace and happiness envelop this place”.

As can be seen from the above eulogy of the great saint, this extraordinary place is veritable tutelary deity to the morally upright person. But to people of ordinary timbre, it appears as a rock-horse with all its limbs.

Within the rock is a cave. There are four stages in the upper and lower parts of the cave, at the centre of which is a secret self-emanated cavern of a dakini containing triangular red and black colours and a natural divine mansion. At the side of the rock, there are self-emanated figures of the sun and the moon. At the bottom of the cave there is a self-emanated impression of the demon Matramrutra. When Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel brought the remains of his father to the fire mandala, 13 *Pal-khorlo-dompa* (Sri Cakrasambhara gods)

emanated by themselves at the side of the rock, a sight which can still be seen today. At the basement of the cave there is a long passage of rock, which differentiates the virtuous from the non-virtuous. The virtuous cross it easily, while the sinful people are squeezed in between and become terrified.

There is an upper cave, the unvarying Vajrasana cave, which houses a self-emanated Hayagriva whose chest directly faces the south, symbolizing the actions of Abhicarya in wrathful forms. The siddhikara-tantra describes the requisite locale for the tantric practicing siddhi. It should possess a black rock with a pointed head and its mouth facing south, and it should be at the summit of a hill or at the site of a tree or cemetery, or a place associated with a *mamo*. In Tango all these requirements are perfectly met.

When Zhabdrung Rinpoche was in meditation in this cave, at mid-night the demons of the valley caused this horse-head area to tremble, accompanied by loud swishing and thundering sounds. A large lump of rock, equivalent to the size of a yak's body, came crashing down towards Zhabdrung's head. He was then in complete samadhi, but the supernatural rock, instead of piercing the *larey*, was miraculously held in it. The rock has been carefully preserved till today, so that it may rouse the faith of future generations.

At present, there is a two-storeyed temple here. The lower storey contains the temple of Hayagriva, and has for its main object, the speaking Hayagriva. There are many other internal objects of one's personal lamas and gurus; crystals in which images of tutelary deities made their appearance; and a three-faced Hayagriva discovered by the divine son Ngawang Tenzin from the Thuji rock at Phadjoding. Also can be found a whip containing collective supplications, and a small flat stone which, according to the Namthar of Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo, bears the foot impression of the youngest daughter of Ngawang Tenzin, who was a dakini. These kinds of wonderful objects abound at the place.

On the upper storey is a temple of Mahakala where Zhabdrung Rinpoche meditated on Mahakala and his retinue. The main object here is the speaking statue of the 4 handed Mahakala, which was made by Zhabdrung himself. The wondrous *tormas* from which fire sprang forth during the performance of prayers are extant till today.

The cave below, known as the Kiphug Nyima dzong, has a very difficult approach but possesses all the requisite necessities for recluses. Those who can reach its interior will attain enlightenment, and the qualities of samadhi and experience. At the right of the sacred place, there is a big sandalwood tree. This was originally a staff of Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo, who planted it – on the earth, saying, ‘This will be the centre from which the Drukpa Kargyud doctrine will spread’.

Below and very near the tree is a small ground containing a chaitya—an inheritance left behind for posterity by Dakini Sonam Paldon at the time of her entering the state of beatitude.

This holy place is like the range of the Malay hills, full of the most delicious and fragrant wines, attracting one to reside there. Drupkhangs, fruit trees and flower gardens abound. At the centre, surrounded by this wealth of nature, there is the mandala of the sacred horse, and a self-emanated congregation hall of heroes and dakinis. Hence, the sanctity of the place is great, beyond description.

How the Successive Great Saints Came to This Place

When during the 4th Rabjung, in accordance with the prophecy of Chos-rje Tsangpa Gyare, Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo came to this place, he suddenly heard the neighing of a horse, and turning towards the source of the sound, he beheld the vision of Bhagavat Hayagriva sitting in the form of the Horse-King, the crown of its head blackish-green. He went up and prostrated himself before it. The Bhagavat said, ‘You, my son, whose coming was predicted by the Guru – you should not be

small-minded, but you should possess the Bodhicitta (Bodhisattva mentality). Constantly keep in mind the predictions of the Guru.'

As was forecast, Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo married Sonam Paldon, the manifestation of *Machig Lapdon*, through whom he begot four sons. He meditated over a long period of time, and attained the vision of all the tutelary deities. Immense credit goes to him for the great service he rendered in bringing the Drukpa Kargyud tradition to this valley for the well-being of the sentient beings.

During the 8th Rabjung, Chos-rje Drukpa Kunlay came and blessed the place. He prayed that his successors would take care of this Vihara. Within a short time, the divine son Ngawang Tenzin, then aged 50, opened the door of this sacred place in accordance with the prophecies of Dakinis and Dharmapalas. He meditated and gained experience on Mahamudra practice. Many of his disciples resided here and propagated the doctrines. His son Tshewang Tenzin, who was the manifestation of Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo, undertook for many years the responsibilities of the monastery and of spreading the sacred teachings.

In the 10th Rabjung, when Zhabdrung Rinpoche also arrived at this place, the divine son Tshewang Tenzin acted as his host, and offered to Zhabdrung the entire monastic endowments along with its subjects. Subsequently Zhabdrung sat in meditation in a secret cavern and, on the basis of the Abhicarya tantra, propitiated the blackforeheaded wrathful Mahakala. Within a month, with the help of his acquired powers, he killed his antagonist Desi Tsangpa and his queen. Then, while celebrating the happy occasion by making offerings to the Dharmapalas, he said, 'I am the turner of the spiritual and temporal laws. I am the refuge of all.' etc. That is how the seal with 16 I (Ngas), which is like a lion's roar, was invented, and became widely diffused. Because of this, the secret cavern is called *duedulphug* (place where the demons were subjugated), and Zhabdrung is also

known as Duejhom Dorji (the thunder-bolt which rooted out the devils).

These are the main important events, which occurred here. Many others, which took place, cannot be related within the brief length of this history.

Khenchen Sonam Ozer, Thubwang Shakya Rinchen and others meditated at this place and became siddhis. We disciples also must now under-take the following religious disciple:

Theory -	Mahamudra
Meditation-	Six mystic topics
Ethics -	Based on Ronyom Kordrug
Results-	Stages of Tendrel

Lastly, and most importantly, is the secret path and propitiation of one's Gurus.

If we practise all this sincerely at this extraordinarily holy place, we shall achieve quick success and realization, for it is said that seven days of meditation here is equivalent to seven years of meditation elsewhere.

How the Monastery was Constructed by Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye

Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye was born to Tshewang Tenzin and Damchoe Tenzima (daughter of the Lama of Chang Gangkha) in the Earth Tiger year of the 11th Rabjung corresponding to 1638 A.D., i.e. 2,516 years after the Buddha. At the age of 8, he was offered to Zhabdrung, who performed the symbolic gesture of cutting the hair from the crown of the boy's head. From then on, he received his religious instructions and injunctions on the Drukpa Kargyud tradition both from Zhabdrung himself and his tutor Damchoe Gyeltshen. Later, after having attained proficiency in it, he ascended the throne of Desi at the age of 31, i.e. in the Earth Monkey year. He also

became the 4th Desi at the age of 43 in the Iron Monkey year, and ruled the country on the basis of both spiritual and temporal laws. For quite some time thereafter, the country enjoyed peace, happiness and tranquillity that is comparable to a god's heaven. Guru Rinpoche himself had prophesied that a person by the name of Tenzin would come from the centre of Dorje-den (Vajrasana), and that his time would be characterized by the momentary peace both in Tibet and in the Southern Valley (Bhutan). In keeping with the prophecy, there is a general saying that never had the country known such idyllic peace as during the days of Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye.

At the age of 51, the Earth Dragon Year of the 12th Rabjung, corresponding to 1689 A.D., i.e. 2,567 years after the Buddha, Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye constructed, within the brief span of 2 months, the main beautifully decorated 12 cornered monastery, along with the 3 storeyed gallery central tower.

In the ground floor temple of Trulku, the main sacred object is a gold and copper Buddha statue thrice a man's height, which was made by the famous sculptor Panchen Deva of Nepal. It is believed that if one prays before it, the prayer is always fulfilled. Both at the right and the left, there is a clay Buddha Dipankara made with medicinal metals. There is also a statue of Maitriyanath, which is twice a man's height. To the left and right of these sculptures, there are life-size statue of the 8 chief spiritual sons of the Buddha. These are said to be the work of the renowned craftsmen Trulku Dzing and Druk Chophel. In the Jokhang, there is a stone carrying a distinct footprint of Jetsuen Tenzinma, daughter of the divine son Ngawang Tenzin. Together with this, there are various other impressions of riding horses, goats, and sheep. One of the outstanding internal objects of the monastery is a golden key in the shape of a horse-head, which was discovered by the divine son Ngawang Tenzin from the Thuji rock at Phajoding. Common belief has it that a pious man can open the key. On the left is a great Mahakala temple, whose chief deity is the four-handed Mahakala. A skull in one of

Mahakala's hand is said to be that of the great Tibetan King Thrisong Detsan.

The second floor temple is the temple of Sambhogakaya. Its main sacred object is a gold and copper statue of Avalokitesvara, which was also made by Panchen Deva of Nepal. At its right, there is a temple of Guru Rinpoche. At its left is the temple of Namse palace. On the third floor is the temple of Dharmakaya, with a gold and copper statue of Buddha Amitayus made by Panchen Deva as its main sacred object. Both on the left and the right, there is a statue of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. There is also a life-size clay figure, made with medicinal metals, of Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye. All these sculptures are very sacred. At the right there is the bedroom of Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye. Its main sacred object is an image of Guru Rinpoche, who appeared in his vision. Other objects include the Kargyud Serthreng. All the images are made with medicinal metals and are the real work of the renowned sculptor Trulku Dzing.

The bed-room walls depict paintings of weeping images which can be seen even today. It is said that the miraculous images began weeping at the time of the passing away of Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye when he was 59 years old.

In the temple to the left there is a statue of Trulku Jampel Gyamtsho, which is believed to have been made by himself.

The wall paintings on all the 3 storeys are the real work of the great painter Jangchub Sempa.

In front of the central tower and in the middle of the courtyard, there is a natural fountain whose flow is constant throughout the year. Then, between the Dzong and the sacred place, there is a chaitya known as Jangchub Chorten. According to the Namthar, the chaitya was built from the ashes of Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye.

In the Wood Horse Year of the 16th Rabjung, corresponding to 1966 A.D., i.e. 3,024 years after the Buddha, the 64th rJe Khenpo Jamyang Yeshey Sengye together with Her Royal Highness the Grandmother Ashi Phuntshog Chodon revived the Shaydra (School of Buddhist Studies). In the Fire Serpent Year corresponding to 1977 A.D., Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Kesang Wangchuck renovated the monastery and made it far superior to the original.

Everyone is aware and proud of the great patronage rendered by Her Majesty the Queen Mother and other members of the royal family, to whom we would like to record our immense respect and unstinting loyalty. The very existence of such an extraordinary sacred place and monastery is a great fortune to us, and all of us should pay it due homage and respect with unfailing devotion. Through this key to the holy place, those creeds, which are impelled to come here and meditate on the sacred doctrines, will achieve the Mahamudra experience and understanding.

**CONSECRATION OF NEW KA-GONG-PHUR-SUM
LHAKHANG IN KURJEY, BUMTHANG BY HIS HOLINESS
DILGO KHYENTSE RINPOCHE***

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The second temple, which is known as the Temple of Sampa Lhundrub (Complete Fulfillment of one's Mind and Thoughts or Anabhog bhavana) was constructed in 1900 by Ugyen Wangchuck, the first hereditary monarch of Bhutan when he was the Tongsa Penlop.

The construction of the new Lhakhang on the sacred ground of Kurjey was undertaken by Mayum Chonying Wangmo Dorji and Her Majesty The Queen Mother in keeping with His Majesty's desire and wishes to build a sacred image of Palchen Heruka while her mother Mayum Chonying Wangmo Dorji had also wished to construct a similar big image of Dorji Phurpa (Vajrakila) at this holy spot. When His Holiness Dilgo

Khyentse Rinpoche was consulted about this, he advised Her Majesty The Queen Mother to build a temple of Ka-Gong-Phur-Sum (Kagye, Gongdue and Phurpa) on this sacred place. Thus the construction on this magnificent temple started in 1984 in loving memory and dedication to all the past Kings of Bhutan, and to Gongzim Ugyen Dorji, Gongzim Sonam Tobgye Dorji and Lyonchen Jigme Palden Dorji, and with deepest prayers for the long life and successful reign of His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, and for the eternal happiness and well-being of the Kingdom of Bhutan in particular and all sentient beings in general. It is the biggest and most elaborate Ka-Gong-Phur-Sum Temple of the Terma tradition. The Ka-Gong-Phur-Sum literally means Three Mystic Revelations of The Eight Pronouncements (Kagye), Abhipraya Samaja (Gongdue) and Vajra Kilaya (Phurpa).

The new Kurjey Temple has three storeys with the main image of Palchen Chemchog Heruka (Mahasri Parama Heruka) in wrathful form or in short form "Mahasri Heruka of Palchen Duepa", with his mystic consort standing imposingly from the first to the third floor. This commanding image of Palchen Heruka is 34 feet in height and has 21 heads, 42 hands with an image of various deities in each hand and 8 legs. The mystic consort has 9 heads, 18 hands, 4 legs and stands 30 feet in height.

Though there are different forms of Palchen Heruka in various traditions of Vajrayana Buddhism, this particular one installed in the new Temple of Kurjey is the Chief of all Mahasri Heruka, and this sacred image has been made in accordance with the Longchen Nyingthig (The Heart Essence of Vast Openness) tradition. The image of Palchen Heruka has the beneficial effect of averting all undesirable elements like war, internal strife, natural calamities, misfortune, epidemics and bringing peace and happiness to the county.

On the right of Palchen Heruka stands the 17 feet image of Drangsong Throepa Lama Gondue with 3 heads, 6 hands and 4 legs while his consort has one head with two hands and two

legs. On the left side of Palchen Heruka stands a 17 feet image of Sinbu Throepa Palchen Dorji Phurpa or Vajrakila with 3 heads, 6 hands and 4 legs with his consort who has one face with two hands and two legs.

Life size statues on the top floor on the right of Palchen Heruka are *KHEN-LOB-CHOE-SUM* or Khenchen Bodhisattava (Shantaraksita) on the right, Lupon (Guru) Rinpoche in the centre and Choegyal Thrisong Deutsan on the left. Images of the lineage of Nyingmapa Lamas adorn the top portion of the altar.

Statues of similar size on the left side of Palchen Heruka on the top floor are Drogoen Tsangpa Gyare Yeshe Dorji, founder of the Drukpa Kargyu tradition with Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel and Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye, the fourth Desi of Bhutan on the right and left respectively. Images of the lineage of Drukpa Kargyu Lamas are beautifully placed in a row above the three statues.

Statues in the middle floor are Kagye (The Eight Pronouncements), Gongdue (Abhipraya Samaja) and Phurpa (Vajra Kilaya). They are the Chief Tutelary Deities (Yidam) of the Terma tradition of Buddhism in the Kingdom.

Statues to be completed on the ground floor are Buddha Sakyamuni, the main image on this floor with Sariputra and Moggallana standing on his right and left, the sixteen Arhats (Neten Chudrug), Hashang, Upasaka Dhamata, and the four guardian kings of the Four Directions (Digpalas).

Along with construction of the new temple, a new *chari* (wall) has also been erected around the three temples at Kurjey. The top of these walls is adorned by 108 chortens (caitya) carved out of stones and placed at regular intervals. These Chortens are known as Duduel or Jangchub Chortens. Chortens represent the Mind of all the Buddhas, and the steps towards spiritual enlightenment. The Chortens on the Chari at Kurjey are symbols that commemorate Buddha's

victory over evil forces and the absolute purity of His enlightenment. The purpose of erecting these Duduel or Jangchub Chortens is to enable all beholders to receive the benefit from the merits and blessings of the Buddha symbolized by the structure of these Chortens and the sacred relics placed inside them.

The successful completion and consecration of the new Kurjey Temple has been possible because of His Majesty's personal interest and generosity for this noble task, the spiritual guidance in accordance with religious ceremonies and specifications given by His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, the dedication of Mayum Chonying Wangmo Dorji and Her Majesty The Queen Mother, and the generous personal funds provided by them, and the dedication of the supervisors and master Bhutanese craftsmen and their teams. Besides the generous funds contributed towards the construction of this new Temple, Mayum Chonying Wangmo Dorji also donated many sacred and priceless relics enshrined as Yeshe Sempa (Jananacitta or Divine Wisdom Mind) in the images of the new temple.

The wishes of His Majesty as well as that of Mayum Chonying Wangmo Dorji are fulfilled with the successful completion of this majestic Lhakhang. The construction of the new Kurjey Temple is only one of the many great contributions made by Mayum Chonying Wangmo Dorji and Her Majesty The Queen Mother in the service of the nation and towards the preservation and promotion of Bhutan's rich religious and cultural heritage. In 1961, Her Majesty was responsible for establishing the Simtokha Rigney School (College for Buddhist Literary Science) under the principalship of His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. In 1966, Mayum Chonying Wangmo Dorji and Her Majesty constructed the beautiful temple of Guru Nangsi Zilnon, Guru Horsog Magdog and Kurukule, attached to the historic and sacred temple of Kyichu Lhakhang in Paro. On completion of this temple, they introduced an annual Drubchen with Tordhog and Tshogbum

for the welfare and happiness of the country and the salvation of all sentient beings.

Mayum Chonying Wangmo Dorji and Her Majesty The Queen Mother also built the Dechog Lhakhang (Cakrasamvara temple) in Punakha Dzong. They also introduced an annual Dechog Drubchen in Punakha and the offering of regular liturgical prayers to the three Chief Guardian Deities of the kingdom, Pal Yeshey Gonpo (Mahakala with Raven Head) in Tashichhodzong and Simtokha Dzong.

With the consecration of the new Kurjey Temple, the kingdom has gained another sacred and important national treasure. The generous and selfless contributions of Mayum Chonying Wangmo Dorji and Her Majesty The Queen Mother towards the construction of the new Kurjey Temple and their numerous other contributions towards preserving and promoting the religious and cultural heritage of Bhutan will be cherished by the people of Bhutan for generations to come.

Second Consecration in 1991

For the second consecutive year, the Holy Dubchen of Kagye Desheg Duspa (The Eight Pronouncements), the Hidden Teachings revealed by the great Tertön Ngadag Nyangral Nyima Özer (1124-1192), was performed at the newly built temple of Ka-Gong-Phur-Sum at Kurjey Lhakhang, Bumthang from the 7th Day of the third month of Iron Sheep Year corresponding to 21st April till 4th May, 1991 in accordance with His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche's Gongter.

The Dubchen and consecration ceremonies were performed by His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Trulshig Rinpoche, other venerable Trulkus and 108 monks from Tongsa, Tharpaling, Nyimalung and Shechen Tennyi Dargyeling Monastery of His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche at Boudhnath, Nepal. His Majesty The King, Her Majesty The Queen Mother, Their Majesties The Queens, Their Royal

Highnesses The Princes and Princesses, senior monks and officials attended the ceremonies and offered prayers.

On completion of the new Kurjey Lhakhang and statues on the first and top floors, the first Kagye Dubchen and consecration ceremonies were held in June 1990. During the last 11 months, since the first Dubchen, beautifully painted murals depicting life stories of Guru Rinpoche and his Eight Manifestations on the top floor and on the ground floor life size images of 16 Arhats (Neten Chudrug) including Hashang and Upasaka Dhamatala and one storey high image of Lord Buddha, flanked by Sariputra on his right and Moggallana on the left have been completed and were consecrated by His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Tulkus and 108 monks. The consecration ceremony of Geleg Dhojo “Fulfillment of all Auspicious” was performed at the Neten Chudrug Lhakhang for two days. The images (Ku), Scriptures (Sung) and Stupas (Thug) will have visualization of Wisdom Being on actual meditational deity that is mediated upon through the performance of consecration ceremony. On the completion of the consecration, His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche gave the name Ngedon Shedrub Gatsal “The Joyous Garden for the practice and Expounding of the Absolute Teachings” to the new Kurjey Lhakhang.

The Kagye Dubchen started with ceremony of Sachog with rituals of invocation and offerings to the Field Protectors for preparation of Ritual Ground and elimination of hindrance during the Dubchen. This was followed by preparatory rites (Tagon), drawing coloured sand Mandala and other preparations. The main Kagye Dubchen was performed on the first floor of the temple where 34 feet high image of Palchen Chemchog Heruka (Mahasri Parama Heruka) and 17 feet high images of Gongdus (Abhipraya Samaja) are beautifully installed and consecrated last year.

The sacred Teachings of Kagye, originated from the primordial Adi-Buddha Kuntu Zangpo, were transmitted to Dorje Dagpotsal who handed down the teachings to Dakini Lekyi

Wangmo. She concealed the teachings in a Stupa located in the cremation ground of Silwi Tshal (Sitavana) near Bodh Gaya. The teachings were later uncovered in a beautiful jewel casket from the Stupa and presented to Guru Rinpoche who initiated his Eight Principal Spiritual Sons into the sacred teachings at Dagmar Keutshang (Red Rock Cave), Samye Chimphug. After the initiation, Guru Rinpoche had hidden the teachings, which were later discovered by Ngadag Nyangral Nyima Ozer at Khothing Lhakhang of Lhodak in Tibet. Nyima Ozer is known as the Sun like Terton while Guru Chokyi Wangchuk (1212-1270) as the Moon of Tertons. The teachings discovered by them are called the Upper and Lower Treasures. Desheg Kagye, in its peaceful form symbolizes the Eight Spiritual Sons of Buddha and in its wrathful form it represents Eight Herukas. Making images of Chemchog or performance of Dubchen prolongs one's life, ensures prosperity and bestows protection against poison and weapons for all living beings.

While Dubchen was in progress, His Holiness Trulshig Rinpoche assisted by Venerable Rabjam Rinpoche, Namkhi Nyingpo Rinpoche and other senior lamas ordained over 250 monks at the recently consecrated Neten Chudrug Lhakhang. Over 75 monks took high ordainment of Gelong, fully ordained monk, observing a total of 253 vows while the rest took ordainment of Getshul, a novice monk observing only 36 precepts according to Pratimoksha Vows. These ordainments were performed as per the lineage tradition of Mindroling Monastery.

On 30th April, corresponding to the 17th Day of Third Month, auspicious Tenshu (Longevity Ceremony) was offered to His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and to His Majesty The King by Venerable Tulkus and monks led by Trulshing Rinpoche in accordance with rituals of Longevity ceremony of Khentse.

Ngodrub Langchog (Ceremony of Receiving the Supreme Consummation) was performed in the early hours on 4th

May. Sacred objects in the Mandala were taken out, and prayers said at the same time when H.H. Dilgo Khentse Rinpoche bestowed longevity initiation of Kagye Desheg Duspa to His Majesty The King, Her Majesty The Queen Mother, Their Majesties The Queens, Their Royal Highnesses The Princes and Princesses, monks and the officials gathered there.

This was followed by Jinseg (Fire offering ritual) held outside in front of the new temple. The Fire Offering Ritual of Peace and Increase was performed in order to compensate for any excess or omission during the preceding rituals and to increase the ritual potency respectively. There are four kinds of Fire Offering Rituals concerning with Peace, Increase, Power and Wrath.

The ceremonies came to an end in the afternoon of the same day with the beautiful prayer of Marmai Monlam (Prayer of Holding Sacred Lamps) symbolizing the attainment of Buddhahood together with spiritual brothers and sisters attending the ceremony.

On the next morning, the entire ceremony ended with the collection of magnificent Sand Mandala (signifying the fact that all things are ephemeral) and immersion of sand grains into the Chamkha River in a procession of monks carrying banners and playing religious music as presents to Nagas (Serpent Spirits). Such deeds usher in good crops, timely rain, prevention of wars, epidemics and famines in the country. In this way, the ritual of Kagye Desheg Dubchen and consecration in its complete form was auspiciously brought to a conclusion.

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Statues of similar size on the left side of Palchen Heruka on the top floor are Drogoen Tsangpa Gyare Yeshe Dorji, founder of the Drukpa Kargyu tradition with Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel and Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye, the fourth Desi of Bhutan on the right and left respectively. Images of the lineage of Drukpa Kargyu Lamas are beautifully placed in a row above the three statues.

Statues in the middle floor are Kagye (The Eight Pronouncements), Gongdue (Abhipraya Samaja) and Phurpa (Vajra Kilaya). They are the Chief Tutelary Deities (Yidam) of the Terma tradition of Buddhism in the Kingdom.

Statues to be completed on the ground floor are Buddha Sakyamuni, the main image on this floor with Sariputra and Moggallana standing on his right and left, the sixteen Arhats (Neten Chudrug), Hashang, Upasaka Dhamata, and the four guardian kings of the Four Directions (Digpalas).

Along with construction of the new temple, a new *chari* (wall) has also been erected around the three temples at Kurjey. The top of these walls is adorned by 108 chortens (caitya) carved out of stones and placed at regular intervals. These Chortens are known as Duduel or Jangchub Chortens. Chortens represent the Mind of all the Buddhas, and the steps towards spiritual enlightenment. The Chortens on the Chari at Kurjey are symbols that commemorate Buddha's

victory over evil forces and the absolute purity of His enlightenment. The purpose of erecting these Duduel or Jangchub Chortens is to enable all beholders to receive the benefit from the merits and blessings of the Buddha symbolized by the structure of these Chortens and the sacred relics placed inside them.

The successful completion and consecration of the new Kurjey Temple has been possible because of His Majesty's personal interest and generosity for this noble task, the spiritual guidance in accordance with religious ceremonies and specifications given by His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, the dedication of Mayum Chonying Wangmo Dorji and Her Majesty The Queen Mother, and the generous personal funds provided by them, and the dedication of the supervisors and master Bhutanese craftsmen and their teams. Besides the generous funds contributed towards the construction of this new Temple, Mayum Chonying Wangmo Dorji also donated many sacred and priceless relics enshrined as Yeshe Sempa (Jananacitta or Divine Wisdom Mind) in the images of the new temple.

The wishes of His Majesty as well as that of Mayum Chonying Wangmo Dorji are fulfilled with the successful completion of this majestic Lhakhang. The construction of the new Kurjey Temple is only one of the many great contributions made by Mayum Chonying Wangmo Dorji and Her Majesty The Queen Mother in the service of the nation and towards the preservation and promotion of Bhutan's rich religious and cultural heritage. In 1961, Her Majesty was responsible for establishing the Simtokha Rigney School (College for Buddhist Literary Science) under the principalship of His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. In 1966, Mayum Chonying Wangmo Dorji and Her Majesty constructed the beautiful temple of Guru Nangsi Zilnon, Guru Horsog Magdog and Kurukule, attached to the historic and sacred temple of Kyichu Lhakhang in Paro. On completion of this temple, they introduced an annual Drubchen with Tordhog and Tshogbum

for the welfare and happiness of the country and the salvation of all sentient beings.

Mayum Chonying Wangmo Dorji and Her Majesty The Queen Mother also built the Dechog Lhakhang (Cakrasamvara temple) in Punakha Dzong. They also introduced an annual Dechog Drubchen in Punakha and the offering of regular liturgical prayers to the three Chief Guardian Deities of the kingdom, Pal Yeshey Gonpo (Mahakala with Raven Head) in Tashichhodzong and Simtokha Dzong.

With the consecration of the new Kurjey Temple, the kingdom has gained another sacred and important national treasure. The generous and selfless contributions of Mayum Chonying Wangmo Dorji and Her Majesty The Queen Mother towards the construction of the new Kurjey Temple and their numerous other contributions towards preserving and promoting the religious and cultural heritage of Bhutan will be cherished by the people of Bhutan for generations to come.

Second Consecration in 1991

For the second consecutive year, the Holy Dubchen of Kagye Desheg Duspa (The Eight Pronouncements), the Hidden Teachings revealed by the great Tertön Ngadag Nyangral Nyima Özer (1124-1192), was performed at the newly built temple of Ka-Gong-Phur-Sum at Kurjey Lhakhang, Bumthang from the 7th Day of the third month of Iron Sheep Year corresponding to 21st April till 4th May, 1991 in accordance with His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche's Gongter.

The Dubchen and consecration ceremonies were performed by His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Trulshig Rinpoche, other venerable Trulkus and 108 monks from Tongsa, Tharpaling, Nyimalung and Shechen Tennyi Dargyeling Monastery of His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche at Boudhnath, Nepal. His Majesty The King, Her Majesty The Queen Mother, Their Majesties The Queens, Their Royal

Highnesses The Princes and Princesses, senior monks and officials attended the ceremonies and offered prayers.

On completion of the new Kurjey Lhakhang and statues on the first and top floors, the first Kagye Dubchen and consecration ceremonies were held in June 1990. During the last 11 months, since the first Dubchen, beautifully painted murals depicting life stories of Guru Rinpoche and his Eight Manifestations on the top floor and on the ground floor life size images of 16 Arhats (Neten Chudrug) including Hashang and Upasaka Dhamatala and one storey high image of Lord Buddha, flanked by Sariputra on his right and Moggallana on the left have been completed and were consecrated by His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Tulkus and 108 monks. The consecration ceremony of Geleg Dhojo "Fulfillment of all Auspicious" was performed at the Neten Chudrug Lhakhang for two days. The images (Ku), Scriptures (Sung) and Stupas (Thug) will have visualization of Wisdom Being on actual meditational deity that is mediated upon through the performance of consecration ceremony. On the completion of the consecration, His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche gave the name Ngedon Shedrub Gatsal "The Joyous Garden for the practice and Expounding of the Absolute Teachings" to the new Kurjey Lhakhang.

The Kagye Dubchen started with ceremony of Sachog with rituals of invocation and offerings to the Field Protectors for preparation of Ritual Ground and elimination of hindrance during the Dubchen. This was followed by preparatory rites (Tagon), drawing coloured sand Mandala and other preparations. The main Kagye Dubchen was performed on the first floor of the temple where 34 feet high image of Palchen Chemchog Heruka (Mahasri Parama Heruka) and 17 feet high images of Gongdus (Abhipraya Samaja) are beautifully installed and consecrated last year.

The sacred Teachings of Kagye, originated from the primordial Adi-Buddha Kuntu Zangpo, were transmitted to Dorje Dagpotsal who handed down the teachings to Dakini Lekyi

Wangmo. She concealed the teachings in a Stupa located in the cremation ground of Silwi Tshal (Sitavana) near Bodh Gaya. The teachings were later uncovered in a beautiful jewel casket from the Stupa and presented to Guru Rinpoche who initiated his Eight Principal Spiritual Sons into the sacred teachings at Dagmar Keutshang (Red Rock Cave), Samye Chimphug. After the initiation, Guru Rinpoche had hidden the teachings, which were later discovered by Ngadag Nyangral Nyima Ozer at Khothing Lhakhang of Lhodak in Tibet. Nyima Ozer is known as the Sun like Terton while Guru Chokyi Wangchuk (1212-1270) as the Moon of Tertons. The teachings discovered by them are called the Upper and Lower Treasures. Desheg Kagye, in its peaceful form symbolizes the Eight Spiritual Sons of Buddha and in its wrathful form it represents Eight Herukas. Making images of Chemchog or performance of Dubchen prolongs one's life, ensures prosperity and bestows protection against poison and weapons for all living beings.

While Dubchen was in progress, His Holiness Trulshig Rinpoche assisted by Venerable Rabjam Rinpoche, Namkhi Nyingpo Rinpoche and other senior lamas ordained over 250 monks at the recently consecrated Neten Chudrug Lhakhang. Over 75 monks took high ordainment of Gelong, fully ordained monk, observing a total of 253 vows while the rest took ordainment of Getshul, a novice monk observing only 36 precepts according to Pratimoksha Vows. These ordainments were performed as per the lineage tradition of Mindroling Monastery.

On 30th April, corresponding to the 17th Day of Third Month, auspicious Tenshu (Longevity Ceremony) was offered to His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and to His Majesty The King by Venerable Tulkus and monks led by Trulshing Rinpoche in accordance with rituals of Longevity ceremony of Khentse.

Ngodrub Langchog (Ceremony of Receiving the Supreme Consummation) was performed in the early hours on 4th

May. Sacred objects in the Mandala were taken out, and prayers said at the same time when H.H. Dilgo Khentse Rinpoche bestowed longevity initiation of Kagye Desheg Duspa to His Majesty The King, Her Majesty The Queen Mother, Their Majesties The Queens, Their Royal Highnesses The Princes and Princesses, monks and the officials gathered there.

This was followed by Jinseg (Fire offering ritual) held outside in front of the new temple. The Fire Offering Ritual of Peace and Increase was performed in order to compensate for any excess or omission during the preceding rituals and to increase the ritual potency respectively. There are four kinds of Fire Offering Rituals concerning with Peace, Increase, Power and Wrath.

The ceremonies came to an end in the afternoon of the same day with the beautiful prayer of Marmai Monlam (Prayer of Holding Sacred Lamps) symbolizing the attainment of Buddhahood together with spiritual brothers and sisters attending the ceremony.

On the next morning, the entire ceremony ended with the collection of magnificent Sand Mandala (signifying the fact that all things are ephemeral) and immersion of sand grains into the Chamkha River in a procession of monks carrying banners and playing religious music as presents to Nagas (Serpent Spirits). Such deeds usher in good crops, timely rain, prevention of wars, epidemics and famines in the country. In this way, the ritual of Kagye Desheg Dubchen and consecration in its complete form was auspiciously brought to a conclusion.