

## Reconstructing Nineteenth Century Trade Route between Bhutan and Assam: Evidences from British Political Missions\*

*Indrajit Ray\*\* and Ratna Sarkar\*\*\**

Recent studies contradict a longheld western perception that Bhutan was a landlocked and isolated kingdom until the recent times without any significant trade relation with the rest of the world.<sup>1</sup> They have dug the contemporary documents to prove her vibrant trade with the neighbours at least from the seventeenth century onwards. Side by side with the present jurisdiction of West Bengal, the kingdom carried out trade with Assam in those days. The extent of her historical interconnection with Assam is understood from the evidence of seven duars (doors)<sup>2</sup> between these two places. All those duars were not, however, safe for long-distance traffic. The problem of dense forest stood on their ways, and it was compounded by the settlement of robbers and other anti-social people in their vicinities.<sup>3</sup> Safety was ensured only in the Banska duar through which ran, as the evidence in this study suggests, a long-distance trade route between Bhutan and Assam. The present article seeks to identify that trade route, and to analyse its various facets. The route has not yet been studied in any detail presumably because of inadequate source materials. We seek to reconstruct it based on the data and information from the reports of two British political

---

\* We acknowledge Dr. D.P.Boot, Cartographer, Centre for Himalayan Studies, North Bengal University for the preparation of maps in this study, and also for his valuable comments. All errors, however, remain with the authors.

\*\* Reader, Department of Commerce, University of North Bengal, India

\*\*\* Senior Research Fellow (UGC), Department of Commerce, University of North Bengal, India

missions, headed respectively by William Griffith<sup>4</sup> and Robert Boileau Pemberton,<sup>5</sup> during the first half of the nineteenth century. Those are supplemented, wherever necessary as well as feasible, by other source materials.

Section I describes the historiography of trade route in a nutshell along with the scope of investigation in this study. Section II defines certain concepts that are involved in the trade route study. Section III identifies the trade route between Bhutan and Assam, and elaborates its various characteristics. Major findings of the study are summarised by way of conclusion in Section IV.

### **Section I: Historiography and the scope of study**

Although trade routes played an important role in human civilisation, it seems to have attracted less attention in the literature than what it deserves. A 20-million strong records at the Library of Congress database accommodate only 134 titles on Trade Routes.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, only 264 trade thoroughfares are referred in Melvyl database of the University of California. Most of these trade routes belong to what is popularly known as the Silk Roads.

The literature on the trade route dates back to the late nineteenth century when the imperial conflict between Great Britain and Russia in Asia generated a good amount of academic interest on the ancient silk route. Since then, the subject has been enriched so much so that it is now an integral part of the historiography in Asia. A review of this literature is available in Drege and Buhner,<sup>7</sup> and Morris Rossabi.<sup>8</sup> The existing literature, however, draws materials mainly from two distinct sources, literal sources and archaeological findings. While the earlier studies are based on the former sources,<sup>9</sup> the latter has gained popularity after the excavation at Xinjiang during the early twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> The present study draws exclusively from the literal sources, especially from books and journals as well as the reports of political missions visiting Bhutan from British India.

The two branches of literature, mentioned above, perceive the function of trade routes from divergent plains. Since the literate sources recognise only the literate communities, the trade routes in such studies inevitably highlight ‘trans-civilisation’ exchanges. Archaeological evidence, on the other hand, is able to acknowledge additionally the activities of non-literate communities, and, hence, focuses on ‘trans-ecological’ exchanges along the silk roads between the people in pastoral settlements and the nomads in the steppes. A synthesis has, however, been on the offing with the study on the Eurasian steppe route by Franck and Brownstone.<sup>11</sup> P. D. Curtain underscores the importance of such studies by emphasising, “Goods normally pass across this ecological divide with greater intensity than they do in more homogeneous environment.”<sup>12</sup> David Christian, however, seeks to establish the trans-ecological exchange links along the silk roads by way of analysing the nature of the goods traded there.<sup>13</sup> Analysing the list of trade-wares published by al-Muqaddasi in 985 AD, he argued, “Any list of goods traded along the Silk Roads will show the presence of large amounts of steppeland or woodland products, while some of the goods produced in the agrarian world were made especially for export to the steppes.”<sup>14</sup> Recognising the importance of such studies, the present article seeks to analyse the commodity composition in Bhutan’s trade routes to ascertain the nature of exchange they represented.

Geography and history are the centrality of the historiography of the silk roads. Various cities and towns located on them are identified in the literature to analyse the role played by trade routes in the exchanges of commodities, technologies, styles, religions,<sup>15</sup> genes and disease vectors.<sup>16</sup> In the historical perspective, the literature narrates how the trade routes emerged and flourished as a result of several large agrarian empires like the Han, Roman, Parthian and the Kusan,<sup>17</sup> and subsequently waned with the rising importance of the sea-routes.<sup>18</sup> While the historical aspects of Bhutan’s trade routes are kept outside the purview, the present study concentrates mainly on their geographical outlines.

The literature also attempts to develop the silk-road 'theory'. Pioneers in this field are A.G.Frank,<sup>19</sup> B.K.Gills,<sup>20</sup> J.L.Abu-Lughod<sup>21</sup>, W.G.McNeill<sup>22</sup> and others. The central hypothesis of this group of writers is available in Marshal Hodgson.<sup>23</sup> He notes, "Just as the first urban, literate life would have been impossible without the accumulation among a great many peoples of innumerable social habits and inventions, major and minor, so the great modern cultural mutation presupposed the contributions of all several citted peoples of the eastern hemisphere."<sup>24</sup> Frank and Gills, in particular, seek to establish an underlying unity of the Eurasian history, which they believe to have nurtured a single world system from 2000 BC onwards.<sup>25</sup> In a similar tone, Haraprasad Ray<sup>26</sup> underscores the unity of trans-Himalayan civilisation, and its integration with the world system through the southern silk roads where Bhutan's trade route was connected. The present study does not, however, enter into this field of interest.

## **Section II: Definitions**

The trade route literature does not formally define certain frequently used concepts. The terms like nodes, links, paths, route etc are loosely defined, and often used interchangeably. For the sake of clarity, we define certain terms to be used in this study borrowing from the literature of transportation network modelling that has been growing fast over the past few decades.<sup>27</sup> There is, in fact, a conceptual identity between these two fields. Similar to a transportation network, a trade route is loosely defined as a specific configuration of certain links connecting a given set of origin (O) and destination (D). Two differences are, however, noted. First, trade route usually refers to an extensive coverage between origin and destination across the country boundaries, often across the boundaries of the continents, which developed historically over a long period. The transportation network is, on the other hand, confined to a metropolis, or at best a conglomeration of villages and a city. Secondly, trade routes were developed with a single objective of the flow of trade (though used subsequently for a variety of purposes) whereas the

transportation network is constructed for various purposes like journey to work-place, journey to residence, shopping and so on. In this sense, trade route may be considered as a variety of transportation network. We use the following terminology in this study.

**Origin and Destination:** Origin is defined as an important place like a town or a city where commodities were assembled for long distance trade. It might not be the place of production, as understood in the present-day literature of transportation network. In earlier days, the commodities that were exported in bulk, were produced scatteredly in tiny scales in the countrysides, and assembled by traders in a transit point. That transit point is considered here as the origin. Destination is likewise defined as a town or a city where the merchandise was finally sold in bulk. It might not represent the zone of consumption. The consumers might live away from the place where the long-distance trade was terminated. The word 'finally' has been incorporated in the definition to accommodate the possibility of changing hands in transit.

**Node:** In transportation network, a link is defined as a transport infrastructure that connects two nodes. Thus, nodes are functionally conceived to define the link.

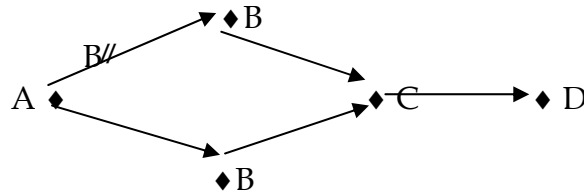


Figure 1

In the above figure, A, B, C and D are the nodes and AB, BC and CD are links. If a node is changed, a different link

follows. Thus, once the node is shifted from B to B', the link is also altered. But any place that comes in between two nodes, such as B'', in the same link is not considered as a node in the transportation literature since it can not perform the function ascribed to its concept. A node is, however, defined here as a place in the trade route that assumed importance in the past owing to the infrastructure supports it provided to traders such as marketing facilities, convenience and safety for taking rest, availability of food and drinks for the traders as also fodder for pack animals and so on. Thus, a place like B'' that comes in between two nodes A and B may be considered a node in our study if it provided nodal services to the traders.

**Link:** A transport infrastructure that connected two nodes is defined as a link. Under the above definition of nodes, the direction of journey did not necessarily change even if a journey shifted from one link to another.

**Path:** Path is defined as a set of links that connected a given set of origin and destination. There may be more than one path for a given O-D. Thus, for the origin (M) and destination (N), there may be two paths, such as MabN and McN in Figure 2.

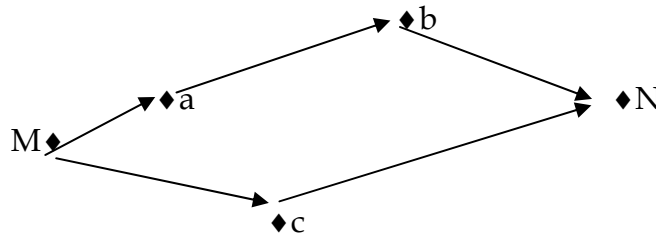


Figure 2

**Trade Route:** We are now in a position to formally define a trade route. Trade route is a historically evolved network of various paths  $k$ ,  $k \in K$ , for a given pair of origin and

destination, each path consisting of a number of links  $a$ ,  $a \in A$ , and each link interconnecting two nodes,  $n_i$  and  $n_j$ ,  $n_i, n_j \in N$ . This definition corresponds to that of transport network. That there were a number of paths in the silk roads is recognised in the literature. The German geographer, Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833-1905), who coined the term 'silk roads', used it in plural form.<sup>28</sup> "The plural form", according to Christina, "is important because the Silk Roads consisted of a constantly shifting network of pathways..."<sup>29</sup> He further noted, "[I]t is possible to trace in the writing sources several arterial routes [paths, in our terminology] leading from China to the west. They passed through modern Xinjiang (by at least three major routes), through central Asia, and then either through Afghanistan to Kashmir and northern India, or to the Mediterranean..."<sup>30</sup> The distinction between links and paths in the definition of trade route is, therefore, important for the sake of clarity in the literature.

Since a trade route is, according to the above definition, constituted primarily of paths, links and nodes, the description of a trade route is an account of these constituents as well as their analysis from the viewpoints of the logistic supports that they provide to the trade.

### **Section III: The Trade Route**

Traffic in the Bhutan-Assam trade route accommodates traders of two different origins. There were the Bhutanese traders who travelled down to Assam for the disposal of Bhutanese goods, and treaded back with the Assamese ware to count profit in both ways. The people of Assam were not interested in this journey.<sup>31</sup> The uncomfortable terrain and climate in the hills might have prevented them from such ventures. Secondly, the Tibetans used this route as a path in the Tibet-Assam trade route, a broader network that formed an important leg of the southern 'silk roads'.<sup>32</sup> There was, however, another path in the Tibet-Assam route that bypassed Bhutan. It ran via Tawang, a place directly controlled from Lhasa, to Hajo in Assam through the Kooreah parrah duar.<sup>33</sup> Originating from Tawang a road, however, traversed to

Tashigang in Bhutan to serve as a link between the two paths of the Tibet-Assam route. These inner-connectivities with Tibet explained why the Tibetan traders, the Kumpas,<sup>34</sup> dominated traffic in the Bhutan-Assam route. It should be noted that the Kumpas were so predominant in this route that some authorities considered as the Kumpas even those Bhutanese who lived in tents or in temporary booths, and were employed in the carrying trade down this passage.<sup>35</sup> While going to Bhutan under a political mission, Pemberton noticed several caravans of the Kumpas proceeding towards Assam. The missionary counted as many as 400 Kumpas in a single stretch of the route.<sup>36</sup> According to his estimate, more than 2,000 kumpas were regularly involved in this trade route.

This traffic was not perennial in nature since the bulk of the Assam-bound commodities were traded through seasonal fairs.<sup>37</sup> Though, in most instances, the fairs in Assam were symbolic to some religious festivity, those were by and large the spots of commerce. Assam's annual fair, however, took place generally in the winter, and this timing was convenient for journey in the Bhutan-Assam trade route. Roads were least hazardous during this season. Numerous hilly streams and torrents criss-crossed the route putting challenges to journey during the monsoon. But in winter, they were tame and could be crossed by traders and their animals in safe along with their trade-wares. Many of them even got dried so that traders walked along their beds comfortably rather than going up and down through the uneven terrain of the mountain. The weather in winter was also conducive for journey in this region. This factor should be appreciated in view of heavy rainfall in the places en route the journey. The average rainfall was 254 cm in the hills and 178 cm in the plain during the rainy season<sup>38</sup> that extended over seven months from March onwards.<sup>39</sup> The travellers should, therefore, complete their journey before the monsoon set in. In his tour-diary Pemberton wrote, "They [the Kumpas] return homewards during the months of February and March, taking care to leave plains before the return of the hot weathers or

rains, of both of which they entertain the most serious apprehensions.”<sup>40</sup>

Pack animals were the only means of transport in this mountainous route. Ponies and mules were employed more frequently for the purpose. Bhutan breed the best pony, namely the Bhutia Tangun breed,<sup>41</sup> in the early nineteenth century, and those were evidently in great demand even in the plains of Bengal. Traders preferred this animal as they could easily negotiate the rugged terrain of the route, seeking assistance only in steep ascents and descents. Griffiths noted that the Bhutanese ponies were spirited, and understood their duties perfectly. In the line of the march, they proceeded orderly especially when the road was uneasy. They could march in such roads at a speed of about 2.5-3.2 km per hour. “In difficult ascents”, he observed, “they are assisted by pushing up and in descents they are equally assisted by vigorously pulling at the tail.”<sup>42</sup> In later years, however, their quality was deteriorated for the want of well-built stallion which were exclusively employed in officialdom, and they became, according to Eden, ‘vicious, obstinate, weedy, wretched, animals compared with those of Thibet and Sikkim.’<sup>43</sup> Their prices also became ‘exorbitant’ as the mares began to be widely used for the purpose of domestic carriage in the countryside. The mules were, however, relatively cheaper. Sometimes, they were raised by crossbreeding the Bhutanese pony and the Tibetan ass, but more frequently, they were imported from Phari in Tibet. Their price in Tibet was reportedly as cheap as Rs60-70.<sup>44</sup> They were ‘really magnificent’, as Eden described, and he ‘never saw finer or handsomer animals of this class.’<sup>45</sup> But these mules were more vicious and less manageable than the ponies. Ponies and mules apart, sheep, goats and asses were also found plying in this route with cargo. Available information suggests that the Tibetan breeds were superior in this class of beasts. The Tibetan sheep, for example, could carry a load of 15-20 kg each as against the carrying capacity of 6-12 kg for the Bhutanese sheep and goat.<sup>46</sup> The ass was, however, the most robust animal capable of carrying about 40 kg each. But they

were employed exclusively for carrying salt in this route. The Kumpas of Tibet also employed the ewes and the yak as the beast of burden but their uses were limited.

A striking variety was evident in the commodities of exchange between Bhutan and Assam. The following table gives a glimpse of this diversity. It is compiled from available information about three contemporary fairs in Assam where the Bhutanese traders largely participated. These figures, however, exclude the barter trade that was reportedly extensive in such fairs.<sup>47</sup>

*Table 1: The commodities of exchange between Bhutan and Assam*

Bhutanese Commodities			Assamese Commodities		
Name	Amount	Value (Rs)	Name	Amount	Value (Rs)
Ponies	27 nos.	16,000	Paddy	7,596 mds	6,207
Sheep	131 nos.	393	Rice	6,443 mds	12,596
Dogs	25 nos.	226	Tobacco		36
Yak tails	165 nos.	143	Betel nuts	1,249 pans	278
Bee-wax	158 mds	6,335	Molasses	21 mds	63
Lac	126 mds	1,209	Dried fishes	198 mds	1,958
Dye	11,563 bundles	79	Eria silk cloth	1,207 pcs	9,907
Chillies	223 mds	716	Cotton cloth	1,467 pcs	3,136
Spices	1,354 mds	3,207	Other cloths	2638 pcs	9,471
Walnuts	10,000 nos	31	Brass pots	950 nos	1,887
Rock salt	--	18,825	Iron bars	275 pcs	202
Gold	120 tola	2,400	Others	--	1,685
Blankets	6,673 nos	19,484			
Musks	--	451			
Bhutia rags	841 nos.	421			
Others	--	5,183			
<b>Total</b>	--	75,103	<b>Total</b>	--	47,426

*Source: W.W.Hunter, A Statistical Account of Assam, Vol. 1, 1879, pp.143-145*

The table shows that ponies, rock salt, blankets, bee-wax, spices and gold dominated the Bhutanese commodities of exchange, and that the Bhutanese traders purchased mainly paddy, rice, eria silk cloth, and various types of cotton cloths. The Kacharee tribe of Assam reportedly wove certain varieties of cloth like dunko lepa cloth and kharu cloth, included under 'other cloth' in the table, exclusively for sale to the Bhutanese traders.<sup>48</sup> The nature of commodities in this exchange, however, indicates that this trade route gave rise to trans-ecological exchanges. Majority of the goods that Assam exported through this route, as evident in Table 1, were the products of advanced human civilisation. The goods from the other end of the route were more of the kind of 'stepeeland or woodland products'. We may cite in this context the products like ponies, yak tails, sheep, dogs etc as the products of the pastoral civilisation, and lac, dye, spice, bee-wax, raw rubber, walnuts, chillies etc as the forest products. While discussing the nature of this exchange Pemberton referred to the list of goods as provided by Ralph Fitch in Hakluyt Voyages (1583), and remarked, "However wonderful the variety of articles which the improved manufacturing skill of Europe now enables the merchants of Bengal to offer in barter for the produce brought down by those of Tibet and Bhutan; the latter bring to the market, in diminished quantities, only the same goods which they imported three centuries ago."<sup>49</sup> The Bhutan-Assam trade route thus corroborates the hypothesis of Curtin that historically the commodities usually passed across the ecological divide.

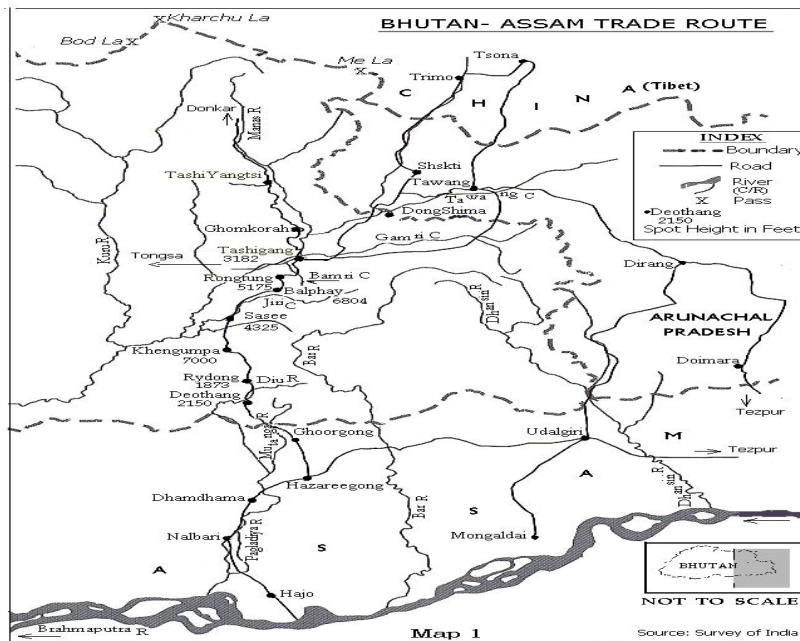
From the tour-dairy of the missions we gather a fair knowledge about the comparative speeds of travel at different stretches of this trade route. The speed of traffic in this route is expected to correspond to that of the missions since they made the journey with the similar types of animals as the traders. But two qualifications should be noted in this contest that might cause variations in travelling speeds between them. First, the missionaries carried with them only their provisions whereas the traders moved along their cargo. Second, the missionaries were completely foreigners to this

land and climate; in contrast, the traders were regular visitors in this route. But since these factors affect our estimation in opposite directions, our judgement is largely balanced. Speed is here measured as the distance travelled per day assuming that each march, as reported in Griffiths's tour-dairy, began at dawn and ended at dusk. With a total distance of 168 km covered in 11 marches,<sup>50</sup> the mean speed in this route comes to around 15.3 km per day. Wide variations from this mean value is expected to occur at different stretches of the route because of the differences in their gradients, as seen in the annexed map (Map 1). We have estimated that in the hilly terrain, the speed was less than 14 km per day. On the plain, in contrast, it was around 17 km a day. Pemberton himself estimated that the average speed per day was nine miles five furlong (i.e. around 14.5 km) for a journey in the hilly terrain between Dewangiri and Poonakha, a distance of about 400 kms. In respect of this estimate, he observed, "In so difficult a country, with heavily laden collies, [it] is as much as can be calculated upon with any certainty, at that season of the year, in which the journey was effected."<sup>51</sup> The speed indeed fell drastically if the journey was conducted in rainy days.

### **Tashigang: The Origin**

Tashigang was the origin of the Bhutan-Assam trade route. It was an important place of Bhutan where Raja Chhogyal Minjur Tempa, the third Deb,<sup>52</sup> built a three-storied dzong (the fortified monastery) facing the river Manas in 1667 after extending his authority to eastern Bhutan.<sup>53</sup> As the dzong rendered protection to the people from wars and natural calamities, human settlements used to spring up densely in and around such dzongs. Tasgong's prosperity in the contemporary Bhutan also emerged out of such a development process. By the nineteenth century, it became a populous settlement with an extended hinterland all around. Because of this, and also since the dzong participated in the border trade,<sup>54</sup> markets were developed there with supplies of both the Bhutanese and Tibetan commodities.<sup>55</sup> Tashigang, however, contributed a few commodities to those transactions. Although there were good arable lands in its

surrounding villages, surplus production seldom occurred. Among the articles of export that were produced locally, stick-lac<sup>56</sup> was an important item. It was procured substantively from the valley of Tashigang. Tashigang was also famous for straight iron swords, known as das,<sup>57</sup> 3 feet in length with spear and arrow head, which the neighbouring countries highly acclaimed for. Iron ores locally available in the hills at the northern foot of the castle were used for this purpose. These apart, maddar (the raw material of manjistha, a dye) and natural wax were collected from forests in its vicinities and jubrung (a spice) was procured from the north-east mountain for the purpose of export. But the majority of the products that went down the route came from Tibet.



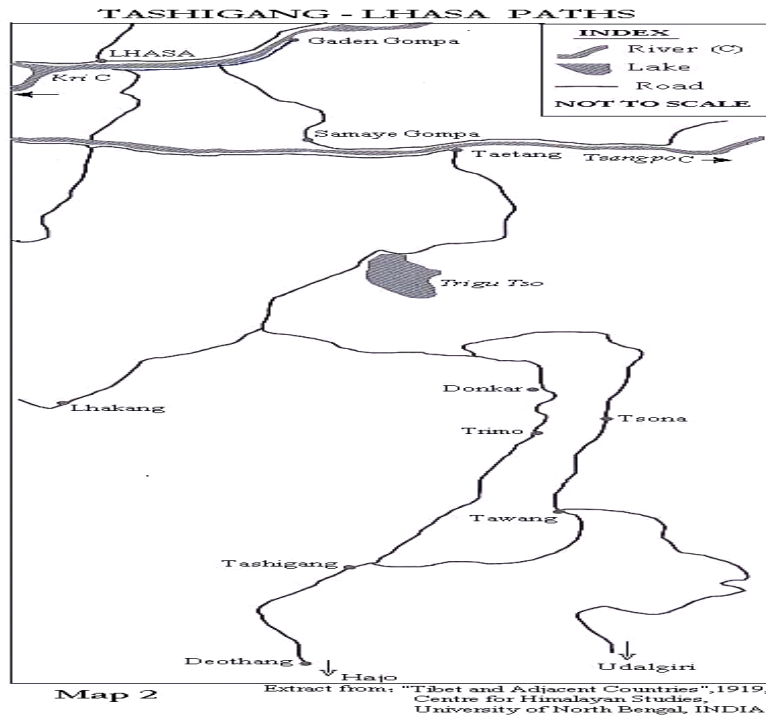
In fact, Tashigang's importance as the origin was ensured by its road connections with Tibet, as adumbrated above. There were two paths between Tashigang and Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, through the valley of the river Manas (vide Map 2). One

of them ran via Tawang.<sup>58</sup> In between Tashigang and Tawang there were two rivers, the Gamri-chu and the Tawang-chu, intercepted by a steep spur. A three-day march upstream the Tawang-chu led to the Bhutan-Tibet Border at Dong Shima where a bridge was available to cross the flowing river. From Tawang a road went to Tsona Dzong, and thence to Lhasa. The bulk of the Tibetan trade was conveyed over this path to the plain. There was another path in between Tashigang and Lhasa. The northern hinterland of Tashigang was dotted with villages. From one such village, Tashi yangtshi, ran a road along the Ging-la to Lhasa via Donkar. According to White, the Ging-la path was 'an easy and good trade route'<sup>59</sup> which the Assam-bound Tibetan traders used extensively during the winter. The Tibetan merchants, however, brought with them coloured carpet (especially red), gold dust, rock salt, chowries, musk, Chinese silk, dye and bee-wax. The Bhutanese traders used to purchase woollen cloths, rock salts and ponies from Tibet for the Assam-bound trade.

Some products were, however, added to the merchandise in the route. The products like walnuts, musk and caoutchouc (raw rubber) were available mainly in the lower ranges (below 3,000 feet above the sea level). Sometimes, the travelling traders added those to their merchandise from the places like Dewangiri;<sup>60</sup> but more often, local traders joined the caravans with those commodities.

Tibetan traders apart, merchants of many distant places used to visit this route when the communication between Bhutan and Assam was open through the jurisdiction of the Paro Pilo. The contemporary trade route<sup>61</sup> passed through Kashmir, Nepal, the Mooraug, Benaras, Sikkim, Bhutan and Assam, and this constituted the southern leg of the Silk Roads. It ensured as much as four times greater traffic in the Bhutan-Assam trade route than what plied during the nineteenth century. Both Bogle and Pemberton, however, noted that the trade had diminished in the wake of 'the jealousy of the Chinese administration' who sought to restrict the flow of British produce in her market. Pemberton observed, "The

suspicious and monopolising spirit of the Chinese Viceroy of Gortope is represented as almost effectually paralysing the operation of his own subjects, and excluding them from the advantages which would inevitably result from an unrestricted admission of British produce to the boundless regions of Tartary and Tibet.”<sup>62</sup> The Paro Pilo also contributed to this decay by an attempt to monopolise this trade in exclusion of other merchants.



### Hajo: The Destination

The traders terminated their journey at Hajo in Assam. Located on the north bank of the Brahmaputra in the erstwhile Kamrup district, the place enjoyed perennial water transport facilities deep into the province of Bengal. The hill traders disposed their commodities in the Hajo market where

the people congregated during the winter on the occasion of a religious fair at the Mahamuni temple. The temple attracted the Hindus and the Buddhists alike. The Hindus believed that a visit to this temple during this festival removed all the sins of their misdeeds. The people of the Brahminical faith, therefore, thronged on this occasion 'from all parts of India'. The Buddhists were equally zealous about this place on the faith that one of their great prophets and legislators was present there. William Robinson described, "The pious Buddhist too, imbued with the some faith, leaves his home in the distant regions of China and Thibet, and crossing the pathless tracts of the snowy Himalayas, burdened with the load of his offences, hastens to make obeisance at the shrine of his country's deity, and departs in joy and gladness, lightened of his load."<sup>63</sup>

As at the other ends of the country, the fair at Hajo had a predominant commercial character. The Bhutanese and the Tibetan traders sold off their commodities in this fair to the visiting pilgrims as well as traders. They were, however, less interested in Indian currency in exchange although the currency prevailed largely in Bhutan during the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>64</sup> For making their return journey profitable, they procured the Assamese commodities as much as possible. Available information from three contemporary fairs shows that from the proceeds of their sales, the hill merchants retained only 35 percent in currency, and purchased the Assamese goods by the rest.<sup>65</sup> Staying for about three months at Hajo, these hill traders trekked back along the route in caravans.

Not that all hill traffic was terminated at Hajo. Though it attracted the lion's share, a few of them were diverted to other annual fairs at the base of the Bhutan hills. One such fair was held at Udalgiri in Darang district of Assam during February or March. Hunter described it as an important fair from the viewpoint of 'trade with the Bhutias, and other hill people living beyond the boundary [of Assam]'. He wrote, "It is attended by Bhutias, Tibetan, and Kamputis, as well as by

the people of the plains from all the surrounding Districts, and a few Manipuris.”<sup>66</sup> Similar fairs were also held at Kherkeria and at Doimara. Though these places belonged to the territory of Bhutan, a large number of people from Assam participated in those fairs, and a trade relation was ensured between Bhutan and Assam.

### **Nodes and Links**

Away from Tashigang the first resting place for the traders was Rongtung, around 10 km from the origin. It appears from the annexed map (vide Map 1) that the difference in altitude between these places was around 2,000 feet so that the journey was steep up the hills. Following the waves of the mountains, the connecting link assumed a zigzag direction. From Tashigang it descended gradually for a stretch of about 3km along the course of the river Manas running around 1,000 feet above its bed. The road subsequently met the river Bamri, crossed it at its confluence with another torrent without any support of a bridge, and then became very steep upwards for a little long while. The steepness lessened only at the approach towards Rongtung. The roadsides were not, however, uniform all along. Till its stretch to the river Bamri, the wayside places were largely barren, vegetated only with coarse grasses, stunted shrubs and occasionally with long-leaf pines. A few villages sparsely occurred about the Bamri, and as the road reached nearby Rongtung, the terrace cultivation appeared in sight. Rongtung was basically an agrarian settlement where rice was cultivated in the summer, and barley or wheat during the winter. There was the Castle of Rongtung nearby a stream. Traders in this route took a night-rest here for further journey onwards.

The next leg of journey was from Rongtung to Balphay, a distance of around 10 km. The journey continued to be ascending as Balphay was 1,600 feet above Rongtung (vide Map 1). The link was very undulating in this area along the slope of the hills causing the journey hazardous. From Rongtung, the road inclined steeply, and only after crossing some depressions, it got a relatively plain stretch through the

woods of oak. The woods were neither dense nor continuous, scattering rather here and there on the downs. Beyond those woods, a sharp inclination followed again, quite abruptly this time, leading the road to a height of 10,000 feet above the sea level. The journey was difficult as well as hazardous. It was particularly so at some places where the road ran along the edges of barren summits that were covered only with brown and low grasses. At the fag end of the journey, there was descent for about 2,000 feet. In its downward course, the road met a pagoda at a height of 8,000 feet above the sea level before finally entering Balphay from its north-east. The place, however, provided good accommodation. Most of the houses were well-built, covered with split bamboo and secured by rattans. Such precautions were necessary in this place as violent winds blew here during the winter from the south and the south-east. Cultivation was not, however, very developed. The limited lands that were put into cultivation were meant primarily for turnips, radishes and barely. The quality of their yields showed that the soil and climate were not very suitable for agriculture.

From Balphay the journey proceeded to Sasee for about 18 km through a headlong fall from 6,804 feet above the sea level to 4,325 feet (vide Map 1). The connecting road from Balphay descended steeply for over 2,500 feet up to the river Geeri. This link was conspicuously narrow here, and ran through the decomposed flank of a mountain. An absence of mind might cause fatal to a traveller. Griffiths noted, "It was of such a nature that a slip of any sort would in many places [of the road] have precipitated one several hundred feet."<sup>67</sup> The road then ran downwards over the bed of the river Jiri for little more than a kilometre. This course was available only during the winter when the river became dry. Leaving the riverbed behind, the link took a turn for a continuous upsway excepting a down of 500 feet, and encountered again the river Jiri. Crossing the river finally led the road to Sasee. The place was not at all a prosperous settlement in the third decade of the nineteenth century. The houses were not as organised as one found in Balphay. Cultivation was also little undertaken,

and was confined mainly to barley, buckwheat and hemp. The next node on the route was Khengumpa, approximately 16 km away from Sasee. Given the difference of longitude between these nodes (vide Map 1), the link had to ascend by 2,700 feet. But the latter segment of the road was much steeper than this as its former stretch was descending. Initially the road from Sasee went downwards up to the river Dimree. The river remained considerably wide even in winter but could be crossed along with the laden animals. There was another torrent a few kilometres away but it remained dry in winter. In between these rivers, the road ran undulating. But after crossing the torrent it became very steep upwards, and continued to be so till Khengumpa was reached. The journey on this link in caravan was difficult especially when it proceeded through the open ridges of spurs at the approach of Khengumpa. The roadsides were not, however, monotonous in vegetation. It varied from the Bapeel vegetation near Sasee through the humid and sub-tropical trees near Khengumpa. There were the woods of fir as well as the forest of oak resembling, according to Griffiths, 'much our well known English oak'.<sup>68</sup> Khengumpa was also a smaller settlement but agriculture was relatively developed. There were a number of valleys surrounding this node where cultivation flourished. There were also plantations of tobacco and Bobosa (Clensine Coracana) in gardens attached to the dwelling houses.

The journey then proceeded to Rydong. Around 18 km away from Khengumpa this settlement grew on the bottom of a rather narrow valley. Travelling traders used this node as the final halting place before reaching at the plain. The inhabitants took agriculture as the mainstay of their livelihood. A good deal of barley cultivation came to notice in this place during the winter. In contrast to the previous journey, however, travel from Khengumpa to Rydong was descending. It was from 7,000 feet above sea level to 1,900 feet. From the outskirts of Khengumpa the road was steep and rugged passing along the open ridges of the mountains or the narrow rock-corridors. During this journey the mountain vegetation gradually disappeared and the looks of the plain

came to notice as the road approached Rydong.

From Rydong the route went for about 11 km to reach Dewangiri. It was the last halting place in Bhutan. There was no human settlement on the waysides. The journey was easy as the road was inclined very gently, and also because of the bridge that was constructed on the river Diu. It was mandatory for the visiting traders to Assam that they should return back within a stipulated time. According to the custom of this border town, the local king allowed the traders to cross the border only when they left their brethren at the town as security. These temporary inhabitants constituted a large segment of population in this place during the trade season. Dewangiri was, however, a densely populated place. The people were mostly Bhutanese living in simple huts. A few stone-built houses were also there during the first half of the nineteenth century. Such houses were generally three-storied. The owners used to occupy the middle floor while the second floor was divided into several compartments for the purpose of rent. The ground floor was left for cooking. Water was, however, scarce as no stream or spring ran nearby. The local people brought water from distant places by aqueducts made of hollow trunks of small trees. Dewangiri had a special attraction for temple. There were a number of Buddhist temples where the travelling traders, by virtue of their faith, should visit for blessings. An extensive market was developed in this node for exchanging the hill products with the products of the plain. The people from Assam, especially the Kacharees, assembled in this market to trade on barter their own products like rice and dried fish for the manjistha.

The next halting place was Ghoorgong, around 13 km away from Dewangiri. The road descended steeply at its initial stretch, and boulders scattering on the way frequently obstructed the journey. Soon it met the Durunga, a river that remained dry in winter. Similar to the river Jiri, this river bed was used in winter by the caravans to march for a few kilometres. Along the river course they left the hills and entered Ghoorgong from its west. This first node in Assam

was very close to the hills, and the intermediate gentle slope was covered with fine sward. There was hardly any cultivation in and around this place presumably because of unfriendly soils. The people perhaps lived on pasturing.

Leaving Ghoorgong the route advanced to Hazareegong. This was a 13-km journey. No land on the waysides was cultivated; nor was there any trace of villages. Only the woods of simool emerged occasionally in sight. The interception of river was also minimal. Only once the river Mutanga crossed the connecting road. Though this river remained wide and violent during the rainy season, it was almost without water during the winter so that the caravans could cross it without much inconvenience. Hazareegong was, however, predominated by the Bhutanese although it belonged to Assam. Agriculture could not flourish here, as the soils were less fertile. There was one resting-place at Hazareegong, locally called wam-ghur, where travellers took rest at night.

From Hazareegong the road went to Dhamdhama at a distance of about 15 km. The waysides were plain as before, and covered with dense reed and grass jungle. Only a few small and impoverished villages came on the way. This stretch of land earlier accommodated some large villages, but those were destroyed, as Pemberton noted, 'from the effects of the hostile invasion by our troops under Captain Bogle in 1836.<sup>69</sup> The connecting road bore a sign of negligence albiet its jurisdiction under the British governance. It got better maintenance only at the proximity of the mainland. A small but rapid stream, however, intercepted the road twice with a bed of pebbles. Fewer inconveniences were met to negotiate these interceptions. But difficulties cropped up to cross another river, the Noa Nuddee, at the fag end of the link. Because of its sandbank and quick sands, any venture on foot involved risks. Even in winter, the river flowed at a speed of around 5 kmph for a width of 70 yards. Elephants were usually employed here to ferry. On the bank of this river, Dhamdhama was situated. It was basically an agrarian settlement. The people cultivated rice as the main crop and

the oilseeds the next. Sugarcane was also cultivated to some extent.

From Dhamdhama the caravans advanced about 16 km for the next halt at Nalbari. There was neither any river nor any long stretch of woods on the way. The waysides were dotted with villages, which, as Griffiths described, were concealed under the bamboo bushes from the views of the travellers. These villages also caught the notice of Pemberton. He noted, "All the fruit trees common to Bengal were found growing in profusion around the houses of the inhabitants; the herds of cattle were numerous and in the finest condition, and everything bespoke happiness and content."<sup>70</sup> Nalbari was, however, a busy commercial centre. A good number of migrant Marwari merchants settled here during the nineteenth century. These merchants owned several warehouses for long-distance trade, and dealt mainly with visiting traders.

The 27-km journey in the last leg, i.e. from Nalbari to Hajo, ran amidst extensively cultivated fields and the clusters of village, much similar to the preceding roadsides. There were also a number of jheels, the big ponds, well stocked with waterfowl and waders. The otherwise easy journey on this plain was, however, circumvented by as many as four rivers, at least two of which threw challenges to cross.

#### **Section IV: Conclusion**

This study thus shows that there was a lively trade route between Bhutan and Assam during the nineteenth century. From Tashigang in Bhutan it ran around 170 km to reach Hajo in Assam with its intermediate stretch distributed almost equally between the hills and the plain. The route consisted of eleven links out of which six belonged to the hill terrain and five in the plain. Journey on the mountain links was tedious, and involved a good amount of risk. Adversities were generated out of steep ascends and descends of the links as well as from their narrow breaths over the open ridges of the mountains. Though these hazards were absent in the

journey on plain, the obstacles here were created by the rivers which did not go dry even in winter. Most of the rivers in the hills, however, remained dry in winter so that the travellers walked over their beds in caravans.

This route assumed importance because of the fact that, apart from the Bhutanese, a large number of Tibetan traders used this course. There were two paths connecting Tibet with this route through the valley of the Manas. Those are: a) a path via Tashigang and b) a path via Donkar through the Ging la. Caravans used to ply on this route during the winter because of favourable climate and also to take advantage of dry river courses. The pack animals that the traders used consisted of ponies, mules and asses in the main, and sheep, goat, asses, ewes and yak to some extent. The Tibetan species dominated among the beasts of burden. Also the Tibetan goods were predominant in the cargo. Either the Bhutanese traders imported those from Tibet, or the kumpas directly brought those down the route. The nature of the commodities traded between Bhutan and Assam indicates that the trade route gave rise to trans-ecological exchanges in conformity with the hypothesis of Curtin.

### **Bibliography**

- Abu-Lughod, J.L. (1989) *Before European hegemony: The world system*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Bentley, J.H. (1993) *Old world encounters; cross cultural contacts and exchanges in pre-modern times*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Boot, D.P. 'The Dzongs of Bhutan', in *Himalayan Miscellany*, Vol. 4, Centre for Himalayan Studies, 1990.
- Boulnois, L. (1966) *The Silk Road* (trans.) D.Chamberlain
- Christaina, David., 'Silk roads or steppe roads? The silk roads in world history', *Journal of World History*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2000.
- Ciolek, T. Matthew., Digitising Data on Eurasian Trade Routes: an experimental notation system

- <http://www.ciolek.com/PAPERS/pnc-berkeley-02.html>,  
Curtain, P.D. (1985) *Cross Cultural Trade in World History*,  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press  
Das, Nirmala (1974) *The Dragon Country*, New Delhi: Orient  
Longman Limited  
Diamond, J. (1988) *Guns, Germs and Steel*, London: Vintage  
Dorje, C.T. (1995) *A Political and Religious History of Bhutan  
(1651- 1906)*, Delhi: Mrs Sangay Xam, Thimphu and  
Prominent Publishers  
Drege, J.P. and E.M.Buhrer, (1989) *The silk road Saga, Facts  
on File*, New York  
Florian, M. (ed.), (1984) *Transportation Planning Models*,  
Amsterdam: North-Holland  
Franck, I.M. and D.M.Brownstone, (1986) *The Silk Road: A  
history, Facts on File*, New York  
Frank, A.G. (1998) *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*,  
Berkeley: University of California Press  
Frank, A.G. and B.K.Gills (ed), (1992) *The World System: Five  
Hundred Years or Five Thousand*, New York: Routledge  
Griffith, William “Bhutan, 1837-1838” in *Asian Educational  
Services*, 2003  
Hodgson, M.G.S. ‘The Great Western Transmutation’ in  
*Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam and  
world History, Edmund Burke III*, Cambridge:  
Cambridge University Press, 1993.  
Hopkrik, Peter (1980) *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road: The  
Search for the Lost Treasure of Central Asia*, Oxford:  
Oxford University Press  
Hunter, W.W. (1879) *A Statistical Account of Assam*, Vol.1,  
London: Trubner & Co.  
NA (1908) *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. XI, Oxford:  
Clarendon Press  
Karan, Pradyumna P. (1967) *Bhutan: A Physical and Cultural  
Geography*, Lexington: University of Kentucky Press  
Kuloy, H. K. ed., *Political Missions to Bootan*, Manjushri  
Publishing House, New Delhi, 1972.  
M’Cosh, John (1837) *Topography of Assam*, Delhi: Logos  
Press  
McNeill, W.H. “World History and the Rise of the West” in

- Journal of World History*, Vol.9, 1998
- Pemberton, R. Boileu (1839) *Report on Bootan*, Bengal Military Orphan Press
- Pommeret, Francoise "Ancient Trade Partners: Bhutan, Cooch Bihar and Assam (17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries)" *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Autumn, 2000
- Ray, Haraprasad "Trade Routes From Northern India and Bangladesh to South and Southwest China: Some suggestions for an integral economic development of the region" in *Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 18, No.1 & 2, 2000
- Rennie, David Field (1970) *Bhotan and the Story of the Doar War*, New Delhi: Manjusri Publishing House
- Rhodes, Nicholas "Coinage in Bhutan" in *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Autumn, 1999.
- Robinson, William (1975) *Descriptive Account of Asam: with a Sketch of the Tea-Plant of Asam: to which is added, A Short Account of The Neighbouring Tribes , exhibiting their History, Manners, and Customs*, Delhi: Sanakaran Prakashak
- Rossabi, Morris (1990) "The Decline of the Central Asian Caravan Trade" in *Ecology and Empire, Vol.1, Nomads in the Cultural Evolution of the Old World*, G.Seaman (ed)Ethnographics /USC, Los Angeles
- White, J. Claude (1971) *Sikkim and Bhutan, Twenty-One Years on the North-East Frontier, 1887-1908*, Delhi: Vivek Publishing House
- 

<sup>1</sup> Vide for example Francoise Pommeret in his article 'Ancient Trade Partners: Bhutan, Cooch Bihar and Assam (17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries)', *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Autumn, 2000, P.1. She contested the hypothesis, advocated, among others, by C.T. Dorji that "The kingdom remained a sealed book for many centuries...." See his *A Political and Religious History of Bhutan (1651-1906)*, p.1.

<sup>2</sup> The seven duars were Ghurkola, Banska, Chapaguri, Chapakamar and Bijni in Kamrup district, and Buri-guma and Kullung in the Darrang district. There was another duar, Kuriapara duar, in

---

jurisdiction of Tawang Rajah. For details of these duars see William Robinson's Descriptive Account of Asam: with a Sketch of the Tea-Plant of Asam, p. 348, p. 294.

<sup>3</sup> Regarding the forest of one such duar Kishen Kant Bose noted, from Bijni to Wandipore in Bhutan through very high jungle to the extent 'An elephant or rhinoceros cannot be seen in it when standing up, In this jungle, when the sun shines, the heat is intolerable, and when sun ceases to shine a person cannot remain in it without a fire on account of innumerable mosquitoes and other insects with which it is filled'. See Kuloy, H. K. ed., Political Missions to Bootan, Baboo Kishen Kant Bose's Account of Bootan.(1815), p.355. For the details of antisocial elements. See John M'Cosh's *Topography of Assam*, p. 135.

<sup>4</sup> William Griffith, *Bhutan 1837-1838*.

<sup>5</sup> R.Boileu Pemberton, Report on Bootan.

<sup>6</sup> T.Matthew Ciolek, Digitising Data on Eurasian Trade Routes: an experimental notation system  
<http://www.ciolek.com/PAPERS/pnc-berkeley-02.html>, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> J.P.Drege and E.M.Buhrer, *The silk road Saga, Facts on File*. NewYork, 1989.

<sup>8</sup> Morris Rossabi, 'The silk roads: An educational Resource', *Education About Asia*, Vol.4, 1999, pp.16-20.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, L.Boulnois, *The silk road*, trans. D.Chamberlain, 1966; I.M.Franck and D.M.Brownstone, *The silk road: A history, Facts on File*.

<sup>10</sup> See Peter Hopkrik, *Foreign devils on the silk road: The search for the lost treasure of central Asia*.

<sup>11</sup> Franck and Brownstone, *The silk road*, pp.30-32.

<sup>12</sup> P.D.Curtain, *Cross cultural trade in world history*, p.16.

---

<sup>13</sup> David Christain, "Silk roads or steppe roads? The silk roads in world history", *Journal of World History*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2000, pp.1-26.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> For religious and cultural exchanges, see J.H.Bentley, *Old world encounters; Cross cultural contacts and exchanges in pre-modern times*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993

<sup>16</sup> For the spread of disease and the exchange of gene along the silk roads, see J.Diamond, *Guns, germs and steel*, Vintage, London, 1988, chap. 11.

<sup>17</sup> L.Boulnois, *The silk road*, p.60.

<sup>18</sup> For the decline of land routes in the silk roads, vide Morris Rossabi, 'The decline of the central Asian caravan trade' in *Ecology and Empire*, Vol.1, Nomads in the cultural evolution of the old world, ed G.Seaman, Ethnographics/USC, Los Angeles, 1990, pp.81-102.

<sup>19</sup> A.G.Frank, *ReOrient: Global economy in the Asian age*, University of California Press, Berkley, 1998.

<sup>20</sup> A.G.Frank and B.K.Gills (ed), *The world system: Five hundred years or five thousand*, Routledge, New York, 1992.

<sup>21</sup> J.L.Abu-Lughod, *Before European hegemony: The world system*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989.

<sup>22</sup> W.H.McNeill, 'World history and the rise of the west', *Journal of World History*, v.9, 1998, pp.215-236.

<sup>23</sup> M.G.S.Hodgson, 'The great western transmutation' in *Rethinking world history: Essays on Europe, Islam and world history*, Edmund Burke III, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, p.47.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>25</sup> Frank and Gill, *The world system*.

---

<sup>26</sup>Haraprasad Ray, 'Trade routes from northern India and Bangladesh to south and southwest China: Some *suggestions for an integral economic development of the region*', *Asiatic Studies*, v.18, no. 1 & 2, pp. 118-119.

<sup>27</sup> M.Florian, 'An introduction to network models used in Transportation planning' in M.Florian (ed.) *Transportation Planning Models* pp .137-152

<sup>28</sup> The term he used is Die Seidenstrassen. Vide Drege and Buhrer, *The silk road Saga*, p.6

<sup>29</sup> David Christania, Silk roads or steppe roads? The silk roads in world history, *Journal of World History*, v. 11, no. 1, 2000, p.2

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.* p.5

<sup>31</sup> This is deducted from the evidence that the hill traders returned back from Assam with merchandise. See W.W.Hunter *A Statistical Account of Assam*, vol. 1, p. This is also no evidence in the literature that the Assamese traders visited the hills.

<sup>32</sup> Haraprasad Ray, 'Trade routes from northern India and Bangladesh to south and southwest China', pp. 118-119.

<sup>33</sup> R.Boileau Pemberton, *Report on Bootan*, p.78.

<sup>34</sup> Kumpa was the southern portion of Tibet lying between the right bank of the river Tsanpo and the northern ridges of Bhutan. See for details David Field Rennie, *Bhotan and the Story of the Doar War*, p.7.

<sup>35</sup> William Robinson, *Descriptive Account of Asam*, p. 347.

<sup>36</sup> R. Boileau Pemberton, *Report on Bootan*, p.19.

<sup>37</sup> W.W.Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, vol. 1, pp. 143-145.

<sup>38</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol. XI, p.183.

- 
- <sup>39</sup> W.W.Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, vol.1, p.95.
- <sup>40</sup> R. Boileau Pemberton, *Report on Bootan*, p.79.
- <sup>41</sup> H.K.Kuloy, ed.,*Political Missions to Bootan*, the Hon'ble Ashley Eden:Report on the State of Bootan and on the Progress of the Mission of 1863-64, p.124.
- <sup>42</sup> H.K.Kuloy, ed.,*Political Missions to Bootan*, Dr. William Griffiths: Journal of the Mission to Bootan in 1837-38, p.328.
- <sup>43</sup> H.K.Kuloy, ed.,*Political Missions to Bootan*, the Hon'ble Ashley Eden: Report on the State of Bootan and on the Progress of the Mission of 1863-64, p. 124.
- <sup>44</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>46</sup> R. Boileau Pemberton, *Report on Bootan*, p.70.
- <sup>47</sup> W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, vol.1, pp.143-145.
- <sup>48</sup> *ibid.* p.144.
- <sup>49</sup> R. Boileau Pemberton, *Report on Bootan*, p.81.
- <sup>50</sup> Willium Griffith, *Bhutan 1837-1838*.
- <sup>51</sup> R.Boileau Pemberton, *Report on Bootan*, p.40.
- <sup>52</sup> The Deb Raja was the Prime Minister of Bhutan. He was the principal organ of the Government. Under his control there were four Governors or Pilo of four regions, Punakha, Paro, Wandipoor, and Tongsa. See H.K.Kuloy,ed.,*Political Missions to Bootan*, Baboo Kishen Kant Bose: *Account of Bootan*,(1815), pp.342-346.
- <sup>53</sup> Nirmala Das, *The Dragon Country*, p.70.

- 
- <sup>54</sup> D.P. Boot, 'The Dzongs of Bhutan', Himalayan Miscellany, vol. 4, 1999, p.99.
- <sup>55</sup> An important market emerged below the Tashigang dzong. [Pradyumna P. Karan, p.64.]
- <sup>56</sup> J. Claude White, Sikkim and Bhutan, Twenty-One Years on the North-East Frontier, 1887-1908, p. 190
- <sup>57</sup> R. Boileau Pemberton, *Report on Bootan*, p.75.
- <sup>58</sup> *ibid.* p.78.
- <sup>59</sup> J. Claude White, *Sikkim and Bhutan*, p.194.
- <sup>60</sup> The place is presently called Dewathang.
- <sup>61</sup> R. Boileau Pemberton, *Report on Bootan*, p.80.
- <sup>62</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>63</sup> William Robinson, *Descriptive Account of Asam*, p. 259.
- <sup>64</sup> Nicholas Rhodes, 'Coinage in Bhutan', *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, Vol.1, No. 1, Autumn, 1999, pp. 105-107.
- <sup>65</sup> See Table 1 above.
- <sup>66</sup> W.W.Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, vol.1, p.143.
- <sup>67</sup> H.K.Kuloy, ed., *Political Missions to Bootan*, Dr. William Griffiths: *Journal of the Mission to Bootan in 1837-38*, p.280.
- <sup>68</sup> *ibid.* p.279.
- <sup>69</sup> R. Boileau Pemberton, *Report on Bootan*, p.39.
- <sup>70</sup> *ibid.*

## The Historical Anecdotes of Kheng Nobilities\*

*Lham Dorji\*\**

### **Abstract**

Social roles and political power of various kheng nobilities like Dung (gDung), Khoche, Gadpo (rgad-po) and Ponpo (dpon-po) of medieaval Bhutan declined especially after many social and political reforms initiated by the Third King in the early 1950s. This landmark reform abolished serfdom which then prevailed all over the country. These noble families did not enjoy social ascendancy or respect of the past and their noble ancestral claims were cast aside as anachronistic past as the country progressed through several reforms of the successive monarchs. Modern education has further diminished knowledge about them and only a few descendants know a little about their lineages. Until now, research on this subject has appeared almost insurmountable, as available literatures are either lost or inaccessible. The old people are the only reliable sources of information who transmit information orally if they can remember anything.

In absence of any scholarship on the subject, this article

---

\* I have relied heavily on oral sources to write this article. Many people have made their invaluable contribution, directly and indirectly. I want to first thank Karma Ura, Karma Galay, Dorji Penjore, Tashi Choden, Chhimi Dem, Tshering Phuntsho and all my colleagues in the Centre. Meme Chepon Tashi Namgay, Meme Tshampa, Meme Thinley Dorji, Aila Penden, Aila Dechen, Lama Jangba, Meme Penden Dorji, Meme Zotho and others were some of the 'living libraries' who helped me to write this article. This is an abridged version of the paper presented in the Fifth Colloquium on Tangible and Intangible Culture organized by National Museum of Bhutan, Paro, in February 2005.

\*\* Researcher, the Centre for Bhutan Studies

draws heavily on the oral sources to construct a rough hi(story), and shed some light on the subject. Where available, literary sources were referred. This discrete chronicle does not focus on one topic, but explores various themes that are related to the nobility.

### **Decline of Kheng Nobilities**

Families of dung, ponpo, khoche and gadpo in kheng enjoyed immense social, political and religious dominance in the region until some powerful religious lineages or 'aristocratic families' called choje (lords of religion) emerged to countervail them during the pre-17<sup>th</sup> century. These families were confined to their own territorial space and were not necessarily unified. But some inter-marriages took place among them and they often joined their small forces against their common local hegemony and rival elites. Zhabdrung Rinpoche's arrival in 1616 further changed their social and functional dominance. Emergence of the centralised state gradually degraded their power since the theocratic state found it difficult to function efficiently amidst contending noble families. It was crucial for the state to prevail over territorial rulers and unite them under one central rule. The unification process resulted in military campaign in the eastern and central regions led by Tongsa Penlop Chogyal Minjur Tenpa (1613-1680) and Lama Namsey Dorji. The government forces defeated the local elites of Kheng along with many other petty rulers in eastern and central Bhutan who were forced to conform to the new political regime though they were not seriously weakened. It was important for the state not to deprive them of their privileges completely in order to obtain their consent to the changing social and political institutions. Their subjections were acknowledged through an oath of loyalty to Drukpa state and government. The state distributed to them statues of Zhabdrung Rinpoche to recognize them as Zhabdrung's privileged subjects. These statues are preserved now in many of the nobles' houses.

The expansion of the central authority, however, did not absolutely eliminate them as a socio-political force, until the

third king abolished the slavery system in 1950s. The nobilities continued to dominate the public affairs and collected revenue for the government. They also made the Mon villagers to toil on dung's manor farms for some specific months and pay tax in kind. The government allowed such informal subordination of the monpas to extent that it did not bear too strongly on the state function. Until recent period, the nobles monopolized the hereditary post of the gup and took over some administrative roles and religious responsibilities.

Consolidation of power transformed them spiritually from pre-Buddhist faith to Buddhism. The practice of pre-Buddhist faith was indispensable because honouring and propitiating gods of heavens was a spiritual means of exerting their noble ancestry, and hence guaranteeing the respect of the community. Spread of Buddhism in the region on the one hand and their aspirations to maintain their spiritual superiority encouraged them to become patrons (dbyin bdag) of many Buddhist luminaries who visited Kheng.

### **Contended Origin of *Kheng Nobilities***

'Dung' refers to the patrilineal noble families of Bumthang, Kheng and Kurtoe. The term was used either as a title of an adult male noble or referred to a noble's household. According to various written sources,<sup>1</sup> dung nobilities in kheng spread from Ura Dung Nagpo (ura gdung gnag po) believed to have descended from the sky.<sup>2</sup> Guse Langling alias Lhagon Pelchen ruled Ura and adjoining places for many years. His son Dung Nagpo Dragpa Wangchuk continued to rule the domain but he died without any heir. His reincarnation, Lhawang Dragpa was born in Yarlung Drongmoche in Central Tibet and was later ennobled as Ura Dung. Chume Dung, Domkhar Dung, Dur Dung and Gyatsa Dung were the descendants of his legitimate sons from Chokor Ashi Drenzom. While visiting his landed estates in kheng to collect annual taxes, he fathered a son called Nima Wangyal through an extramarital affair with Ponmo Tashi Wangmo. The noble son then became the main progenitor of Nyakhar Dung and other dung lineages in

kheng.

The origin of dung discussed by John Ardussi (2004:60-72) proves contrary to the ancestral myths of dung described in the other Bhutanese sources. By Ardussi's theory, the Gdung were not primarily an aboriginal people of Bhutan, but rather a somewhat scattered 'southern' (Ch. Lho-pa) population occupying the highlands of south-central Tibet, from Phari in the west to Lhobrak in the east, living of the land and by hunting. Branch families may have inhabited parts of Bhutan, but they were not the main body.<sup>3</sup> Aris (1979) conversely ascertained that the term 'dung' was associated with Lhasay Tsangma's descendants in 12<sup>th</sup> century, before Gelugpa's invasion of the dung-reng and lho-dung in South Tibet who fled to Bhutan and Tawang only in 14<sup>th</sup> Century. The rGyal-rigs (f.11b) records a local tradition concerning two 'important clans' (rus che-ba) in the west, the rGyal-dung of Apa-grop and gDung-'brog of Thimphu, both of whom descended from a son of Prince Tsangma. It is only... 'clan'. No one seems to remember the rGyal-gdung and gDung-'brog today, though a motley group of jungle -dwellers living far to the south of sPagro are still called the gDung (Aris, 1979).

Khoches were the noble families of lower kheng who were dominant in areas close to Assam and Bengal. At this stage, it is impossible to explain if khoches of Bhutan shared blood kinship with lost tribes of Khen and Khoch in Assam and Bengal. There was a significant trade relationship between khengpas and Indians. During winter seasons the people of hill had to migrate to the plains with their goats and sheep. Khengpas were known for their excellence in warfare and statecraft. A Khen chief established a dynasty in Kamata (kamrupa) by virtue of his courage and skill. We have evidence of three kheng kings of this dynasty who ruled Kamrupa (Kamta). According to Pelgen and Rigden (2000), Khoches of kheng once ruled the Assamese provinces of Kokabari, Rangapani and Gohali.<sup>4</sup> Whether the khoches mentioned by these authors were the descents of Khen dynasty of Kamta needs to be ascertained. Local tradition

holds that Khoches were the direct descendants of Lhasey Tsangma, a grandson of Tibetan king Thrisong Deutsen. Lhasey Tsangma came to Bhutan in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. This can be substantiated by the fact that the descendants of this prince established Byar-pa<sup>5</sup> families in Kheng Joka and Ngangla where khoches were based. I would hypothesize that Byar-pa families in Joka and Ngangla once ruled the khen and koch tribes of the plains. Through this association Byar-pa families came to be known as Joka and Ngangla khoches.

Dakpai, Kikhar Jang, Tali and Buli Ponpos were another group of noble families who dominated the middle *kheng*. It is unlikely that these families descended from *dung* nobility though local tradition traces their ancestors to *dung* families. They should be considered a different group of nobilities, otherwise it would not justify the titles being different. This category of noble family could have existed as early as *dung*'s historical origin in *kheng* or even earlier. One plausible hypothesis is that this nobility originated far back to Lhasey Tsangma's period. It is mentioned in *Gyalrig* that Lhasey Tsangma passed through *Kheng* Tali and Buli while on his route to Jamkhar. Known for his royal ancestry, wealthy local families would have hosted the prince. If so, these families would have been later distinguished as 'ponpo' to recognize their association with the prince (locally called 'pon'). Kikhar and Dakpai were two other villages where *ponpos* lived, but mention of these places is not made in *Gyalrig*. However, it is possible that Lhasey Tsangma passed through them as these places fall on the lateral route to Tali, and the name Kikhar may have originated from Lhasey Tsangma's concept of 'khar' or Dzong which are prevalent in eastern Bhutan.

The title 'ponmo' had been given to Ura Dung Dragpa Wangchuk's mistress Tashi Wangmo of Kheng Nyakhar. It is difficult to determine if she had been thus titled even before her affair with Ura Dung. Local tradition holds that Lhasey Tsangma visited Nyakhar. It was he who named the place Nya-khar locally meaning 'break of day'. He prophesized that a man from Bumthang would bring in power and prosperity

to the host family just like the breaking of dawn.<sup>6</sup> The man of the prophecy could have been Ura Dung Dragpa Wangchuk.

Another theory regarding the origin of ponpo is that they would have descended from the Ponpos of Bumthang. According to *Gyalrig*, the king Langdarma's campaign to destroy the teachings of Buddha in Tibet led to the escape of the six Dorji (vajra) brothers of Lhalung Palgye Dorji from Tibet to southern lands. Three brothers arrived at Bumthang and settled in Tang and Chokor. Their descendants became the ponpos of Tang and Chokor. The other three brothers came from Lhodrak and arrived at Kurilung. The descendants of Dragpa Dorji gained power over Kurilung and started the families of Kurilung Ponchen and Zhelngo. Changrig Dorji's descendants went to Zhongar Molbalungpa and gained control over Khengpa.<sup>7</sup> The descendants of Changrig Dorji might have started ponpo nobility.

Gadpo families were equally influential but were believed to have no noble ancestry. They were ennobled based on their intelligence (saila), strength (khego), and wealth (junor). Gadpos were known for their courage and skills during warfare. Because of such qualities, people unanimously recognized them as their leader who would give them protection from adversaries and dispense justice in the community. Gadpopa is referred to a performer during a local festival called Chodpa in Goshing. He performs dances and prays for longevity, wisdom, and prosperity through exhaustive use of mockery and obscene language. He traces his origin to the abode of Lha-Jajin (Lord Indra). As revealed by his ritual recitation, he makes his psychic journey from the heaven through Ura to the present place. This is clear from the verses about his encounter with Ura Nad-mo (female host of Ura).<sup>8</sup> It is uncertain whether gadpo nobility of kheng can claim their noble ancestry like Gadpopa.

### **Religious superiority for Social Distinctions**

The expansion of religious aristocrats' (cho-je) control over western Bhutan entailed non-religious nobilities to express

their superiority through their faith in pre-Buddhist practices that constitute a mix of animism, Bon religion, and Buddhism, and later as Buddhist patrons. Most of the kheng nobilities worshipped the god of heavens, nature, and local deities. They played important roles in religious invocations of non-Buddhist gods and local deities. This is clear from some ritualistic prayer verses. An invocation verse of Bonpo during Goleng roop asserts that Tenpa Shenrab, the founder of Bon, had introduced various rituals and festivals in kheng like roop in Goleng dung, Shu in Tali and Buli Ponpo, mitshim in Tagma Dung, kharphu in Shar Tongpa and gadang in Ngala and Bjoka Khoches. It is an exaggeration to claim that Tenpa Shenrab had visited Kheng, but it is possible that his followers came to Monyul following Guru Rinpoche's widespread annihilation of Bon religion in Tibet. A few of them might have traveled to or through kheng leaving a legacy of Bon practices that blended well with existing animism.

While their [dung in particular] origin were never associated with religious schools as were chojes, and although they never functioned (except somewhat fortuitously) as lamas, it would have been impossible for them to claim legitimacy of their rule without associating their line with certain divine properties.<sup>9</sup> Most of the non-Buddhist rituals begin from the attic, floor, or surrounding areas of noble houses where offerings are made to Ode-Gongyal, Tenpa Shenrab, Ama Gung-lhai-gyalmo and others. Local people believe that the houses of nobles are closer to the heavens. It would make it easier for gods to descend to earth through the houses of nobles who are already believed to have ancestral linkages with the gods of heaven. Later with the spread of Buddhism, some of these Bon practices had either become completely extinct like Tagma Dung or they are practiced in a simplified form like roop in Goleng Dung.

The nobilities continued to dominate religious affairs even after major replacement of the traditional faith with Buddhism. The emerging state recognized Buddhism as

indispensable if social order was to be created uniformly. The nobles were central in public affairs. They also took important responsibilities in the community's religious function, aside from their social and political role as the functionary agents of the state government. They were distinguished from the rest through their possession of Zhabdrung's statue in their houses. Most of the important religious ceremonies had to be initiated in these houses. Nobles' mansions functioned as temples before the community temples were built. Even the oldest temples, if there were any, were taken care by these noble families. Some of them were also privileged hosts and patrons of important Buddhist saints such as Pema Lingpa, Thuksey Dawa Gyeltshen and others. All these indicate the religious superiority enjoyed by these nobilities.

### **Space of Nobilities within *Khenrig Nam Sum***

Traditional division of kheng into three regions was purely based on physical proximity of each division to Zhemgang Dzong. Such division was instituted to ease out the administrative difficulties and to simplify tax collection and labour mobilization for the state. Tagma Chogpa (Lower Kheng), Nangkorpa (Middle Kheng) and Chikorpa (Upper Kheng) were the three major divisions. Zhemgang Dzongpon was responsible for administering all three regions. But with repeated damage of the Dzong by earthquakes and fire, it became inconvenient for the people of upper kheng to mobilize labour frequently owing to remoteness of the regions from the Dzong. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, following a revolt against the Dzongpon, the upper kheng was directly administered from Wangdicholing in Bumthang and the inhabitants were known as Wangleng Suma. They were exempted from taxes and labour services to the state government. This short-term arrangement later led to conflict between Tunglabi Dung under Chikor division and rest of the nobilities of Tamachok and Nangkor divisions led by Nyakhar Dung.

Nobilities under Tamachok division were Tagma Dung, Samkhar Dung, Subrang Dung, Zurphai Dung, Gomphu

Gadpo, Nangla Khoche and Joka Khoche. Virtually, all noble families were powerful, but two of them had prerogative by virtue of their geographical locations. The axioms, Tagma Dung tagi guyung (tiger's head) and Joka (Dogar) Koche sergy di mig (the golden key) or Go tagma dung; Jug Joka khoche (head-Tagma Dung and Tail-Joka Khoche) provide evidence to their leadership roles among the nobilities. The nobilities under Nangkor division included Dakpai Ponpo, Kikhar Jang Ponpo, Buli Ponpo, Tali Ponpo, Goleng Dung and Nyakhar Dung. Shingkar Dung, Tunlabi Dung, Kuther Dung, Wamling Gadpo, Bardo Gadpo and Khomshar Gadpo were the nobilities under Chikor division.

### **Tagma Dung's Extraordinary Encounter with Terton Pema Lingpa**

As mentioned earlier, Tagma is located close to Zhemgang Dzong on the hilltop facing Jowo-Durshing. Tagma and Samkhar are also mentioned in Guru Rinpoche's Nye-yig of Jowo Durshing. The names of the places associated with this village were mostly derived from a female tigress (tag-mo) that roamed the hill, frequently killing inhabitants and domestic animals. Talagang (tiger- hill), Tagabi (tiger-meadow), Talajong (tiger-land), Tagkhai (twenty-tigers) and Ta-gam (tiger-gorge) are some other adjoining places. An Assamese saint was said to have visited the village and tamed the tigress by feeding it with milk. His statue is preserved until today, but it cannot be identified.

Tagma Dung's mansion was also known by another name, Kharsangpong Chukpo. Local history accounts that Tagma Dung alias Kharsangpong Chugpo met Pema Lingpa. It was an extraordinary meeting because the latter made a supernatural visit to Kharsangpong Chugpo. Tagma Dung had intense faith in Pema Lingpa but did not have the privilege of meeting him. Driven by his unwavering faith in him, he prayed to the terton even during his meals to visit his house. On one of his meals, he envisaged Pema Lingpa seated in front of him on the animal hide. He offered his imaginary terton with foods and drinks, saying, "Lama, relish on my

offering, while I eat in your company."

While Lama did not appear physically in front of him, the tertön paid him an unusual visit. It was later known from a man from Berti that Pema Lingpa came to Kharsangpong Chugpo's house. A man was returning from his village to his master's house when he saw a lay-monk sleeping near a rock in Takhai. The monk told him that he was invited by Kharsangpong Chugpo for a meal and got drunk. He found out later that no such monk ever visited his master. It was, as discussed earlier, a miraculous visit. Perhaps, Chugpo would have seen him, though the other people in the house did not see him.<sup>10</sup> Local belief that Pema Lingpa might have pre-determined the arrival of his body relics (kudung) in Tagma after more than hundred years to remain there hidden for years under Tagma Dung's custody can be true.

### **The Arrival of Pema Lingpa's *Kudung* in Tagma**

The previous bond between Pema Lingpa and Kharsangpong Chugpo brought the kudung of tertön in Tagma Gonphai some hundred years later. It so happened that Zhabdrung Rinpoche decreed Chogyal Minjur Tenpa in 1656 (?) to secure the relic to Punakha Dzong from Tamzhing Lhundrupcholing. Intending to safeguard the relic and avoid it being taken to Punakha Dzong, his custodian and other devotees escaped to Tagma Gonphai. At that time, Tagma Gonphai was inaccessible area, and it was home to many wild animals including elephants and tigers.

The kudung was moved from Tamzhing to Tagma Gonphai through Phromzor Mon and Nabji Korphu. The places along the route got their names from this event. The kudung had to be rested in several places along the route. The first place that I can account at this stage is Pemathang, just opposite Korphu; the other places before it have not been ascertained. Pemathang was thus named because it resembled a lotus flower. In Tashithang, a group of nuns offered a Tashi Mendey to the kudung. The kudung was then carried across Tashiphu and arrived at Thridangbi (thri - oral transmission, nang -

give and bi - ground). The natives were given religious oral transmission and received the kudung's blessings. They crossed various streams and passed through a thick jungle called Zegang Yungba (ze-leopard and yungba-jungle) infested with leopards. When they arrived at Torsengmed (tor-offer) they made water offering to the kudung. They climbed down to a Mon village of Berti where they met some folks involved in a bitter brawl. The place was thus known as Berti, 'ber' locally mean a brawl. They came to a place where Tagma Dung and his subjects came to receive the relic. This place was later named as Lama-gam (Lama- refers to kudung, gam-receive). The relic was then taken through Dung-jud, a place where men from Tagma Dung's household used to contest and test their strengths and skills by jumping over a huge rock, traveled farther through Takhai (twenty-tigers) and arrived at Zhuthrithang (zhuthri-throne, thang-ground) where the kudung was kept on a throne prepared by Tagma Dung. The relic finally reached Tharpacholing, which was their proposed destination. 'Tharpa' in local dialect means escaped from someone or something. It must have been so named to indicate that the relic was saved from its enemy.<sup>11</sup>

The kudung was retained inside a rectangular pit on a mound resembling an elephant's nose. This hill was known to be a sanctuary for wild elephants, tigers, and other animals. They dug trenches around it to protect the relic from beasts. It was then moved to a base close to a pond (dawar) to keep it away from the strong winter winds. One of the devotees went to Lhodrak and brought Jangchub Choten to preserve the sacred remains. Tagma Dung helped in building a temple to house the relic. The entire relics were taken care of by Tagma Dung. Bi-annual religious ceremony in honour of Terton Pema Lingpa was initiated and conducted by several generations of Tagma Dung. The descendants of Tagma Dung have to send butter (mar-phod) and flour (phi-phod) offerings today while conducting Peling Kuchey. Until recently, this nobility had an authority to reveal the relics to public. In absence of Dung, Khraipa Apa was allowed to do so. Later on, Lama Phuntsho and Khyentshe Rinpoche were authorized by

the government to handle the relics.

Another oral history accounts that Pema Lingpa visited Tharpacholing in the form of a white bird. While visiting kheng Buli, he turned into a white bird and flew to Tagma Gonphai. The bird perched on a hill like an elephant's nose. It was at this time that he destined the arrival of his body remains in Tagma.<sup>12</sup> But, according to Rigden and Pelgen,<sup>13</sup> Pema Lingpa built Tharpacholing monastery in Tagma Gonphai while on his way from Kurtoe to Tagma via Nabji Korphu. He dedicated the temple to Palden Lhamo to tame tigers and elephants, which posed dangers to villagers of Tagma and bordering areas.

The kudung is said to have remained there for more than two and half centuries, until Choje Ugyen Phuntsho took it to Yudrungcholing in Trongsa. It is accepted in the official dominion that the kudung is in Punakha Dzong in Machen Lhakhang. Another view contends that it was not moved anywhere from Yudrungcholing. The attempt to take it back to Tamshing failed after a route to Tamshing was damaged by landslide. It was taken as a bad omen and the kudung was not moved out of Yudrungcholing.<sup>14</sup> Although the kudung had been moved, the other relics including his wardrobe and masterworks were retained, some of which were taken to Khorphu Lhakhang by Lama Phuntsho.

### **Tagma Dung's Subordination of Berti Mon**

Tagma Dung ruled his subjects like Berti Mon and khraipa from his manor house called Umpang Dzong. It was a tall three-storied building with nine doors. It is not known when the Dzong was built, but it must have collapsed around 1882 when Drongsep Singye Namgyal was assisting Jakar Dzongpon Pema Tenzin in a war against Trongsa Penlop Dungkar Gyeltshen. Dzongpon Tsangla, the second Dzongpon of Zhemgang Dzong rebuilt it. He was known to have come from Buli Ponpo nobility and married Prengpa, the daughter of Tagma Dung. The ruins of the Dzong are visible today.

Berti Mon were the community living in the black mountain areas similar to monpas of Chunseng and Phrumzor. Tagma Dung maintained intimate personal servitude of Berti Mon and exerted some control over Phrumzor Mon. It is difficult to determine the exact period when such slave institution began, but some evidence points that it existed back to 12<sup>th</sup> century when Kharsangpong Chugpo had the spiritual encounter with Terton Pema Lingpa. The meeting of Pema Lingpa in Tagkhai by a 'so-called Kharsangpong Chugpo's servant from Berti' bore witness to bondage relationship between them. The power of noble lordship was defined by an agreement (gen-ja) signed in the presence of local deities like Nadpo Rinchen Drakpo, Chunglai Lhasang Karpo, Dhongai Tsanchen Marpo, Kibulungtsan and Aka Raja. This relationship was personal rather than territorial in nature. The conditions laid down in the gen-ja speaks so much about the services that Berti Mon would have to render to Tagma Dung until crows turned white.

This is clear from the Berti Mon's commitment to a close bond of personal serfdom even with the change in social and political institution in the country. One reason for such commitment could have been an extra-ordinary agreement between them. Betraying the conditions laid down in the gen-ja meant death and famines in Berti. One of the conditions stated that Berti Mon would serve Tagma Dung with loyalty until crow turns white. To further strengthen the bond and re-affirm their loyalty, the elders of Berti Mon came to pledge their commitment during an annual ritual in Tagma Dung's house. Such commitment was made to Dung Wangdi, possibly three generations ago. The other motive behind this was to escape the subjugation by the regional aristocrats of Pelri and Lame Gompa in Bumthang.<sup>15</sup> They feared that becoming their subject would necessitate them to work harder, pay more taxes and deliver load farther.

Some generations of Tagma Dung were said to have exerted coercive rule over their domestic servants who had to carry out intense manorial labours- almost day and night- for

meager amount of foods. They were levied heavy meat, fish and grain taxes, sometimes even to the threshold of starvation. Elderly people from Berti recount the hard work and extreme punishment they were subjected to by their stern lords, barely getting time even to attend to nature's call. Berti community had to provide one man as Dung Apa's personal servant (arpo) on a rotation basis until 1970s.

In the course of time, the number of days Berti Mon had to work in Dung's household was reduced to ten days. During the second King's reign, Berti community made some attempt to violate the agreement. They appealed to the King to relieve them from Dung's control and upgrade them to the status of khraipa. But, since non-human witnesses were involved in bond-agreement, breaking the bondage resulted in a series of misfortunes such as famines and death of the community members. Apologies were made to the deities several times; however, breaking the oath is believed to have incensed the deities further bringing inflictions to both the parties involved. To redress the situation, Dung Thinley Dorji took an initiative to desecrate the genja by involving the descendants of Berti Mon. It was burnt during one of the religious ceremonies organized by Meme Thinley in 1990 with extensive ceremonies, and both the parties made prayers of apologies to the deities. Chumi Gonpa Lama Yeshey Dorji performed desecration rituals.

### **Disintegration of Samkhar Dung**

Samkhar Dung once controlled the community of Samkhar and Chungseng Monpa, the communities located close to Surey- today's Jigmecholing (Sarpang Dzongkhag). Instabilities within the family disintegrated Samkhar Dung, thus leading to a 'deserted village' that was later re-settled by Lhotsampas in 1950s. The internal dispute between brothers over family rights and inheritance was the principal cause of the family breakdown. To make matters worse, their mother allied with the younger brother, and explored whatever means available to ensure that manorial holdings and entitlements were passed to him, deviating from patrilineal tradition of

Dung that required the eldest son to become the heir.

She obliged her two sons to accept the contest that she had devised in such a way to favour the younger son. Two sons were called to a ground above their manor house and made to jump on a cow skin laid on the ground, with the criterion that whoever stood firm on the skin was to take over the family rights. She laid the skin in such a position that the elder brother skidded down. She altered its position when the younger brother jumped on it that the hairs gripped his feet firmly. The younger brother's victory, however, did not resolve the conflict. Instead it flared into a war that the subjects were even forced to flee to Shar Wotap. He became aware of a fatal outcome of his leadership rivaled by his own brother. To safeguard his own life, he ceded all his holdings to Lame Gonpa aristocrats. The latter acknowledged him with a decree authorizing two brothers to settle on any land located between the boundaries of Joka Khoche and Tama Dung.

The mother grew weary of the situation that bore too much on her and their subjects. She cursed her sons and prayed that no male descendants be born to future generations, thus ending the Dung lineage. The females dominated several generations of Samkhar Dung; the born males were mostly disabled. The intra-family tussle infuriated the protective deities who chased the entire family up to Pong Angla Ungli<sup>16</sup> (hill) above Tama Gonpa. Local tradition holds that an unknown saint from India came to save them from the deities. He would have been the same saint who was believed to have tamed the tigress in Tagma. Stones resembling statues of Guru Rinpoche and Jitsun Drolma were discovered in Pong Ungla Ungling.<sup>17</sup> The family members of Samkhar Dung escaped to the territory of Zurphai Dung, who provided them with land in exchange for a pig and a matangma of ara.

### **Fateful Collapse of Nyakhar Dung and Its Cause**

The pretentious conduct of Nyakhar Dung and his ambitious hunt to become a regional hegemony led to the fateful end of his lineage. The other nobilities and the central government

alike dreaded his aggressive nature over others, which led the central force to crush it. This nobility as a direct descendant of Dung Nima Wangyal, the illegitimate son of Ura Dung Dragpa Wangchuk and as the family who hosted Lhasey Tsangma, enjoyed the sense of superiority over others.

The way Nyakhar Dung (maybe Nima Wangyal) had looked for an appropriate site to build his temple reveals much about his supernatural qualities. He climbed a hill and threw a cymbal<sup>18</sup>, assured that the site where the cymbal had landed would be suitable for the construction. The cymbal, at first whirled horizontally over Melongbi, swirled farther and then settled on the ground where Nyakhar Lhaxhang stands now. He had prophesized that water would flow from the site as a gift from the lord of serpent (klu),<sup>19</sup> which proved true.

Meme Tshampa identifies imprints on the rocks above Zhobleng as those of Guru Rinpoche. But, others consider that Nyakhar Dung left those imprints to mark his victory over a serpent god. The serpent god was hacked into several pieces. These bodies turned into a long stretch of rocks that looked like serpent, and are seen even now. The snake had vowed, "My life lasted short; so will the lineage of Nyakhar Dung be totally wiped out." This is confirmed by the present situation where no trace of his lineage exists at all, and if so, only a few of them.

His innate tendency to exhibit his power and influence in the region through warfare made several local nobilities angry and provoked their jealousies. Tunglabi Dung was the strongest rival, who intending to eliminate its relentless opponent took advantage of Chogyal Minjur Tenpa's military campaign in Kheng. Norbu Wangchuk also known as Tunglabi Dung sounded in secret to Lam Namsey about Nyakhar Dung's mounting influence and his potential threat to the process of unification. This led to the central government's crusade against Nyakhar Dung, in which the latter was devastated despite its strong resistance. The Dzong was set on fire and the family members were taken as

captives. He demonstrated his extraordinary strength in this war. He was known to have endured several bullets fired by soldiers of the central government.<sup>20</sup>

Although the Drukpa army crushed Nyakhar Dung, Zhabdrung looked at him with delight and compassion and returned his privileges after the golden yoke of secular law and silken knot of religious principle had been administered on him and other nobilities of the east and central regions. This is summed up as follows: “But on seeing with loving compassion that king dGa’-ba and the Great Chief Dar-ma of Gung=gdung, the gDung of Nya-mkhar, the descendants of Bla-ma rGyal-mtshan and, more over, all those who had not abided to commands were [now] performing whatever works of service that came their way in a state of repentance that forsook their previous actions and purified their present deeds, those that had been imprisoned and those sons who had been kept a hostages were favoured with remissions and [re-]granted whatever houses, fields, articles of wealth, officers and subjects they each had in their various homes”.<sup>21</sup>

At one point in time, Nyakhar Dung fought with the warriors of Assam. An oral source explains how Assamese forces were driven back to plains by supernatural means. To contend the enemies before they could take hold of strategic position, he took a handful of sand, prayed to his protective deities and threw it towards the military camp. These sand turned into thousand of pikes (meri in Khengkha) that headed towards the camp forcing the soldiers to flee. The place was later named as Meripang.<sup>22</sup> The Bodo folk-songs of Kamrup, Goalpara and Darrang contain lyric<sup>23</sup> pertaining to conflicts between Bhutanese and the Bodos. This song must have been sung during the Bodo’s wars with Nyakhar Dung and Joka Khoche.

### **Goleng Dung: A Renegade Nobility**

The turn of an unfortunate event within the family of Tagma Dung gave birth to a new branch of nobility in Goleng. It so happened that Dung Wugpa and his son-in-law quarreled

during Peling Kuchey in Tagma Gonphai. The son-in-law was drunk and was nagging his uncle. Intending to avoid further friction, Dung Wugpa left the scene. He was hiding in Umpang Dzong when his son-in-law caught him again. In effort to save himself, he accidentally stabbed the son-in-law to death, forcing him to flee to Goleng. He started a subsidiary Dung family in Goleng. However, other oral sources construe it differently. According to Meme Tshewang Namgay, a descendant of Tagma Dung came to Geloeng as magpa (male spouse) and started the noble family.<sup>24</sup>

Three important households such as Dung, Kudrung and Mamai co-existed and held different social and political responsibilities. Whereas Dung household was respected as an elite group, Kudrung household served as Shingkar Dungpa's local agency responsible for collecting local taxes for Pangtey Pon and Mamai household. The Dung had little control over the community since most of them were controlled directly by Pangtey aristocrats such as Suma. The Mamai stemmed out of zurpa household that was created as favour from Pangtey Pon mainly to exempt taxes. It so happened that an ordinary girl, then the groom in Dung's household sought her brother's help in exempting her from paying taxes. As a servant in the court of Pangtey Pon, he appealed to his master to excuse his sister from paying taxes who right away decreed that she would be tax-exempted. But, this brought about some anxiety to Goleng Dung, who dreaded that she might possibly bear influence over him, especially with her brother's support. To evade her influence, he isolated her and she was then forced to establish her own household anew, then known as zurpa.

One of the existing social privileges that Goleng Dung is entitled to is its lead role in indigenous communal festival called Roop that is celebrated annually to invoke local deities for bumper harvests and general well being. Invocation rituals begins from the attic of Dung's house and ends in the field where Dung has to sow ceremonial seeds, before which no community members is allowed to do so. This throws true

light on how the community respects this nobility as being 'sanctified enough' to consecrate the sowing season.

**Jang Ponpo's Dungkar (conch) flew to Kurtoe Dungkar Choje**

While Guru Rinpoche was mediating in Jampe Lhakhang, he was believed to have instructed Monmo Tashi Kheudon, the daughter of the king Sindhu Raja, to go to Mon area of southern Bumthang in Kikhar, a place naturally endowed with peace and silence. He gave teachings and taught her how to mediate on them. As directed, she traveled to Kheng and found a small cave resembling a stack of Buddhist texts in Kikhar where she had mediated and practiced those teaching for several months.

There is ample evidence to prove that followers of Guru Rinpoche had blessed Kheng Kikhar. Monmo Tokto Lhakhang featuring more of Tibetan architectural design stands as a testimony. It is believed that the temple, located not far from Monmo's holy cave, is based on a huge mass of sacred rock. Irrespective of written record, local accounts date this temple to the period of Jampe and Kyichu Lhakhangs. It seems this temple was built in honour of Monmo Tashi Kheudon as indicated by its name. One of the main relics was a dark statue known as Sam-ye ku, which was supposed to have flown miraculously to the temple's site on its own all the way from Lhasa. But, the statue had been unfortunately stolen a few years ago. It was such a portentous bronze statue endowed with mystical power to foretell ill-fated events such as sickness and death in the entire village. If someone were to fall sick, the statue would lie down on its back, and reverting to its normal position signified recovery of the sick. For ages, Jang Ponpo owned the temple and it is still being taken care of by his descendants.

Below this temple is a huge rock from which an unknown treasure revealer was believed to have extracted a pair of conches (dung-kar). The opening on the rock shaped like two conches supports this belief<sup>25</sup>. One of the sacred conches is

said to have flown to Kurtoe Dungkar while the other is still preserved in an old mansion of Jang Ponpo. If this belief is true, I think there is some possibility of the said 'Kurtoe Choje' having derived its name from this conch or dungkar.

The house of Jang Ponpo is located a short distance away from the temple. The ruins of the houses of khraipa and drapa bear witness to Jang Ponpo's pre-eminence and the size of his subjects. The ruin of a watchtower indicates the presence of rivals as well as his involvement in wars.

### **Buli Ponpo's Power and Myth**

I have proposed different theories to the origin of Ponpos in Kheng, but the origin of Buli Ponpo is traced to three brothers (Mayung, Khanyok and Lopen) from Tibet who settled in Bumthang Buli. The three brothers were hunting wild boars that ravaged their wheat fields. They pursued the animals and came to what is now known as Buli.

According to the oral source<sup>26</sup>, Buli Ponpo derived its wealth and power from Buli Manmo (goddess of lake). She lived near Zhemgang Dzong, but she could not tolerate the place after people started to dump animal carcasses into her lake and defiled her abode. So she ran away to a more congenial environment. She headed towards Buli, where she took a shelter in the house of so-called Buli Ponpo feigning herself as an old human lady. She preferred to occupy the ground floor stating that she needed more space to accommodate all her companions, which appeared too unusual for the host. The host was further amazed with her request to leave her alone throughout the night. The night passed on with rattling sounds emerging from the ground floor. Not able to restrain his curiosity, he ventured to peep through a small hole despite the visitor's request not to disturb her in any manner. He found out that snakes of all shapes and colours had filled up the ground floor. She left the house early morning wishing that the host should not have peeped through the hole. However, she invited him to the lake located some distance away. When he went there, he found at the lake's edge a

bronze pot with a broken rim (zang thro). It is said that had he not disturbed the guests, he would have been gifted with many pots.

Another version says that soon after the guest had left the house, the host's daughter went missing frequently without any knowledge of where she was going. Her father, grew curious of her daughter's periodic running away that he fastened a thin string on her cloth so that he could trace her using it. The string unfolded itself all along the way she had walked, the other end of which was with the father. He followed the string and came to a lake where he saw his daughter descending into the lake; her hand spinning the thread, and that was where he last saw her. All of a sudden, he saw the edges of the lake filled with thousands of pots of all kinds. He saw a pot, broken at its rim - too unusual from the rest- to capture his pathos that he touched it with his finger. Within no moment, the rest of the pots vanished except the one that he had managed to touch. He brought home this pot after which he grew in power and wealth and this continued throughout all his generations, later known as Buli Ponpo. It was later known that his daughter had been taken as Manmo's groom for which he had been compensated with the pot. He was also later given a dark boy as compensation, whom he did not keep with him for his laziness but gave to Joka Khoche.

This 'legendary pot' is preserved up to this day in Punakha Dzong. According to the oral source again, the war that broke out between the central authority and Buli Ponpo was all due to this pot. Because the pot was a super-human's gift, its presence in the house enhanced Buli Ponpo's wealth and raised his fame. His swelling influence in the region became a source of apprehension to them that they sent a troop several times to eliminate Buli Ponpo's family, but did not succeed.

In the later period of the history, Buli Ponpo Singye Namgyal joined the court of Trongsa Penlop Jigme Namgyal. Through his loyalty and role in the internal strife, he rose to a position

of Drongsep earning him the title of Drongsep Singye Namgyal. His bravery and skill is revealed: “He was a giant man whose strength and power assumed mythical proportion. A man of divine birth, he could jump across nine paddy field terraces forward and three terraces backward. Three men of superhuman strength and size, Chumed Wangyel, Mangdep Dhendup and Buli Karchung were his assistants.”

In the midst of his growing fame came a severe blow upon him. According to Lama Sanga (1994), he led the force of Trongsa Penlop Pema Tenzin against Jakar Dzongpon Dungkar Gyeltshen and defeated him. Pema Tenzin, who was at that time in conflict with Dungkar Gyeltshen over the post of Trongsa Penlop, engaged Drongsep Singye Namgyal in the war promising him the highest post if he managed to defeat his enemy. But, Pema Tenzin did not keep his own promise, and the post was given to his brother-in-law, leaving Drongsep Singye resentful. Singye Namgyal employed two men who were annoyed by Pema Tenzin for expelling them from employment in construction of Lame Gonpa. The two men killed Pema Tenzin in 1882 in Byakar Dzong. Singye Namgyal occupied the post of Jakar Penlop. But, the matter did not end easily. Pema Tenzin’s sister sought the help of Ugyen Wangchuk to avenge the death of her brother, who came to fight Singye Namgyal with a huge force. They surrounded Jakar Dzong, but because Ugyen Wangchuk’s aunt and cousins were inside the Dzong and Singye Namgyal threatened them to blow up the Dzong with gunpowder if ever they attacked him, the attack had to be suspended. Determined to kill Singye Namgyal, Pema Choki and Ugyen Wangchuk pretended that they had surrendered and entered the Dzong with the force bearing gifts for him. It was on this occasion that Singye Namgyal was killed and his supporters were gradually executed. The dead Penlop’s property in Buli, was permanently confiscated from his family, and given to Dasho Thinley Namgyal of Pangtey (Chummey), Bumthang. The ‘legendary pot’ must have been among these chattels. His [Singye Namgyal] crime was considered a humiliation not only for his family, but also for whole Buli community, and he was

not talked about until recently.

### **Age-old Rivalry Between Tunglabi and Nyakhar Dungs**

At one time, Tunglabi Dung served directly under Wangdicholing, but later Zhongar Dzungpon controlled it, owing to its proximity. It was easy for this nobility and subjects to pay taxes and services to Zhongar Dzung than to Zhemgang Dzung. His desertion of his former Dzung provoked other nobilities, as decrease in the number of subjects meant higher tax and service burden for the rest of the Kheng nobilities. It led to conflicts between Tunglabi Dung and Nyakhar Dung, the latter was backed by other nobilities. Nyakhar Dung demanded that Tunglabi Dung should rejoin them since he fell under Zhemgang's jurisdiction. But, the other party refused to do so stating that he had nothing to do with it. Further, he went on to say that it would not matter much whether he served the east or central as he was in any case serving the same government. When no choice was left to change his mind, Nyakhar Dung declared a war. Tunglabi Dung signaled his courage to challenge the rest of the nobilities if they were to come to his territory. Nyakhar Dung prepared his army of fifteen men and marched towards Tunglabi. He [Tunglabi] invoked all his deities before his enemies arrived. Kuther Dung, a younger brother of Tunglabi Dung tried to mediate between them but in vain. On the day of the war, Tunglabi Dung conveyed to his enemy that he would prefer the fight one to one with Nyakhar Dung rather than making their men fight. He laid the condition that he would surrender his land and subject to Nyakhar Dung if he lost the fight while the latter would also do the same. Amidst a huge gathering, two of them wrestled and knocked each other to the ground to almost to the point of exhaustion. During the peak of the fight, the wife of Tunglabi Dung intervened from the crowd shouting, "oro oro! sem ma yeng cho , rog gadang sengpa, phin bi" (In Sharchop language, 'do not get distracted; he lifted his arm, stabbed him). This somewhat diverted Nyakhar Dung's attention as he did not understand the language, and at a spur of movement, Tunglabu Dung killed him on the spot.

### **The Nobilities and the Annual Tax**

Subsequent to the consolidation of the eastern and central regions under Drukpa regime, the nobilities of the middle and lower Kheng conducted themselves as the principal taxpayers (ma-khrai), separate from the ordinary tax-payers (khrai-pa) who were grouped under two major administrative units: Tama Drungwog and Tali Drungwog, then administered by an official known as Drung. There were other groups of taxpayers like Rimonbitapa, Samkharpa and Ka-pa families. The taxes were paid in money and kind ranging from garments to dyes, vegetables, and dairy products. The nobilities had to submit their taxes (ma-khral) to Zhemgang Dzong on 10<sup>th</sup> day of 10<sup>th</sup> Bhutanese month, which then were further conveyed to Trongsa Chhotse Penlop.

The nobilities of Tamachog region customarily met in Berti, on 7<sup>th</sup> day of 10<sup>th</sup> Bhutanese month, before moving together in groups to Zhemgang Dzong with loads of tax. Berti Mon and Tagma Khraipa would submit their taxes first to Tagma Dung, and were also responsible to deliver them to Zhemgang Dzong. Berti Mon would carry taxes from Tagma up to Berti and Tagma Khraipa Chungwa would then carry them to Zhemgang. Each of these nobilities would bring with them their own personal servants known as arpo.

On the way, it was traditional for these nobilities to take rest on shaima gor (stone). Those stone slabs were arranged in the form of a seat specifically for the nobilities to take rest when they traveled to Zhemgang Dzong for administrative purposes. It was here that they would celebrate their journey with foods and drinks. Tagma Dung, by virtue of being close to Zhemgang Dzong would occupy the top seat while Joka Khoche had to sit on the last stone slab.

The nobilities from Nangkor and Tamachog would assemble in Zhemgang Dzong on 8<sup>th</sup> day and take a break on 9<sup>th</sup>. They would camp below the Dzong, but would stay with their traditional host families in Trong in case of bad weather. The

host families were known as Nadpo and Nadmo, who would normally welcome their guests by saying, "we have been hosting your family since Zhabdrung's time, and would welcome you for generations." Such relationship exists even now, particularly among the people of Ngangla and Joka.

On the tenth day, they would gather in the Dzong along with their taxes. Tamachogpa would occupy the middle row, Tagma Dung seated on the lead, while Nangkorpa would occupy the left line with Dakpai Ponpo at the top. Chupon of Trong and Dangkhar would occupy the right row. It was mandatory for Tagma Dung to present first a sample of his Dzongbub (cloth tax). Chepon, an official appointed from Tongsa Dzong would measure the length and width of the cloth and examine its quality. His recognition of the sample meant that rests of the taxes were accepted. In the end, Dzongpon would also host them a grand meal. Ironically, the meat used to be collected from the nobilities themselves in advance. The people of Namthir and Dangdung would then transfer the taxes to Trongsa. Some people from Kheng would also go with them.

### **Conclusion**

I have written so much on different aspects of Kheng nobilities, including several legends linked with them, some of which may seem rather irrelevant in the present context. The purpose behind this article is to record whatever we can-the reminiscence of the past- that I presume would be lost forever. The richness of each individual society that emerged through distinct social processes is evident from the rich oral tradition. As a 'society' that relied heavily on oral information until recent past, and with a sudden shift to print and mass media, it is likely that those resources would fade away as our 'living libraries' die one after another. It is thus crucial for us to translate the oral sources to print medium so that generations hence can still appreciate our glorious past, and later use them for some in-depth analysis of our socio-political transformation. I have not been able to document even a fraction of what exists on Kheng nobilities. There is

still more research to do and add to our limited literature, especially in English.

### **References**

- Ardussi, John “The Gdung Lineages of Eastern and Central Bhutan”, in *The Spider and Piglet*. The Centre for Bhutan Studies, Thimphu, (2003)
- Aris, Michael (1979). *Sources for the History of Bhutan*. Viena: Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde, Heft.
- Rigden, Tenzin & Pelgen, Ugyen (1991) “Khenrig Namsum”, ISDP, Zhemgang
- Sanga, Lama (1983). 'brug gi smyos rabs gsel bai' me long.
- Tshedwang, Padma (1994). *History of Bhutan*, Thimphu: National Library

### **Endnotes**

---

<sup>1</sup> The legendary origin of Dung families in Bumthang is described in various literature like Gyalrig by Gelong Nawang, H'brug gi smyos rabs gsel ba'l me long (Genealogical history of Bhutan) by Dasho Lama Sanga

<sup>2</sup> According to the existing literature, the origin of Dung in Bumthang centers on a legend of Guse Langling alias Lhagon Pelchen.<sup>2</sup> During the reign of the king Khikha Rathoed, the people of Bumthang prayed to O-de Gungyal (God of Heaven) to give them a leader who can bring an end to their constant internal strife. Guse Langling was sent to the valley as an answer to their prayers. He is believed to have come down from the sky to Ura valley grasping a divine cord and was born to Sonam Peldon. His divine parentage earned him respect from the people as result of which he became the powerful nobleman of the community. H'brug gi smyos rabs gsel ba'l me long (Genealogical history of Bhutan) by Dasho Lama Sanga, published in 1983.

<sup>3</sup> See Ardussi (2004), The Gdung Lineages of Eastern and Central

Bhutan, in *Spider and Piglet*, p. 68.

<sup>4</sup> Ugyen Pelgen and Tenzin Rigden, *Khenrig Namsum: A Historical Profile of Zhemgang Dzongkhag*.

<sup>5</sup> According to Gyalrigs, the youngest son [of Thonglegpal –mThong-legs-dpal], Ong-ma, after going to U-dza-rong, took control of a royal castle and, gaining power over the subjects and officers, acted as their chief. The descendants of Byar Ong-ma are all Byar-pa families who are at U-dza-rong, gTor-ma-gzhong, Yong-ka-la, lCags-mkhar-bzung, Kuri-smad, rGya-ras-zur, Byog-kang (present Joka), Ngang-la, Khomshar, Netola and Kheng-rigs rNam-gsum.

<sup>6</sup> Meme Tshanmpa, Kheng Nykhar

<sup>7</sup> See Gyalrig

<sup>8</sup> Wayo, Wayo- Voices from the Past, Phuntsho Rapten, Goshing Chodpa, the Centre for Bhutan Studies, Thimphu. PP. 86

<sup>9</sup> Michael Aris, *Bhutan: The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom*, 1979, Aris & Phillips Ltd., Warminster, Wilshire, England, Page 116.

<sup>10</sup> As narrated to me by Meme Dzongtho. He is one of descendants of Tama Dung. His grandmother had passed down this story to him.

<sup>11</sup> This was narrated to me by Ap Zontho of Tagma. He heard this story from his grandmothers.

<sup>12</sup> Meme Penden Dorji, younger brother of Tagma Gup Thinley Dorji.

<sup>13</sup> Authors of *Khenrig Namsum: the Historical Profile of Zhemgang Dzongkhag*, 1999: 57

<sup>14</sup> Kengnyer, Yudrungcholing, Trongsa. He believes that the kudung is in Yudrupcholing monastery. The caretaker in the temple should normally come from Tagma because of the long-term association of kudung with the people of Tagma Gonphai.

<sup>15</sup> According to Meme Thinley Dorji, Tama Gup who was the last generation of Tagma Dung who enjoyed the privilege of employing a male attendant (arpo) from Berti while on his official errand to Zhemgang Dzong.

<sup>16</sup> Reference to Angling Ungling is also found in Dorji Penjore's article on Wamling Kharphue. In this article, Angling Ungling refers to mythical world of god on the way from the human world to abode of 'Ode Gongjan in heaven. However, in the present context, Angling Ungling refers to a place located above Tagma Gonphai

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Meme Penden Dorji and Ap Dzo-tho.

<sup>18</sup> I had the opportunity to see this cymbal during one of field studies in Kheng. The cymbal has become too old and torn.

<sup>19</sup> Meme Tshampa from Tshaidang presently living in Tingtibi.

<sup>20</sup> Lam Tshang Nga's Biogrpahy on Lineages

<sup>21</sup> Aris, Michael (1986). Sources for History of Bhutan in Lo-rgyus, pp. 113

<sup>22</sup> As accounted to me by Meme Tshampa.

<sup>23</sup> The Bodo girls encouraged the heroes to win the battle by singing this song:

Drive fast your steed Bachiram

A hero you are,

The Bhutiya Soldiers are marching

Tieghten the rein and use your spur,

Drive your steed fast, Bachiram

Look, here they come.

This is extracted from B. Chakravarti's 'A Cultural History of Bhutan' published in 1979, pp. 18.

<sup>24</sup> Lham Dorji, "Goleng Roop" in *Wayo Wayo- Voices from the Past*, 2004, The Centre for Bhutan Studies.

<sup>25</sup> I had an opportunity to visit this temple. On the rock, one can see an opening that is exactly conch in shape. I have also seen one of the conches. The other conch is said to have been taken to Kurtoe Dungkar Choje.

<sup>26</sup> As narrated to me by my 72 years old grandmother Aum Penden, from Tagma. She heard this legend from Meme Chepon Tashi Namgay of Zhemgang Trong, who claims to be the direct descendant of Buli Ponpo.

## Oral Construction of Exile Life and Times of Künkhyen Longchen Rabjam in Bumthang\*

*Dorji Penjore\*\**

### Background

Common people who have been often left out of monastic and modern education systems have their own rich literary traditions which serve similar socio-cultural, education and entertainment functions. Bhutanese oral literary genres like *srung* (folktale), *glu gzhas* (folksong), *gab tshig* (riddle), *dpe gtam* (proverb, saying, maxim, and adage), *dgod bra* (joke), *gtam rgyud* (legend, fable, tale), *blo ze* (ballad) are some of the rich oral traditions. Modern education was introduced only in the late 1950s, and before that the monastic education system, which provided Buddhist education, was accessible only to a few privileged families. Women were excluded, with exception of a few nuns. But folk composition, narration, acquisition, memorization, and the daily use of indigenous knowledge through oral mediums have been a continuous process. It is the today's equivalent of universal education. Children who could not avail either monastic or modern education for various reasons have always resorted to the traditional education system.

This paper attempts to construct the exile life and times of Künkhyen Longchen Rabjam in Bhutan through use our rich oral tradition (*kha rgyun rtsom rig*) and what people on the

---

\* This paper, presented in the Fifth Colloquium on Tangible and Intangible Culture, National Museum of Bhutan, February 2005, is based on oral information provided by 73-year-old Meme Ngonjungla alias Sonam Tshering of Samling village. It was recorded from 5-7 November 2004 in Tharpaling and Samling. There may be different oral versions. Where available, I have referred some written sources to crosscheck oral sources.

\*\* Researcher, The Centre for Bhutan Studies

ground find affinity or affiliation, indifferent to what inaccessible scriptures inform. The information was drawn largely from the oral sources.

Künkhyen Longchen Rabjam (1308-1363) was one of the most important Buddhist luminaries to visit Bhutan. He was the greatest Dzogchen ‘adept, meditator, philosopher, and writer’ after Guru Padmasambhava and Vimalamitra. Born in 1308 to Tensung, a son of Lhalung,<sup>1</sup> he was the incarnation of Thrisong Deutsen’s daughter, Princess Pemasal, to whom Guru Padmasambhava entrusted with transmission of Nyingthig, the Innermost Essence teachings of Dzogchen<sup>2</sup> when she was dying. Guru Padmasambhava gave the transmission of Khandro Nyingthig in Longchen’s vision and named him Drimed Odzer. Terton Pema Lingpa (1450-1521) was one of his incarnations. Longchen is known by different names: Kunkhyen Longchen Rabjam (*kun mkhyen klong chen rab ‘byams*), Samyepa Tshulthrim Lodro (*bsam yas pa tshul khrims blo gros*), Dorji Zijid (*rdor rje gzi brjid*), Drimed Odzer (*dri med ‘od zer*), Kunkhyen Ngagi Wangpo (*kun mkhyen ngag gi dbang po*). Dorji Zijid was given by Khadro Yeshe Tshogyal while Longchen Rabjampa, meaning ‘Possessor of the Great Expanse of Knowledge’ was given by Tai Situ Changchub Gyaltshen, ruler of Tibet, after they were reconciled.

Longchen Rabjam came to Bumthang on ‘self-exile’. His exile years are important since he lived for 55 years only and spent his last and most productive years in Bhutan. Spiritual matters completely overshadow secular matters in any biography of great Buddhist figures, and so it is with Longchen where the available literatures (*rnam mthar*) contain little or no information on his ‘other’ life. But Samling village in Bumthang, the place where Longchen is believed to have settled first, has preserved a rich account of his life in exile more than 644 years after his visit. This account has been preserved and passed orally through the generations. His religious and secular activities continue to influence the people’s way of life. Different places around Samling village and nearby areas such as Tharpaling, Domkhar, Urok,

Gyalsa are associated with his life. Samling households still farm the land offered by his patrons and devotees. It is not important to question the authenticity of the oral account of Longchen's life and deeds; that the people believe it to be true, and that it continues to influence their life is adequate to put aside our rational minds and suspend our disbelief.

Longchen came to Bhutan following his conflict with Tai Situ Changchub Gyaltsen (*ta'i situ byang chub rgyal mtshan*) of Phagtru who became the ruler of Tibet in 1349. Tai Situ Changchub Gyaltsen and his officials disliked Longchen after he became a teacher of Gumpa Kunrig of Drikung – the most powerful rival of Tai Situ. Once when Longchen was traveling to Lhasa, the hostile forces of Yarlung attempted to assassinate him, but he became invisible to his foes because of his enlightened power. Longchen indeed averted a war in Tibet by winning Kunrig to the Dharma, and prevented the invasions of Ü and Tsang provinces by Kunrig.

The exact arrival and return years are not known. Perhaps, Longchen arrived in Bhutan towards the end of 1350 because the main reason for his exile was his conflict with Tibet's ruler Tai Situ Changchub Gyaltsen who became a ruler in 1349, and at 42 (1350) he repaired the ninth century monastery Zha Pema Wangchen at Dra, Tibet. The beginning of 1351 is the next most probable year since a daughter was born to him in Tharpaling in 1351, followed by a son Drakpa Odzer in 1356. The second reason was to avoid the war of 1359 which he had predicted. So the probable year of his return seems to be 1360 at the earliest; he died in 1363.

In Bhutan Künkhyen Longchen is known for establishing the eight lings (locations where he meditated on, taught, and wrote the Dzogchen): Babron Tharpaling, Shingkar Dechenling and Tang Ugyencholing in Bumthang, Kunzangling in Lhuntse, Kothang Pemaling (or Rinchenling) and Menlok Kunzangling in Wangdue, Nyenlong Drechagling, and Paro Samtenling. Perhaps, his exile years in Bhutan gave him peace in contrast to Tibet which was then rife with

conflicts and strife. He was known to have written and composed his major sacred and scholarly works in exile. Right on the summit of a mountain overlooking Tharpaling and Samling, there is a rock where Longchen was believed to have composed and written almost half of Longchen Dzod Dun (*klong chen mdzod bdun*).<sup>3</sup> While Longchen composed and dictated the texts, Drasung Za Rahula (*gza' ra-hu-la* - the sage of the Za (class), the mantra protectress Ekajati (*e-ka-dza-ti*, *sngags-srung-ma*) and Vajrasadhu (*rdo rje legs pa*) wrote the text, and prepared ink and paper, all seated on that sacred rock now known as Longchen Zhugthri (*bzhugs khri*).<sup>4</sup>

In Bhutan Longchen's well-known religious establishment is Tharpaling (*thar pa gling*) - the land of liberation. Approximately one hundred thousand devotees who had a wish for liberation gathered to receive his teachings. The eyes of Longchen's statue in Tharpaling (called *bar dgon pa*) were deliberately made to look up to the sky after a popular lore. It is believed that more than one hundred monks attained enlightenment in one day, and Longchen who was meditating in the lhakhang looked up to the sky from the window to see where his monks had reached. He saw a hundred of his monks soaring in the sky.

It is said that the name and fame of Tharpaling spread throughout Tibet, and many Tibetan devotees joined him at Tharpaling. The Tibetan border guards disallowed Longchen's devotees to go to Bhutan (then Monyul) if they simply replied they were going to Bhutan; but the moment they heard the word Tharpaling, guards would take out their tongues in respect and allow them to proceed. In Tibet even a simple monk coming from Tharpaling was entitled to a seat since he was considered a geshey (*dge bshes*). Such was the extent to which the fame of Tharpaling resonated even after Longchen returned to Tibet.

### **We will show you the way to water**

Longchen arrived at Bumthang from Tibet and took up a residence at the present day Samling village below Tharpaling

monastery. Many disciples accompanied him, including his syce (a drung) who looked after his horses. He soon discovered that there was no water around Samling, and he thought of moving to another place. But one night five girls (mkha' dro) appeared in his dream and said:

Your aspiration is to live in this place; but the lack of water should not deter you from staying. At dawn walk out of the house, and we will show you the way to the water.

Longchen remembered the dream in the morning and followed the girls' instruction. To his surprise, he saw a yellow flower in front of the door, though it was not a flowering season. He walked towards the flower only to find another flower ... and then another. Following a series of flowers led him along the ridge above Samling. When flowers suddenly disappeared he looked around and found footprints of cattle beneath a tree (*sangmaiseng*). As he removed the leaves, water oozed out of the ground and soon filled the site like a lake (*mtsho*). Longchen named it Nyenlam Zangmoi Tsho (*rmi lam bzang mo'i mtsho*, a lake of auspicious dream). Also known as a mochu it is as large as a size of average Bhutanese house. About 100 meters from Nyenlam Zangmoi Tsho in the direction of Urok, Longchen found a waterfall cascading from a small cliff and named it phochu. Today phochu is very frightening and only a few people can approach it alone. It is a water source for villages of Urok, Rangbi, and Thrunbang, whereas mochu serves as water source for Samling village.

Longchen brought water to Samling through a canal. Waa were used along ridges where canals could not be dug. The remains of old rotten or decayed waa can be seen even now. Today, at least 13 water bubbles can be seen in the lake, signifying 13 water sources. The nearby areas shake with the force of water bubbling from beneath the lake.

### **I never knew you were Rahula**

Longchen entrusted the care of his horses to his adrung.

Looking after horses was a difficult job since Longchen did not have any grazing land. Lands of Domkharpa, Urokpa and Gyalsapa surrounded Samling from all directions. Adrung would carry a packed lunch and go out to look after horses every day while Longchen went with his own work. Surprisingly, the people of Domkhar kept on complaining that his horses had been destroying their wheat crop in Pangri,<sup>5</sup> the land east of Samling. He found the complaints incredulous since his adrung was taking care of his horses. Cha-ralpa (the Curly-Haired One) was then the ruler of Domkhar.<sup>6</sup>

However, Longchen wanted to find out the truth of the allegation. One morning when adrung was about to leave with horses, Longchen struck the end of thread ball on back of adrung's attire using a needle without his notice. As he travelled with horses unaware of the thread on his back, the thread ball began to unravel until it stopped. Longchen then followed the thread. Surprisingly the thread did not lead to the east where his horses were supposed to graze but along the ridge above Samling. The thread took him to a small lake called Shawabumpai Tsho above Urok. He saw various ritual objects and instruments around the lakeshore and his adrung who was swimming. His lower body had been transformed into a snake. Longchen immediately recognized that his adrung was not a man but the Nyingma drasung Rahula. When Longchen accidentally stepped on some dry leaves, Rahula (adrung) threw all objects into the lake on hearing the rustling sound. All Longchen could get was a cymbal (rol mo). Today the same cymbal is kept in Samling as a ter. Prostrating before Rahula, Longchen explained that he had never known the true identity of his adrung. The lake came to be known as Drasung Latsho (bla mtsho). Longchen built a Zakhang (*gza' khang*) for Rahula in Samling. There is a *debri* (painting) of Rahula painted by Longchen using his own blood in the zakhang. Rahula is a wrathful protector of the Nyingma Treasure Tradition who seizes the sun and the moon, and eclipses planets. Also known as the eclipse maker, Rahula is green in colour with nine heads, two hands and the

lower body that of a serpent and upper body that of humanoid.

**It will be better for me to return than for all of you to die**

The complaints made by the people of Domkhar were true. Following that, the people of Domkhar disliked Longchen's neighbourhood and started to revolt, much against the advice of the people of Urok who revered him. Their king Charalpa led the revolt. Longchen fled to the Dakpa region in eastern Bhutan. Before he left, Longchen made a prayer against the people of Domkhar. Following his departure, it so happened that for ten days and nights it was neither day nor night in Domkhar. Charalpa made astrologers divine the cause, and every divination pointed to Longchen.

At that time there were nine tax-paying households (khral pa) in Domkhar. Charalpa summoned a man each from every household and sent them to receive Longchen from Dakpa. The king threatened to throw them from Kayteygangzam, a bridge across Chamkharchhu below Zhurkace village in Chumey, if they failed to bring Longchen back.

As commanded, nine men went to Dakpa and prostrated before Longchen.

"Why did you come here?" Longchen asked.

"Our king requests you to come back to Bumthang and we came to receive you," they submitted.

But Longchen refused, saying that the people had revolted against him and that his life was in danger.

"If you refuse, then we all are going to die before you; please make a prayer for us," they said, and explained their king's threat. They threatened to commit suicide and asked Longchen to conduct mi shi dbang skur after they were dead.

"It is better for me to return than for all of you die," Longchen finally agreed.

**But if I take it, I will suffer this pain**

Longchen returned to Tharpaling following the Dakpa-Bumthang traditional route. Before Longchen escaped to

Dakpa, he had appointed a gomchen (a lay monk) as his representative (bla tshab) in a small monastery he had built in Tharpaling. When bla tshab heard about Longchen's return, he became envious and feared the loss of reverence and privileges he had enjoyed as bla tshab. So he requested a nun (ani) to kill Longchen by offering him poisoned tea and promised to give her a yu or turquoise as a bribe. The nun agreed.

When Longchen was approaching Tharpaling, the nun crossed the gorge of Zanglaiteg and waited at Zanglaitegi Gor (stone of Zanglaiteg) where the main road branches into two – the first one leading to Chudrag Goenpa and the second one to Tharpaling. Ani received Longchen and offered the poisoned tea on a huge flat rock.

"I will have to drink your tea. If I don't, you will not get a yu. But if I take it, I will suffer this pain," Longchen said, throwing the tea on the rock.

The rock instantly split into two. A huge rock split from the middle can still be seen today.

#### **They promised never to revolt in future**

After Longchen's return, the people of Domkhar and their ruler Charalpa took an oath in a place called Portopong and swore that they would never revolt in future. There is a Naa-do (oath stone) submerged beneath the earth in Portopong today. The king and the people offered Longchen their land (Pangri and Najong) where his horses once grazed on their wheat.

#### **A white-faced snake looked back at Longchen**

The whole valley, what is now Urok village, was beneath a big lake (mtsho). Its tshomen (mtsho sman) affected the people, and no one even dared to go near it. There were a total of 100 tax-paying households who had settled along ridges and slopes above the lake. The people of Urok requested Longchen to subdue the tshomen. Longchen meditated on a ridge called

Portopong between Urok and Samling. After nine days and nine nights of meditation on tagchung nyanpa (rta khyung bsnyen pa) a horse's neigh was heard coming from the body of Longchen's horse standing beside him. The neigh reverberated across the valley and frightened the tshomen to run away. Longchen watched the tshomen escape towards Chumey. When it reached at a place called Tonglakhag (below Sonam Kunphen School), it looked back at Longchen. The tshomen (snake) had a white face – so the place was named Dongkar (gdong- face, dkar - white). So Domkhar is the corruption of Dongkar. The grateful Urokpas became Longchen's patrons.

### **No more Drupchen (*sdrub chen*) in Samling**

Longchen started the annual Drupchen (*sgrub chen*) in Samling. It was held on the courtyard of Samling Nagtshang and it lasted for three days. On the second day, the cymbal (*ter*) was shown to the public. The cymbal was beaten to divine the luck of the people for the coming year. Good sound foretold an auspicious year for the people and cattle free of epidemics and diseases, and good harvest.

Lamas and monks who came from Samling household were also the hosts (*tsha wa*); Domkharpa provided dancers, Gyalsapa provided firewood and water, while workers such as cooks came from Urok. Champon (lead dancer) had to be from Samling Chhoje or lama, and Chamjug from drapa (slaves). People who came for the Drupchen had to be provided with free food. Later Samling Nagtshang and Buli Lhaxhang took turns to conduct the Drupchen. It continued to be held alternately in Samling Nagtshang and Buli Lhaxhang until Samling stopped the practice in the early 1960s. Today, Buli Drupchen is held every two years. A ritual called kangjug was held for seven days until it was discontinued in 1982.

### **No dirty water from above, no smoke from below**

Longchen later offered to build a new zaxhang for Rahula and asked him to give any preference for the place. Rahula demanded that it should be build in the place where there

was no dirty water from above, no smoke from below, and in a place where there is a *do-yurung* (stones structure in shape of a swastika) in the western direction. The choice fell on Shingkhari village. The caretaker (*sku nyer*) of Shingkhari Lhakhang was sent from Samling, including phod and ration. The oral account only mentions that a Zakhang was built by Longchen. The present Shingkhari Dechenling Lhakhang was built by Tsezang Thaye Drakpa, Longchen's great grandson, who was the first Shingkhari Lam. The throne of Longchen was discovered in the basement of the monastery while it was being renovated. The throne measuring 5.5 square feet and 1.7 feet in height was found when the soil of the basement was dug to prevent the decay of planks.

**We have nothing , but the land to offer you**

When Longchen was visiting the Mon region of Mangdey (Trongsa), he arrived at the present village of Shengleng in Baleng. There he gave teachings to the devotees, performed *mi shi dbang skur* for the dead, *rim gro* for the sick and other spiritual services. He built a lhakhang in Baleng as his winter residence and named it Shengleng Goenlha (*dgun lha*) or winter lhakhang. The local people who were practicing Bon became his patron and offered him about 20 langdo (*glang dor*) of *chu zhing*. Longchen was to reciprocate the offer by visiting and staying in *dgun lha* in winter months. Moreover, Longchen had to sponsor the annual Samling Drupchen with the rice harvested from the land offered to him. As agreed, Longchen visited the village in winter and sponsored Samling Drupchen with the rice. The lhakhang can still be seen today.

From there, he went across a river to the next Mon village called Wangleng. His visit coincided with death of a man, and the people requested him to conduct *mi shi dbang skur*. The people did not find anything of worth to offer as *yon* (fee) and offered some of their farmland and *tsamdo* (*rtsva 'brog*).

This was how the Samling household came to possess some *chuzhing* and *tsamdo* in Trongsa. The cattle of Samling migrated to Wangleng in winter until the early 1980s before

the ownership of tsamdo was reverted to the local people after they complained that they cannot grow any winter crop due to the presence of Samling cattle in winter months, and that their ignorant fore-fathers had offered the tsamdo to Longchen in return for his religious service. There were two tsamdo in Wangleng – a smaller one on a mountain slope surrounded by cliffs on three sides, and a bigger one near the village. Chuzhing at Shengleng is still owned and farmed by Samling household.

### **Wear this Longchen's Seal as protective talisman in the war**

An oral source has it that Samling Ashi Choiten Zomba was a distant relative of the first Deba? (Jigme Namgyal?). Before he left for the war at Sharcho Dewathang, Samling Ashi asked him to wear the Seal of Longchen (phyag dam) as mtshon thub (protective talisman), to which the Deba agreed. It is said that Deba refused for the seal to be sent through a garpa and he personally rode to Samling, saying that 'whatever I want for my personal use must be acquired personally'. The Duar War, 1864-65 was led by the Trongsa Penlop Jigme Namgyal. Ugyen Wangchuck (b 1862) was then only 3 years old.

Deba gave Samling Ashi all types of lands (*chu zhing*, *skam zhing*, *tshod bsre ldum ra*, wetland, dryland, vegetable garden) belonging to six khral pa (taxpayers) in Tashiding and four khral pa in Baling, Trongsa, after he returned victorious. The household of Samling still own and farm those lands. The chuzhing at Baling (20 langdo), which used to yield 6 nyishu (120 dre) of rice was sold to Trongsa Dratshang. The names of the dead taxpayers and details of lands can be found in the old sathram.

Later when the Kurjey Lhakhang was being built by the Deba, Samling Ashi contributed dolma gsung byon ma'i sku (the Tara statue which spoke) as its zung as per the divination. The second Kurjey Lhakhang known as Sampa Lhundup – complete fulfilment of one's mind and thoughts or Anabhog bhavana – was built in 1900 by Gongsa Ugyen Wangchuck

when he was the Trongsa Penlop.

### **Fire burned Samling Nagtshang, not Longchen's Seal**

In 1351 Longchen had a daughter born to Kyidpala (skyid pa lags) and a son Trulku Tragpa Odzer (*sprul sku grags pa 'od zer*) or Dawa Drakpa (*zla ba grags pa*, 1356-1409?) born in the year of the fire-monkey. Dawa Drakpa or Thugsey Dawa as he is popularly referred now was the manifestation of Tadrin (*rta mgrin*) who later became a great scholar and a holder of the Nyingthig lineage.

Longchen built a residence (*nag tshang*) for his son Thugsey Dawa in Samling, followed by a lhakhang. Samling is the alteration of Samterling (*bsam gter gling*). It is believed that nag tshang used to house a zot-full (a big wooden box) of Longchen's ter such as rol mo, bla rdo, statues and scriptures. Some of the ter can be seen even today in Samling. When Dorji, the only son of Samling Ashi Choiten Zomba was recruited as a garpa to serve in the court, and it is believed that Samling Ashi gave Longchen's ter, one after another, as gifts to the court so as to relieve her son from garpa duties. Nagtshang caught fire in 1982 (15<sup>th</sup> day of 11<sup>th</sup> Bhutanese month) but luckily, the most important ten of the Nagtshang, the seal of Longchen, was saved.

### **Stream which never freezes in winter**

Longchen's son Thugsey Dawa was born inside a cliff below the road between Tharpaling and Zanglaipogto. Ani used a large stone bowl (*zhong*) to wash the baby with the water flowing from the cliff. The large stone bowl can still be seen today. The water flows down between Samling and Zhitsar. There was a water-mill on the stream near Chumeychhu. When all streams in the area freeze during winter months and watermills are idle, this particular stream which has its source in the cliff surprisingly never freezes and the watermills works all the year round. It is believed that the stream does not freeze after it was blessed by bathing of Thugsey Dawa in the upstream. The ruin of the mill is visible even now.

### **Household that inherited Longchen's property**

Oral memories can trace the ancestors of Samling Ashi house as far as Ashi Choiten Zomba who was perhaps a contemporary of Trongsa Penlop Jigme Namgyal. It is also said that she was related to Jigme Namgyal through a marriage. It was Ashi Choiten Zomba who offered the sacred Seal of Longchen as protective talisman to Jigme Namgyal during the war with Phelingpa (British) in Dewathang (Duar War). Oral account has it that she was the direct descendent Longchen's son and inherited Longchen's land, property and samter. The main Samling household owns Longchen's Seal and other sacred objects, though the fire burnt most belongings.

### **References**

- Longchen Rabjam (1989). *The Practice of Dzogchen* (introduction, translation and annotation by Trulku Thondup; edited by Harold Talbott). Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publication
- Padma Tshewang, et al (1995). *The Treasure Revealer of Bhutan: Pema Lingpa, the Terma Tradition and its Critics*; Bibliotheca Himalayica, Series III, Volume 8. Kathmandu: EMR Publishing House
- Dudjom Rigdrel Yeshey Dorji (1991). *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, Volume Two; Reference Material; Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein (trans.), Boston: Wisdom Publication
- Roerich, George N. (trans.) (1996). *The Blue Annals*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publisher

### **Tibetan sources**

gangs can mkhas grub rim byon ming mdzod by ko zhul grags pa 'byung gnas and rgyal ba blo bzang mkhas grub

<sup>1</sup> Lhalung was a son of twenty-fifth descendant of the nephew of Gyalwa Choyang - one of the 25 chief disciples of Guru Padmasambhava.

<sup>2</sup> Pema Ledreltsal (1291?-1315) the incarnation preceding Longchen discovered the Nyingthig teachings, and it was later known as Khadro Nyingthig.

<sup>3</sup> The rest were written in Mount Kailash (Personal communication, Dr. Yonten Dargye, National Library of Bhutan; February 2005). The seven mdzod are: Yid bzhin rinpoche'i mdzod, Mang ngag rinpoche'i mdzod, Chos dbyings rinpoche'i mdzod, Grub mtha' mdzod, Thegs mchog mdzod, Tshig don mdzod, and gNas lugs mdzod.

<sup>4</sup> "In many instances, his disciples saw Dharma protectors in his room. Ekajati, Vajrasadhu (rdo rje legs pa) and Rahula used to prepare paper and ink for his writing." Harold Talbott edition (1996), *The Practice of Dzogchen*, p.155

<sup>5</sup> Now it is called Zhisar (new settlement) after the Tibetan refugees had settled in the area.

<sup>6</sup> People refer to him as Domkhar Dungpa. Domkhar was named only after the revolt, while Dungpa was a later coinage.

## Religious Life and History of the Emanated Heart -son Thukse Dawa Gyeltshen\*

*Lham Dorji\*\**

### Introduction

This article relates a few episodes from the biography of Tuksey Dawa Gyeltshen (*thugs sres zla ba rgyel mtshen*), the heart son of Tertön Pema Lingpa. Titled "sprul pa'i sres chen zla' ba rgyal mtshen gyi rnam thar ring chen rgyen mrzes (The Ornament of Precious Jewel: the biography of the Great Emanated Son Dawa Gyeltshen), the biography was written by Jatshon Mebar (Ja' tshon me 'bar). It is difficult to ascertain the exact period of this biographical compilation, but Jatshon Mebar acknowledges that it was Benchen Gyep (dben chen rgyep) and Thukse Dawa's loyal patron Tenzin (bston 'zin) were inspiration behind the work. It is now one of the rare documents on Thukse Dawa's spiritual accomplishments and other accounts of his life. Like any other Buddhist biography, it contains elaborate descriptive accounts of Thukse Dawa's life such as miraculous birth, mythical beginning of early life, destiny of a child's religious roles, religious activities, mystical experiences, description of his good deeds, events surrounding his death and lastly his teachings. The present article also partially relied on some

---

\* The author of this biography has identified himself as Jatshen Mebar. It is hard to find reference to this author elsewhere. He claims himself to be a simple hermit in the high mountains and accept that he is not the learned master of debate, phonetics and poetry, and but a simple layman who is actually unworthy to write the biography of the great Thukse Dawa Gyeltshen. He mentions in the biography that he had to write this biography not being able to bear the weight of the command given by the Drung of Benchen (dben chen rgyes) and the request of his close friend Tenzin, the devoted patron of the great son.

\*\* Researcher, the Centre for Bhutan Studies

oral sources to enrich this biography. One drawback is various anecdotes have no dates even if they provide a wealth of details on Thukse Dawa's travels in Tibet and neighbouring states.

There is a huge corpus of literature on Tertön Pema Lingpa's life, but that of his sons are yet to come to light, except for oral tradition. It seems that his biography is not available for the wider readership even in Bhutan, and absence of research creates a gap in our understanding of Pema Lingpa's lineage sons. Thukse Dawa Gyeltshen, the second lineage son was one of the greatest Buddhist luminaries and Heruka-incarnate who displayed ten extra-ordinary qualities in his lifetime. He is the one who possessed ten perfections and the one who was free from six human poisons. His greatness and good qualities are summarized in the biography as described below.

The emanated son is thus born to a great lineage; talented in every field; invulnerable to false deeds; impartial to every religion; endowed with six great personalities; the great protector of every sentient beings; and the learned scholar to whom the other masters and students alike can submit and pay reverence. He possessed vigor to reach any places where sentient beings were in need of his help; possessed power to clear suffering like medicines to cure diseases; owned enough resources to help sentient beings like abundant monsoon rain; his actions (body, speech and mind) commanded unsolicited respects; he was freed of ignorance even as a lay person; acquired magical power to transform five elements of nature; controlled his own life and lived longer than the average life-time; possessed power to perceive paradise, listen to sermons and comprehend the Buddha's action; and he was endowed with wisdom to dispense the sufferings of the *samsaric* worlds.

It is obvious from the above abstract that the emanated son acquired great spiritual prestige in Tibet and played important religious roles, particularly in propagating the

terma tradition in Bhutan, Tibet, Mustang in Nepal, and Arunachal Pradesh, particularly in Shardongkha. He made substantial contribution in spreading terma teachings in Bhutan and Tibet at the time of growing competitions between Nyingmapa and Gelugpa tradition in Tibet. He traveled across Tibet and visited several great monasteries and maintained good relationships with local rulers and ecclesiastical leaders of various Tibetan principalities and quasi-political units including the Seventh Karmapa Chodra Jamtsho and Drigung Rinpoche Rinchen Phuntsho. His contacts with several native leaders and Tibetan clergies were mostly spiritual in nature, but some of them had political significance such as his role in bringing peace between the feuding rulers and religious lords, and the power of his terma in preventing Tibeto-Mongol war (hor dmag).

### **Auspicious Birth and Mystical Early Years**

Thukse Dawa Gyeltshen was born as one of the three lineage sons of Pema Lingpa. The two other sons were Khedrup Kinga Wangp<sup>1</sup>(mkes grub kun dga' dbang po) and Drakpa Gyeltshen (srag pa rgyal mtshen). Khedrup Kinga Wangpo settled at Kochung (mKho'u-chung) in Kur-stod and started mKho'u-chung Chos-rje from which Tenpa Gyeltshen (bstan-pai' rgyel-mtshan) established a branch of family of Dung-dkar Chos-rje. The ancestors of the present monarch originated from Dungkar Choje (dung-dkar Chos-rje). Thukse Dawa Gyeltshen settled at Tra-kar (spra-mkhar) and his descendants came to be known as Chume Dung (chu-smad gDung). Drakpa Gyeltshen inherited the temple of Tamzhing (gtam-zhing) in Chos-'khor valley of Bumthang and became the principal progenitor of Tamzhing Choje.

Five important reasons are cited in the biography as *raison d'être* for Thukse Dawa's birth - time, place, dharma, father and mother – all time and context framed. His birth corresponded to the 'mythic time frame' when Buddhism was in the state of degeneration, and he was pre-destined as one of the revivers of Buddhism. Bumthang was considered a

suitable birthplace, as at that point of time, the place was known as Mon though Guru Rinpoche had blessed it several times. Pre-Buddhist faith, Bon religion dominated the region and the natives were still disillusioned and less mindful of Buddha's teachings. He chose Terton Pema Linga as his father for his virtuous characteristics and upholding his lineage. Ingenuous and kind-hearted mother Are-mo (also known as Trimo-spr imo according to Lama Sanga) conceived him, as she was woman of super-Dakini characteristics of Khando Yeshey Tshogyal (mkha' gro yes shes mtsho rgyal). It was also prophesized in terma text called 'brel rtsal that 'in future, to a person named Pema, the incarnate of rigs sum ngon pa (three Bodhisattvas) would be born'.

Terton Pema Lingpa and mother Are-mo saw many good dreams at the time of pregnancy. Are-mo dreamt that she was in the blissful state of youthful play with a dakinis (attendant goddesses). In her dreams she saw the simultaneous rise of sun and moon; and perceived the vajra rising from the sky entering her head and dissolving into her body. This dream was ominous. She interpreted the concomitant rise of sun and moon as indisputable sign of the birth of the extraordinary child with spiritual qualities like his father and vajra as the 'unexcelled unborn'. In his father's dream, the sun and the moon rose simultaneously and the sound resonated from all directions that the son-to-be can equal him, if not excel him. Accordingly, the great son was born on 10<sup>th</sup> day of Earth Female Sheep Year (1499) at Tang Chelzhong Gonpabi (tang chel gzhong dgon pa sbis) amidst inconceivably innumerable propitious signs. The sky was filled with wonderful rainbows, pleasant sounds and wafting aroma. In his parents' dream, the newborn was being cleansed by one of the dakinis and saw a group of dakinis escorting him to a beautiful meadow amid prayers and songs.

He spent most of his childhood in Dechenling and Gangte (dga steng). Thukse Dawa moved to Gengte Gonpa as soon as he discovered about the re-incarnation of his father, Gyalwang Tenzin Drakpa. Thukse Dawa taught and looked

after the re-incarnation. Several years later, while observing 'gtor bzlogs ritual to dispel bad spirits, the boy left his footprint (zhabje) on a stone symbolizing his acquisition of the state of non-self. In Mani Gonpa where the ruins are found in the forest below Kunzangdrak, the boy developed tendencies to appreciate the masterpieces of his father and grandfather and gradually mastered craftsmanship in pottery, painting and blacksmithy (garzo). When he grew up, he began to travel to various places with his father. On one occasion, when he was traveling with his father from Chokhor to Bumthang Chel, a large group of devotees lined the road to see the great son and receive their blessings. The enthusiastic devotees saw a huge entourage accompanying them though the father and son were the only travelers and reached Pemaling without any other associates. The devotees were perplexed at this and inquired who actually made up the large retinue. The great son remained silent, but the father clarified those acquaintances were super-natural beings who came to pay respects to the great emanated son, and urged them to give his son the highest reverence just like the non-humans.

The Seventh Karmapa Chodra Gyeltshen<sup>2</sup> (1456-1506), the most powerful spiritual leader of Tibet and the hierarch of Karma Kagyu School, rejoiced the birth of Thukse Dawa. He prophetically extrapolated, "if the treasure revealer was Pema Lingpa, the son born to him is Dawa," and sent a note that the son was to be named Dawa Gyeltshen. This name was also mentioned in the secret prophecy, interpreted as 'the one who can clear darkness (ignorance) of all sentient beings'. Amid such respects and praises, a few people actually resented the birth of this child. Deb Thuba Tashi (thub pa bkra shis), the adamant ruler of Chokor, and the one who once tried to defame Pema Lingpa in front of a large crowd in Tang Mebartsho (me 'bar mtsho), also tried to belittle the great son. He verbally debased the son in one of the religious ceremonies in Yuwazhing (yu ba shing) publicizing, "You, the sons of Pema Lingpa would not practice dharma but take wives and roam all across the region." Unable to restrain such

insult, the son retorted, "We are born enlightened even if we do not practice dharma," and left his handprint on the stone to exhibit his super-natural qualities and accomplishment. These awoke neither fear nor reverence to the son, but Deb Thupa and his servants went further even to pass the judgment that the great son's house was shoddier than fox's burrow. Thukse Dawa justified that for spiritually accomplished beings like him needed no ordinary houses, for three realms of Samsara were like Nirvana to them.

Once in 1511, on invitation of the young king (possibly Jo-'phag Dar-ma) of Shardongkha, lower Mon in Arunachal Pradesh, Pema Lingpa and his son set out on the long journey and after traveling for thirteen days arrived at Dungshto Karmathang<sup>3</sup>(dung mtsho skar ma thang) where hundreds of devotees had gathered to receive blessings and teachings from them. They stopped in Karmathang for two days and gave several discourses on the holy dharma to lay-monks and other devotees. The king arrived at Karmathang accompanied by fifteen horses adorned with exquisite saddles and soldiers wearing armours. At that time, the king dreamt that he was guiding Pema Lingpa and Thukse Dawa to a mysterious place akin to dragonhead ('brug mgo), profused with precious jewels (rin chen norbu) where they were being greeted with grand celebrations in Indian style even surpassing the grandeur of heaven. When the entourage finally arrived Shardongkha, the king and queen welcomed them to his palace with exuberant respect and grand ceremonies.

The king entreated the father and son (yab sres) to save him and his relatives from the evil force that inflicted his family for generations due to which his parents and grandparents mostly died before the age of twenty-five. To obviate such demonic power, the king's family had to customarily sacrifice hundreds of humans, goats, and thousands of cattle for Lhachen Wangchuk (Shiva). The king disfavoured this iniquitous deed of bloody sacrifices and requested Trulku Zham-nagpa (zham nag pa-Black Hat Incarnation) in the

previous year to relieve the family of such burden who had the power to protect the king's family only for three years. Knowing the spiritual supremacy of the father and son, the king prayed to them "since two great masters are here today, I pray you-the father and son- to rescue us from such adversities and bless us with long-life without having to sacrifice animals." Pema Lingpa and the son assured the king of protection (skyabs mgon) for next thirty-nine years and subsequently a son was born to the king.

In the royal altar room, fine Indian thrones were set up- the middle throne was for Pema Lingpa, the left one for Thukse Dawa while on the right throne was placed a life-size statue of Dorji Chang (rdor rje 'chang-Vajradhara) said to have belonged to the king's father, all surrounded by ritual objects of gold and silver. With folded hands and unwavering devotion, the king and royal members prayed to Yabtse (father and son) to deliver them the precious teachings of Buddha-Dharma. Step-by-step teachings of Lama Norbo Gyamtsho terma<sup>4</sup> (bla ma nor bu rgyam mtsho) discovered by Pema Lingpa from Lhodrak Senge Dzong and numerous sacred empowerment of klong gsel (profoundly clear), dgongs pa kun 'du' dbang (accumulated wishes-empowerment), gra poi' dbang (wrathfulness-empowerment), rta mgrin dbang (Hayagriva-empowerment), phyag rdor dbang (Vajrapani-empowerment) and tshe dpag med (longevity-empowerment) were graciously delivered. The thug rje chen po smun sel gron me dbang (empowerment of radiant light of merciful ones) was delivered to the public. The king and his subjects presented them a large number of precious objects, textiles, and animals on the next day.

One evening, Thukse Dawa revealed his extra-ordinary power by riding the king's horse which was not tamed and wild that no one had ever dared ride it. He rode the horse alone through a thick forest and came to a mountainside where he dismounted from the horse and left several handprints on stones. His thoughts penetrated the deepest profundities of

non-self and came back to the palace unhurt. He received congratulations on his mount of the feral horse and inspired considerable admiration of the king and subjects likewise.

Thukse Dawa's return to Kunzangdrak Gonpa- a mountain sanctuary in Bumthang where most of Pema Lingpa's sacred relics are preserved, coincided with the offering rituals (tshog skor) conducted by monks, nuns and several lay-people. He saw most of them singing songs in a drunken state. He rejoiced the occasion by throwing a cup into the air that remained floating there for sometime. That night, the valley below also witnessed several lucky signs, which the people posthumously ascribed to the great son who modestly acknowledged that it was not result of his miraculous power but the blessings of Pema Lingpa and Guru Rinpoche. After seven days of intense meditation, Thukse Dawa went to his father to share his meditative experiences. Pema Lingpa praised the son for the achievements and considered this as the sign of Thukse Dawa's long life.

### **Travels and Teachings within Bhutan**

Before entering Nirvana, Pema Lingpa entered the samdhi state for seven days and in the end spoke his last words to all his sons.

"Listen to me, my sons, and heed my words! All of you are my blood-descents who were pre-destined to escape *samsaric* torments and become accomplished even without the *dharma* practice. All of you are bound to attain the greatness of my lineage, but be not swayed away by pride. Abide by the law of 'cause and effect' (*les rgyu 'bres*) even if you become adept masters. Respect others' religion even if you achieve profundities and understand subtleties of mind. Pursue your own spiritual quests but do not neglect others' welfare. Let no jealousy prevail between you- my sons- but live in harmony. Learn and practice all my teachings to help all sentient beings."

Towards the end, Pema Lingpa's right hand gestured the

'counting of rosary beads' (phreng ba); Thukse Dawa understood that his father needed a rosary. He offered him the rosary who right away returned it to him along with the ritual dagger (phurba). The great son realized that his father was going to pass away soon. He prayed to his father to live little longer [for the benefit of all the sentient beings], but died uttering syllable "a" several times and holding Thukse Dawa's right hand. The demise of father left all his sons grievestricken for a long time.

At Pangkhar (spang khar), Pema Lingpa appeared in Thukse Dawa's dream and placed all terma texts on his head saying, "Now you have obtained most of the text and oral transmission from me." In yet another dream, he saw his father at the holy spot of medicinal water (smen chu) in Chel valley, indicating him that terma of medicinal substances (smen rzes) were hidden there. He instructed the great son to guide a man from Kham (eastern Tibet) [who would arrive at Tamzhing on 15<sup>th</sup> day of 10<sup>th</sup> Bhutanese month] to the same sacred site and aid him to extract terma. The son deliberately eluded the arrival of the man from Kham, fearing embarrassment and enkindling skepticism of terma<sup>5</sup> tradition in the people if the vision proved inconsistent. Instead, he visited the sacred space with Umze Dendup Pelbar (dbu mzod ldan grub dpal 'bar) and other relative-lamas on the lookout for terma; all of them glimpsed a tall man on the way but he vanished as they reached ter-go (door of sacred site where ter was hidden). They saw a small stone fissure enclosed with grasses and leaves in umbrageous corner from where came forth some pleasant aroma (dre bzang). On delving further, a radiant human skull was found but failed to discover the medicinal substances. It was at that time Thukse Dawa realized that Guru Rinpoche had actually visited the place in the form of the magniloquent person. The great son innumerably apologized to Guru Rinpoche for his neglect and prayed for his help in discovering the hidden religious treasures. In the end, the great son discovered a statue of Chana Dorji (pyag rdor) and a vessel containing mothers'

skulls of seven generations (skyes bdun a ma thod pa). These terma were distributed everywhere and whoever got them gained the karmic seeds of dharma and entered the realms of virtue.

At that time, the monks and other Bhutanese patrons invited the great son Dawa to Dechenling Gonpa (bde chen gling mgon pa). He accepted and bestowed on them initiation of kun bzang dgongs pa kun 'dus and empowerment of longevity surrounded by many miracles and auspicious signs. While Thukse Dawa was meditating in Chelphu Gonpabi (chel phug mgon pa sbi), he transpired into three different manifestations: one physical body appeared inside the temple of Gonpabi (dgon pa sbi), another inside Pema Lingpa's house and the third one in Chel. These three manifestations were said to have delivered religious discourses all at one time to different groups of devotees.

When traveling to Kurilung, Thukse Dawa and his entourage halted for a night in a water-scarce place. He was known to have extracted water from the area using his miraculous power. Dzongnyer Tshewang Penjor (rdzong gnyer tshe dbang dpal 'byor) invited the great son to Dowo Dzong to consecrate thangka (religious painting). The grain-like object was seen hanging on the sides of the thangka for three nights thus enhancing the Dzongnyer's appreciation and respect to him. When the great son was in Kunzangdrak (kun bzang brag), he saw a vision in which two white and two blue dakinis escorted him to eternal paradises of Sharchok Ngen-gai Zhing (shar phyog mngon dgai') and Yechok Tukpoi Zhing (dbus pyogs stugs po) where his father gave him the final teachings and empowerment.

The great son and his attendant Tenzin (rten bzed) descended through the gorge of Naringdrak<sup>6</sup> (sna ring brag) in Bumthang and arrived at lake Barap (sba rabs). Out of excitement, two of them were engaged in mirthful sport and were trying to drive their horse into water when the great son stepped on a

stone and left his footprint. At once he overturned the stone and concealed his footprint. Later on, Thukse Dawa instructed Umze Dendup Pelbar to obtain him the stone, but he returned empty-handed. The great son went to look for the stone but he too failed to locate it. One night, he saw Ani Pema Tshodrel (mtsho sgrol) in his dream who informed him that dakinis<sup>7</sup> (*mka' 'gro ma*) had moved the stone. She showed him the place where the stone was hidden. The stone was brought home and later presented to Choje Ngawang (chos rje nga dbang) and it is still preserved in Paro Lho Lingkha (spa gro lho gling kha).

### **Travel to Places in Tibet and Rise of his Reputation**

When residing in his seat residence in Dechenling, a girl predestined through his dream that time had come for him to unravel terma from Nanringdrak. It was to be revealed to prevent Mongolian (Hor) war with Tibet. He went to Naringdrak with Tenzin and discovered the terma that was brought to Dechenling. Chogden Gonpo (1497 to 1543), the former student of Pema Lingpa, mentor of the king Nyida Drakpa (nyi zla grag pa) of Gungthang<sup>8</sup>(gung thang) in Tibet and also Trulku of Chodrupling Gonpa (chos grup gling mgon pa), heard about this terma and the associated vision. He sent the message to the great son, "I heard about terma that will be effective in preventing Hor war (hor dmag) against Tibet; we will discuss in a secret place and at appropriate time about how to prevent the war for the sake of all sentient beings". The important role of Chogden Gonpo in averting the Hor war was prophesized by Pema Lingpa, who left the note, which stated, 'the emanation of Lord Hayagriva, would be born as Chogden Gonpo to avert the Hor war.'

Upon receiving this message, Thukse Dawa went to Gungthang and advised the king (mnga ri gung thang rgyal po) to order his subjects to organize jointly a ritual (hor bzlog) of war aversion. The general public, elite and humble citizens alike organized rituals for seven days. The great son, on the other hand, conducted gtor rzes 'phang ritual, and

accordingly, thunder of dragon, lightening and hailstorms heralded from the sky throughout the region even in winter season. Such supernatural occurrences induced fears in the opponents, aroused respects of sceptics, and encouraged adherents to erect gyaltsen (victory banner) on the hills of Lhunpo<sup>9</sup> to mark bravery and triumph.

Thukse Dawa then went to Relphug (rel phug); his advent was accompanied by three nights of incessant rains. In this place, he saw a dream in which a dark man whispered to him to retain half of his treasures in Relphug to ward off Hor war. He fulfilled this vision and traveled to Tshampa (mtsham pa) where he stayed for two nights, and moved farther to Saphu, Yurwog and Tshoyul (mtsho yul) and stayed two nights in each of these places. He was greeted well on his journey from Lhalung to Nangso (*nang sos*), and the people of Taklung<sup>10</sup> (*stag-lungpa*) and Nakartse (sna dkar rtse) rendered his entourage the warm hospitality. Even Shiga Rinchen Pungpa (gzhi dga's rin chen dpung pa) came to greet him. He traveled furtively to many places like Zhablung<sup>11</sup> (*zab lung*), Lhasa, Yerpa, Samye, and Gungthang. Wherever he went, powerful auspicious signs of deterring of Hor war were seen. The probable warfare was successfully forestalled. The Tibetans ascribed peace and prosperity in the region to the goodwill and untiring effort of the great son. He gained his eminence in Tibet and surrounding areas. Trulku Chogden Gonpo of Chodrupling built a statue of Ugyen Rinpoche as the inner relics of Dersheg (Bder gsheg) temple. Thukse Dawa performed the consecration ceremony.

The great son then traveled to three sacred sites of Shar Lawog: Tagtshang (stag-tshang), Dom-tshang and Ze-tshang (gzigs tshang) consisting of hundred and eight mountains. For an ordinary person, it was a day-long pilgrimage in each of these sacred places, but the great son visited all these sacred sites within a day by means of his supernatural power. He brought the statue of Jampel Yeshey Sempa ('jam dpal ye shes sems dpa') from one of these pilgrim sites to Bumthang.

When the great son was in Shar Gorakphu (shar sgo ra phug), he went on a casual walk and saw a natural holy water of longevity from where he collected several 'holy medicine of long life' (tshe ring), which helped revitalize the health and vigor of numerous people. Chogden Gonpo and his lineages turned up there to receive teachings and empowerment. Thukse Dawa bestowed on them empowerment of Pema Lingpa's entire terma and also the initiation of Ugyen Thangyig and Pema Kabum (pad ma bka' 'bum). He then went to Menthang (sme nang), a new town and met Karmapa Mekyod Dorji (kar ma pa mi-skyod rdo rje)-1507-1554. These two great masters discussed in length their teachings and renewed their karmic connections for the sake of sentient beings of six realms. They presided over the public blessing and empowerment ceremonies.

Thukse Dawa was traveling once again in central Tibet on invitation of Choje Dendup (chos rje ldan grup), when on the way he encountered military troops from Yardrok (ya 'brog) and Nagartse (sna dkar rtse) at Lhodrak (lho brag). These armies were at the verge of waging war. The great son sympathetically intending to resolve the conflict stayed there for seven months. He was able to resolve conflicts between these two opposing armies, as their leaders were all his patrons (sbyin bdag). The soldiers returned home in peace.

The son then arrived at Denkedrak (gden bskyed gra) where people of Dargyecholing (dar rgyes chos gling) welcomed him in a grand fashion. In Kunga Rawa Gonpa (kun dga' ra ba) too, he was welcomed in the aura of happiness. The air was filled with aroma of foods from India. At that time, the great son received a letter from the king Rinchen Phuntsho (rin chen phun mtshog) of Drigung ('bri gung) stating that the king planned to meet him. Due to some unavoidable circumstances, the king failed to come and see Thukse Dawa. Meanwhile, the people of Nangpa Tashiling (nang pa kra shis gling) requested the heart-son to visit their place. The lord of U-med (dbu med) also invited him to Samye (bsam yes). He declined this invitation at first as he thought he had nothing

substantial to offer to the great temple. But, he realized that time has come upon him to re-discover terma in Samey and decided to go.

Choje Pal Dendup came to greet him (on his way to Samey) at Kil-Ruru (dkyil ru ru), who also requested him to envisage through dream whether Drigung Rinpoche ('gri gung rin po che) would also come. Thukse Dawa instructed Choje Nyerang (choje nyed rang), Benchen Gyep, Choje Khenrab (chos je mkhyen rabs) and Lama Kunga Yeshi (kun dga' yeshi) to individually see their dream and foretell the arrival of Drigung Rinpoche. Benchen Gyep alone dreamt of simultaneous rise of the sun, the moon, and stars illuminating the entire land. It was considered ominous. On arriving at Gyalchenling (rgyal chen gling), the heart-son conferred the families of Deb with the initiations of long life empowerment of the yidam Tandrin (Hayagriva). The other Lamas accompanying him were again solicited to see their dreams about the possible visit of Drigung Rinpoche; Benchen Gyep again dreamt of two swans flying from the other side of the river while another swan flew from another direction and met together for sometime, and then departed. Thukse Dawa interpreted this dream as fulfilment of a prophecy of meeting with Drigung Rinpoche. His retinue by then reached Drayang Kharu (gra yang kha ru) where Nya Ponpo (nyen dpon po) cordially welcomed them and invited the great son to visit Samey Utse Rigsum (bsam ye dbu rtse rigs tsum). In Samey, the great son performed three-day grand religious ceremony of bskong bshag and performed ritual of Yeshey Sempa (ye shes sems pa) dedicating them to the temple's guardian deities. Deb Utshel (sde pa dbu tshel pa) and Chashel Khenchen (cha shel mkhen chen) came to pay him their respect who were in turn given numerous text initiation and oral transmissions.

Ponpo Phenyul Choje Mentse ('phen yul chos rje smen rtse) welcomed the heart-son in Dargecholing and asked Choje Pal Dendup to request Thukse Dawa to presage Drigung Rinpoche's proposed visit. The heart-son replied that Drigung

Rinpoche was at that moment in Lhasa [in front of the statue of chug chig zhey] and predetermined his arrival there on the next day, which had proved true. The Ponpo was so astonished with this prophecy and his respect for the heart-son grew; he spread the words far and wide that Thukse Dawa was no ordinary being, but the true emanation of triple gem. He presented him the rosary (nor bu spos shel phreng ba), silk cloth and a large turquoise.

As envisaged earlier, Drigung Rinpoche Rinchen Phuntsho and his subjects came to Dargyecholing to invite Thukse Dawa. Drigung Rinpoche revered the heart-son through 'ati pu ho' tradition while the great son reciprocated by 'trati-dzaho' tradition. In view of the fact that the former was the royal descent of Muthri Tsenpo, the great son insisted that he should seat on the higher throne. He refused and sat on the floor with folded hands, focusing his eyes [as clear as the moon and sun on the clear day] on the great son's face, shedding tears of intense faith. The sky was cast with rainbows and people began to gather from all directions. Eventually, on the request of Drigung Rinpoche and other devotees, the great son agreed to sit on the throne. Two Lamas delivered their teachings: the unfaithful were made loyal; evils were moved to good path; and all practitioners were inspired to path of virtues. In the evening, two great masters retired to Lhaxhang for meditation. The great son saw in his vision Drigung Rinpoche as two-faced while Drigung Rinpoche narrated his previous dream in which he saw a nun telling him that the great son was the emanation of yidam Tandin. The nun identified herself as the queen of Kor. In his dream, the son was portrayed as a red-faced lord with red hands. He was holding a rosary of lotus (pad ma ra ga) on his right hand and a holy water glass vase (shel bum nes chu) on his left hand; water was dropping ceaselessly from this vase. He also saw a statue of Tandin on his hand, which he saw was being enfolded in a fine silk and preserved as a relic. He also saw that this statue was being placed on high throne and displayed to all sentient beings.

The people of Henlong Melok (hon long me log) considered the proposed trip of Thukse Dawa as significant and they met together to discuss about how to welcome him. Men waved white scarves and colourful clothes while women sang songs; the sky was also filled with the music of religious instruments. The great son gave his teachings and blessings and unfurled terma or relics discovered by Lama Kuenga Yeshe. In the end, people presented the great son with gift of clothes, land and wealth. The great son was likewise invited to Wachen Teoke (ba chen tu' syes) and meditated for five days in Rul. He gave lot of religious discourse to the devotees of Gonling Nishar ('gon gling nyi shar), Sengdongkha and Tashi Wogphel. Although he was invited to different places, he could not visit all the places, but those places that he went were really blessed and elevated them to the position of paradise.

Trulku of Dargaycholing again invited the great son to Tibet. Upon reaching Samey, he met Drigung Rinpoche who presented him a well-bred horse. These two great masters discussed elaborately about teachings and decided to give various teachings and empowerment to the people of Tibet, particularly to prevent misfortunes and wars. The great son traveled in the western Tibet where eminent figures like Utselpa (dbu tshel pa), Khamsumpa (khams gsum pa), Darapa (sgra rabs pa) and Karpowa (dkar po ba) welcomed him to their respective places. He traveled further to Monkhar Namseyling (mon mkhar rnam sres gling) and delivered the empowerment of tshe rta sbrag and then went to Thrathruk (khra krug) and Ney Dongtse (sne gdong rtse) where he conducted several rituals to prevent the Hor war which was accompanied by so many auspicious signs of fulfillment of war aversion rituals. Tertön Dechen Lingpa also came to see the great son who showed several termas that he had discovered.

The king of Taktse (stag rtse) sent his emissaries to invite the great son to his palace. The king had many enemies and was passing through. He had a sword (gri) that was later taken by

a monk named Chezang (chos bzang). The heart-son told the king that the sword was placed in upright position indicating the coming of war and misfortunes. To prevent the conflict and peacefully outwit his enemies, the great son advised the king to go along with his queen to obtain the sword. The king was obviously reluctant to follow the advice. Consequently, it resulted in a lot of disturbances in the palace. The king and royal members became afraid of the mere thoughts of fearful prophecy and, therefore visited the great son with so much of offerings. But the son expressed his regret that obtaining the sword would do them no help and predicted several misfortunes. The king became sick and regretted for not heeding the advice of Thukse Dawa. The king was made to bathe in a holy water and smoke of burning incense, but his health worsened. Seven experts were consulted but none of them could diagnose the disease; the great son diagnosed the disease as 'geg-chu' known by this name in the Monyul and as 'pebe' in Tibet. He made the king to drink a large amount of wine and cured him. The king in reciprocation organized grand celebrations and made vast offerings to the great son.

Thukse Dawa traveled to Lhudrup Dzong and blessed Deb Kunzang and his subjects. He went to Nagartse on repeated invitations from his devotees. Nagso Rinpoche requested him to give the public religious initiations and the blessings of Chador. He visited Nagso Sherig (nag so shar ri), Nagso Drag (nag so brag) and other places. The people of Lingthongmen (gling mthong smen) offered him the land. In Nagartse, Thripon (khri dpon) showed him around several holy places. Trulku Do-Nga Lingpa invited the great son Dawa to his temple. The king of Taglung (stag lung) also invited him to stay a night at his palace. The lineage of Tertön Choki Wangchuck of Lhodrak invited him where in one of the temples the great son gave blessings of long-life and displayed the relics of Jowo to the public. He spent a night each at Lhalung and Tshogyal Drakar (mtsho yul brag dkar). He stayed some days in Chukher Worwog (chu khyer wur 'og) and finally arrived at Bumthang.

In one autumn season, the re-incarnation of Kachen Kunga Drakpa (dkar chen kun dga' grags pa), Tenzin Norbu went to Dechenling and delivered the teachings and initiations of Lama Norbu Gyamtsho, dgongs pa kun 'dus and tshe 'krid rdo rje phreng ba. At that time, he was immersed in an intense feeling that Thukse Dawa was the true emanation of Chenrezi. The re-incarnate of Rigzin Chogden Gonpo, Donga Lingpa (mdo snga gling pa) attended the elaborate teaching observances when he saw a white monkey, the manifestation of Thukse Dawa, which later he began to see as the real Tandin. He was awestruck with this and cried out of reverence to Thukse Dawa.

On one event, when the great son reached a beautiful flower garden at Babren (bab ron), possibly Baribrang in Bumthang, his other disciples dispersed for alms-begging. The chief disciple (rgyal rses) stayed with the great son. He asked the great son why Benchen Gyepa (dbon chen rgyes pa) despite his kind-heart, intellect and scholarlicism was born in Mon. He probed further about the deep esteem and importance that the great son attached to Benchen Gyep. Thukse Dawa responded saying, "it would be a self-praise to tell the truth, but mention about Benchen Gyep, Ama Jor (ama dbyor) and their descendants are found in Sherab Mebar's prophetic texts."

### **Religious Activities in Bhutan**

Accompanied by Lhalung Deb Duddul Dorji (bdud 'dul rdo rje), the heart-son went to Paro where he was welcomed by Choje Ngawang of Paro Lholingkha (spa gro lho gling kha). He delivered numerous teachings and empowerment and even kept the footprints of his horse. He went to Paro Taktshang and presented one of the relics of Khadro Yeshey Tshogyal to Choje Ngawang as sign of immense blessing.

Karma Zilnen (kar ma zil gnon) of Yowashingshing was leading secretly the warriors of Chokor in war against the people of Chume-Trakar. The great son saw this through his clairvoyance while in meditation in Menthang (Mustang) in

Nepal. Out of the concern, he stood up from the meditative absorption; the simple action as this had larger impacts- the army of Chokor saw the valley filled with soldier of Chume, and saw that they were being chased and were forced to run away. However, the people of Chokor knew that it was the super-natural making of the great son who in turn attributed it to the triple gem. Even though, they gruded this defeat, they did not venture to wage a war with the people of Chume Trakar then on.

Thukse visited Kheng Buli (sbu li) and Tali with an intent to build a temple in Tali. On the day of settling on the temple's site, he gave the public empowerment of long life (tshe byang). In the middle of this ceremony, he slumbered a while when he saw in his dream that Guru Rinpoche, Khandro Yeshey Tshogyal and Terton Pema Lingpa all had come to attend blessing and empowerment ceremony. The public, however, saw them in the form of three vultures. It was an unusual phenomenon which they had never witnessed in their lifetime. A monk disturbed his sleep untimely, and therefore, the great son envisaged that some misfortune would ensue to the people. On that day, the devotees also saw a display of three kinds of rainbows in the sky.

In Bumthang, a powerful Deb of Thrapa (khra pa) invited the son where Thukse Dawa's son Dewatsandag (de ba rtsan da) and other eminent lamas came to see him. The king, queen and prince of Gyelkhar (rgyal mkar) welcomed him with heavenly offerings. The king Gawa Gyalpo (dga' ba) also came to Zangyul Kungarawa (bzang yul kun dga' ra ba) along with the queen to welcome the great son and organized the public blessing of long life (tshe byang) and grapo gsum gril.

### **His lineage Sons**

Thukse Dawa married the daughter of Chokor Deb, Buthri (bu khrid) and seven sons were born to them. There is no written record of the other four sons. His eldest son Pema Thinle was born in 1564 at Tang Chel and recognized as (pad ma 'phrin les) the re-incarnation of Khenchen Tshulthrim

Peljor (mkhen chen tshul khrims dpal 'byor). He was brought up in Samdrup Chodzong (bsams grub chos rdzong) and mediated in Kunzangdrak and Thowadrak. Later, he established Gangte Sanga Choling<sup>12</sup> (sgang steng gsang sngas chos gling). His youngest son Dewa (ldhe va) spent most of his life in Gangte. The middle son was known as Tenpa Nima (bsten pa nyi ma). While meditating in Tang Dechenling, he saw a vision in which he was asked to build a temple in three sided-rock above the Chume river. As envisaged, he started to build a temple; it was known that the non-humans also helped to build the temple. The people also saw many white monkeys helping in the construction, and thus the temple was named as Tra-khar (spra mkhar). He married the daughter of Chume Dung, the descendant of Langdarma's son Yodsung ('od srung).

### **Back to Tibet**

Following his long stay in Bhutan, Thukse Dawa again proceeded to Tibet on invitations by several of his patrons and devotees. In Tse-lam (tshe lam), he conducted longevity rituals for three days. Two Deb brothers of Thrapa came to greet Thukse Dawa and invited him to a temple. At that time, Changdrok (spyang bro) and Lugar (glu gar) from Lungar (lung dgar) came to invite the heart-son. Deb Yulowa and Sharipa had come to invite the great son but he was already gone to Jangchubling where he delivered three-day empowerment ceremony. He then traveled to Kurte (bkur sti) and Tangrak lema (gtang rag blus ma). He gave the empowerment to Deb Tenzin of Lhunpo dzong (lhun po rdzong) and went to Taglung.

In Nagartse, the great son got the message about the coming of Sacha Rinpoche (sa kya rin po che) the very next day. Since the would-be visitor was a well-known religious master, Benchen Gyep discussed with Thukse Dawa about making a grand reception arrangement for him, but the latter came to know about this and therefore did not turn up on the proposed day even though the son invited him. Thus, they

had to promise him that no arrangement would be made only upon which the Lama agreed to come and finally arrived. On that day, several empowerment ceremonies: rta mgrin dbyan, phyag rdor byang, drag po' byang and tshe byang were delivered. Benchen Gyep also offered the text of Pema Jenshing and other religious texts such as Lama Norbu Gyamtsho to Shacha Rinpoche on behalf of the great son who in turn invited the son and Benchen Gyep to Zhablung (zab lung) to perform preliminary traditional hair-cutting ceremony for his son but declined the request by justifying that a palmist had predestined them not to do so and that Benchen Gyep also had also seen bad dreams or inauspicious signs.

Zhabdrung Nawang Jigdra (zhabs drungs nga dbyan 'jig brag) from Shiga Rinchenpung sent two of his attendants to invite the great son without stating any reason. The heart -son agreed to go. Before reaching the place, the attendants informed Thukse Dawa that Zhabdrung Jigdra was the re-incarnation of Lhasey Muthig Sangpo (mu tig btsan po); some said he was the incarnation of Lhasey Murug (lha sres mu rum); some claimed that he was the incarnate of Lha sey Damzin (dam 'dzin); and some regarded him as the incarnate of Mahashri. Whatsoever he was, he was the most learned man; but was often compelled to commit sins by virtue of being the king. The great son considered invitation from him as special, as relative peace and happiness in the region largely relied on him and thought two of them would also meet in the next life because of their present karmic link. With such thoughts of reverence, he moved to Rinchen Pungpa where he was received by Zhelngo Tshangma (zhel ngo tshang ma) with grand offering of tea and various sweets, heaps of raisins, dru and edible goods, much more than the Lha Tshangpa can offer. He discovered the hidden place of Gophu which was once blessed by Ugyen Rinpoche. He said that if the Buddha's teachings were to flourish, the rock would increase in its size, and after seven days the rock had grown bigger and broken into three pieces. Prayers of meeting in the next life were made and these two masters departed

from each other.

### **Transmigration to Nirvana and the related Events**

For the welfare of sentient beings and more importantly the land of Tibet and Mon, the great son decided to build the religious monument (not identified). Benchen Gyep, and Yonchen Wangdi (dbon sres dbang 'dus) donated huge amount of their riches and Paro Choje Ngawang Ponlop (chos rje nga dbang) and the people of Talampa and Dongkarwa (mdongs dkar ba) offered gold. For the consecration ceremony, Choze Drakpa (chos mzod grags) offered khadar and copper, Yumchen Thara, Yumjor Ashi Ugyen and Aum Tshewang made a huge offering of foods and drinks. Lhutsun (lha btsun) bDe'wa, Pedling, Rakhi, Lha-kid also offered the rituals for the sake of all death souls. Yumchen was no ordinary woman. Once, in Thukse Dawa's vision (while meditating in phudrak, Mangdelung), he saw her as possessing super-natural power of clairvoyance; she was also seen as instructing Umzed Tshangpa and Kuenga Gyalpo to open the relics of tutelary deities and make offerings of five different kinds. On opening the relics, it was found out that the statue of Tandin was shedding the tears and witnessed several auspicious signs of rainbows and sounds of religious instruments. Shedding of tears by the statue of Tandin symbolized the sad event that was to ensue soon.

One night, Thukse Dawa saw three girls dressed in white, yellow and red prophesizing him to go to Selphuk (mtshel phug) in Melak Gonpa's (me la gon pa) which is equivalent to Maratika<sup>13</sup> of Nepal and meditate for sometime. He woke up and then left for Melak Gonpo. On reaching gyed gling, the people of Latoed (les stod) and Nagpa Dorji (snags pa rdor rje) came to invite them but since he had already promised to arrive at Goen Sephu (gon tshel phug), their invitations had to be declined. In Tshamdrol Dong (mtshams grol gdong), the people from Goen (gon), Wang, Kabisa (skar sbis rchang) and Paro (spa gro) came in a large number to see the heart-son.

On reaching his own homeland, people from Latoed had come all the way from Kulpalchung (bskul dpal chung) to invite Thukse Dawa and king Gawa (who was among the entourage). The king Gawa agreed to go, as he thought he could meet the powerful king of Latoed, while the son thought it was right occasion to spread further Pema Lingpa's teachings and uphold his lineages in the region. But, Deb Ngawang Namgyal objected the proposed visit to Latoed arguing that the great son had become too old and feeble and Latoed was far away for him to travel. The great son regretted the fact that he had to send message of regret through two messengers who were asked to take lot of gifts and apologies to the people of Latoed. During that time, a strong request came to him from Ngartse Deb Tshewang Rinzin to come to his place, but because of the road conditions, they could reach only up to Jangchubling and then go to Riwodrak where he stayed for a month. At that time, he also received an invitation from Shiga Rinlungpa Norbu Dendup (gzhi dga' rinchen dpungs pa's Norbu ldan drup). From then on, he traveled to Chingna ('chings snga), Tagtse (stag rtse) Dargyecholing, Shigatse<sup>14</sup> (gzhis dga'), Rinchenlung and Taglung.

But when Thukse Dawa reached Taglung, his son Ruwa (rhea ba) and his attendants from Bumthang and Mangde (making twenty in number) came to escort him back home. When they reached Dragophu (brag gu phu), son Ruwa looked back and felt that he would not meet his father. He cried deeply. His attendant Drakpa (gra pa) consoled him saying that this would not be the case, but he replied that he saw some bad dreams and that it would come true. He prostrated thrice towards Taglung and continued the journey.

Thukse Dawa arrived at Nagartse, and after several days of stay there, he became ill. His three nephews and other followers did everything to restore his health but in vain. They decided that Thukse Dawa should be immediately taken to his homeland. Although, the great son wanted to meet Zhabdrung Ngawang Jigdra (who had asked him to) and proceeded to Zhabdrung's place. The situation was not in his favour and he regretted for not seeing him. The entourage arrived Yaroed (yar sred) where Thukse Dawa's health deteriorated further; he saw no good visions. He remembered the prophecy that stated 'the re-incarnate of Tandin is bound to die upon reaching kharaphu or the borders of the Mon'. The great son instructed his disciples and religious patrons to take him further through Lawoglung. The disciples and patrons discussed among them that it would be even impossible to get his body remains if they take the great son to Shiga (gshis dga') and unanimously decided to return. Upon arriving Ke (skyes), Debs of Pal Dewa (dpal sde) welcomed him and gave him their great respects and offerings equaling that of the wealth of Namsey (rna sres). On coming to Dablung ('dab lung), Deb Yulowa (gyu lo ba) came to see the son and apologized him for his bad words that he spoke once against him. He admitted his embarrassment for this mistake to which Thukse Dawa said 'for those accomplished, there is nothing like feeling shame; embarrassment by itself does not exist'. In Nakartse, Thukse Dawa resided in a Lukhang (klu khang) and told the Deb that his death was nearing. The Deb pleaded him to reborn in human form to which the son said can be possible depending on the situation.

His condition began to worsen and his followers all began to sob. Benra (dben ra) who was one of the blood relatives and good followers cried intensely; the great son presented him a sacred statue of Tandin indicating that he should take over his position when he died. His followers requested the great son for a final teachings, but the son said that he had nothing to say except to ask them to furnish the temple that he had built with relics. From Lhote (lho stod), Deb Sangdag Dorji

(gsang bdag rdor rjes) and Jowo Ugyen Sonam (ugyen bsod rnam) came to meet the son at Tshamaphu. On the way, the great son asked several questions about Lhodrak and Bumthang and asked his followers to join him in visiting several places as he had little time by then. He went to Taklung and gave Deb Tenzin and his subjects the empowerment of longevity who in respect sent Jowo Ugyen Sonam (ugyen bsod rnam) as the son's escort to Lhote. In Lhote, people saw rainbows in the sky for days and nights and considered them as omens that the great son's life was drawing to an end. The son said that all of them must not mourn over his death. He said, "for me, there is no difference even if I die or not." He further said that he would stay seven days in each of the six suffering realms ('kor ba drug) before departing to paradise. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of 9<sup>th</sup> month, Tuesday (1587), the great son transmigrated to land of eternal bliss. His body was not cremated but preserved as sacred relic. His disciples prayed that they would be born as his disciples in their next lives and mourned for the death soul and made extensive offerings. They consoled themselves saying 'by virtue of our prayers and supplications, our connection with Thukse Dawa will be maintained."

Thuke Dawa's son was at Jangchubling in Kurilung (byan chub gling) at that time. He dreamt his father (Thukse Dawa) telling him "time has come for two of us to go, alight the horse"; Thukse Dawa was seen holding a horsewhip. In Khenpalung (mkhen pa lung) Phagpa Dawa (phag pa zla ba) dreamt that his father who had already entered Nirvana instructing him to come with him. They arrived at a mound of Tshoyul (mtsho yul) where the Thukse Dawa told him that he would have grown tired and therefore, must go back home. He also dreamt that the father was presenting him the gift of clothes woven out of wool (spu thag) and apologized that he could come not to meet him when he was alive; it was the reason why he came to Khenpalung to meet him probably for the last time.

Two days later, Jowo Ugyen Sonam, Benchen Gyep and other

disciples made many offerings of scarves and clothes and wrapped the body with them. The royal families of Lhote became the great sponsors: supported the son's endeavor to flourish terma teachings; revered him even after death; and prayed that their children would conduct meritorious deed in his memory. Because of their faith in him, rainbows appeared in the sky after six days. In the same year, extremely cold places like Laya and Yadrok (ya 'brog) witnessed blossom of flowers. The body was taken to Zara and arrived at Kharila (mkha' ri la)- where two rainbows emerged from the high mountains of Mon. The body was taken to Saphu (sa phug) and Chukher (chus khyer) where various hermits came to pay their respects to the kudung (body remains). The people of Ngang (ngang) above Tang and Karanghasa (ka rang mkhar sa) received the body with offerings of wine and woolen clothes (spu thag). The kudung was kept a night in each of these two places. Upon arriving at Kikila (skyi skyi la), fifteen dogs accompanied the kudung for 15 days. These dogs were believed to be non-humans who came to protect the body. Devotees from Bumthang came to receive the body on the way and took it to Trakar (spra dkar) in Chume.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> Hor month, Benchen Gyep, his descendants, and non-humans began a year-long Kangzhag (bskang bshags), confessional prayers for the kudung. Benchen Gyep went to Tali, where he had promised the great son to re-build the temple. He offered the temple 300 pieces colourful cloths. Dewa Drung came to Kurilung and sent four vessels (khro), four copper vessels (zang) and woolen cloth to build temple in memory of the great son. Ponpo Tshe offered one copper vessel, Tangbi (sta sbis) Nima Zangpo (nyimma bzang po) offered one copper vessel, Benchen Gyep presented six copper vessels totaling twelve vessels. Paro Choje Ngawang penlop offered 38 serzho (dram of gold between one or two pound), Deb Yulowa offered three serzho, Deb Butshe (bu tshel) offered one serzho, Shiga Rinpungpa offered 40 Zhabdrung's silver dram, the king Sadag (sa bdag) offered 100 silver drams, Deb Tenzin offered 100 quicksilver to be used to build the statue of Buddha Sakya Thupa of 11 finger spans. The

temple was built in his memory (possibly in Trakar- the name of the temple is not mentioned). The inner relics and statues<sup>15</sup> were sponsored by Yum Paljor (dpal 'byor). Benchen Gyep also sponsored the mural paintings<sup>16</sup>. The grand twenty-one types of consecration ceremony was presided over by Thukse Dawa's son and Benchen Gyep. Countless miraculous signs appeared indicating good forces. In the end, the kings, religious lords, the descendants and other devotees offered vast prayers for the well being of all living beings and decided that there was no better way to repay kindness of unsurpassed Thukse than to dedicate themselves to virtuous deeds.

The local oral sources hold that today the lower part of body relic of Thukse Dawa is now contained in Trakar Lhakhang while the head is preserved in Trongsa Dzong. For some time, the body was kept in Trongsa Gaga; people of Chume had to take trouble traveling to Gaga every year to perform Peling Kuche (sku chos) in Gaga, and once discussed to bring the body relic to Trakar. They went with lavish amount of drinks and in the end of the Kuche, served the people of Gaga with plenty of drinks. While they were enjoying the excessive drinks, some men from Chume stole the body and ran away towards Chume. On realizing that the body had been stolen, some people from Gaga followed the steps and brought back its mummified head while the lower part of the body was taken to Trakar.

### **Conclusion**

One can make out from the above historical accounts that Thukse Dawa was an extensive traveller, preacher, and a great visionary. He had traveled widely in Tibet and neighbouring states, giving his teachings to people, high and low, and guiding them to virtuous paths. His religious teachings aside, he had tried to inspire and transcend the shortcomings of the various Tibetan rulers, and make effort to live in peace and harmony. Thukse Dawa was not only popular among the great religious and provincial rulers of

Tibet but commanded respects and faith from the provincial rulers (dpon) and religious lords (chos rje) of Mustang and Arunachal Pradesh. Even though, this paper contains more of the great son's travel to Tibet, it adds some new information on the lineage of Pema Lingpa in the form of some small biographical accounts. From the biography, we get the notion that he spent tremendous amount of time traveling in Tibet; but this should not mislead us that his religious activities were confined to Tibet and remote border regions. He would have done so much in his native land, which remains up to this day as unexplored field of research. I pray that more such biography shall be found out in the course of time to enrich the historical research on this great heart-son of Pema Lingpa. I conclude with homage to all the enlightened beings!

### **References**

- Sanga, Lama (1994). 'brug gi smyos rabs gsel bai' me long,  
Thimphu  
Tshewang, Pema, et al (1995). The Treasure Revealer of  
Bhutan

## **Endnotes**

---

<sup>1</sup> He was born in Budren in 1505, settled in Khochung-situated near Khenpa Jong and started the family of Khochung Choje. His great sons- Dreka and Langkha started the family of Dungkar Choje from where Jigme Namgyal, the father of the first hereditary king of Bhutan descended. His body remains are housed in Bartsham Bremung Lhakang. The other name of this Lhakang is Dungkarcholing.

<sup>2</sup> Known as the emanation of Avalokiteshvara who maintained good previous karmic connection with Pema Lingpa in three lives. Karmapa Chodran Gyamtsho was recognized as having powers that any siddhas from Bhutan, Tibet and India could surpass, who revered Pema Lingpa and invited him to Rinpung to receive his terma teachings.

<sup>3</sup> Dungshtsho Karmathang is the Lake is located above the hill of present day Khar. Terton Pema Lingpa (1450-1521) revealed a ter (a sacred hidden treasure) from this lake. The lake dried up later and the humans started to settle in this place; these settlers became the ancestors of Khoche nobility in Dungsam Mipham Tenpai Nyima (1567-1619), the father of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal also visited this place. A mysterious epidemic struck the settlement at Dungshtsho Karmathang, and the people died except for two khoche brothers who escaped to others places. The ruins of Dungshtsho Karmathang can be still seen submerged beneath the earth today.

<sup>4</sup> The secret guideline to the religious treasures mention about Lhodrak Drak Karpo which said thar 'mind terma' would be found inside the cliff looking like a lion. This terma was extracted in the tenth day of eighth month in the Rabbit year by Terton Pema Lingpa.

<sup>5</sup> Termas are religious treasures of three kinds: objects such as statues, bells and ritual daggers, religious texts and holy medicinal substances that are revealed by tertons.

<sup>6</sup> Pema Lingpa stood on the rock at Naring Drak above Mebar tsho and jumped into the swirling waters under the coercion of Deb Thupa.

<sup>7</sup> In Dzongkha mkha' 'gro ma, meaning female guide or sky farer

<sup>8</sup> Lama Zhang (1123-93) founded Gungthang monastery near Lhasa in 1175 in the district known as Mtshel after which the school was named.

<sup>9</sup> The mount of Tashi Lhunpo near Shigatse. There is an important monastery which was founded by Tshongkhapa.

<sup>10</sup> Taklung monastery was founded in 1185 by Thang-pa

<sup>11</sup> Zhablung monastery was started by Bus-ton where he spent his whole life.

<sup>12</sup> 'brug gi myos rabs gsel bai' me long by Lama Sanga, 1994

<sup>13</sup> Maratika is located in Solu Khumbu region of Nepal where Guru Rinpoche had practiced the means of attaining longevity. Buddha Amitayus (the Buddha of Infinite Life) actually appeared to Guru Rinpoche at the cave and granted him the power to control the duration of his life. Guru Rinpoche is believed to have attained the state of immortality after drinking water.

<sup>14</sup> Monastery of Tashilhunpo is located near Shigatse and was once dominated by the powerful prince of Rinpung

<sup>15</sup> The statues were of: Ugyen Rinpoche, Khando Mendarawa, Khadro Yeshe Tshogyal, Pema Jungney, Nima Yoezer, Shakya Singe, Singye Dradrok and Dorji Drolo.

<sup>16</sup> The mural paintings were of Cheku Kunzang Yabyum (chos sku kun bzang yab yum), Longku Dorji Sempa (longs sku rdo rje sems dpa'), Trulku Garab Dorji (sprul sku dga' rabs rdor rje), Rinzin Shri Srinda (rig 'zin shri ri srhi), Ugyen Pema Jungney (orgyan pad ma 'byung gnyes), Machig Yeshey Tshogyal, Lotsawa Viaroccana, Terton Pema Lingpa, Thukse Dawa Gyeltshen, Wangchen Tandin, Phurpa Dorji: On the door, there were also the paintings of: Dorji Namsum, Eight forms of gods- Kuwi Rinzin Jampel Shenyen, Sungi Rinzin Ngazuna, Thuki Rinzin Huchen Kara, Yonten Rinzin Dewa Chantra,

Drey Ngaigi Rinzin Shente Grapa, Choje Ngagi Wangpo, Choje Kencho Zangpo, Choje Drukpa Gyalpo. In the right room were the paintings of: Ngade Ngang, Guru Chewang Ledresel, Dorji Lingpa, Dorji Zhey, Marmezhey, Shaya Thupa, Jampa Gonpo, Tsepame, Sangay Nampar Nangze, Rigsum Gonpo, Nampar Gyalmo, Gyalwa Choyang, namkhai Nyingpo, Ludrup Nyingpo, etc.



## Cattle Management Systems in Humid Subtropical Areas of Western Bhutan

*NB Tamang\* and JM Perkins\*\**

### **Abstract**

A study was undertaken to improve understanding on management system of Mithun (*Bos frontalis*) x Siri (*Bos indicus*) cross-bred and Siri cattle, as reared in typical Bhutanese farming system. Eighteen households of Jumja, Gedu and Chasilakha villages under Bongo geog of Chukha district having over hundred milking cows of different breed types were purposively selected and interviewed. All farms were also visited to observe their management practices. Results indicate that majority of farmer-herders periodically migrated their cattle and managed them under traditional "low input-low output system", allowing them to graze freely for most of the year in the natural grazing lands (tshadrog) in and around the broadleaf forests, while few farmer-herders with few heads of cattle or with cattle of higher Jersey inheritance open grazed in the vicinity of the homestead. The majority of the farms lacked proper cattle housing and feeding equipment, and the rudimentary nature of cattle management practices soon becomes apparent. Lack of Mithun breeding bulls, fodder scarcity in certain areas, labour shortages on some farms, deficient management and disease and predator attack were identified as the main management constraints. Nevertheless, farmers-herders in far flung villages may continue this simple cattle management system involving Mithun-Siri cross and Siri cattle because of their adaptability, hardiness and other significant factors.

*Key words:* Mithun-Siri cross (*Jatsham/Yangkum*), Siri, cattle management, free grazing systems

---

\* Senior Research Officer, CoRRB, Ministry of Agriculture

\*\* Senior Lecturer, University of Melbourne, Australia

## **Introduction**

Cattle have long been a central component of many Bhutanese farming systems. They are used for the production of milk - most of which is converted to butter or cheese for consumption and trade - draught power, income and a store of wealth. Most of the country's 320,000 (RNR statistics, 2000) cattle are *Bos indicus* types, known locally as *Thrabam* which is a Siri breed, but there is also a strong interest in the Mithun (*Bos frontalis*). For over a century, and probably longer, farmers in Bhutan have been crossing Mithun bulls with Siri cows for hybrid vigour in progeny generations (Roder *et al.* 2001). From long time, Mithun-Siri cross and Siri cattle have been grazed in the broad leafed forest (Norbu, 2000). However, there is relatively little documentation done to understand the management of these cattle types plus a dearth of general information on Siri and Mithun-Siri cross cattle husbandry practices in Bhutan (Burgois Leuthi, 1999, Phanchung *et al.* 2001). This study aimed to improve existing information on Mithun-Siri cross and Siri husbandry practices in free grazing system in selected area of West Bhutan.

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Criteria used in selection of study area**

Selection of the study area was guided by the following criteria: (a) Reasonable access to study area, and (b) cattle were to be an important component of farming systems in the selected area; Mithun-Siri cross and Siri cattle are to be available in appreciable numbers.

### **Location of study area**

The study area was in Bongo *geog* (smallest administrative unit) in the Chukha District of Bhutan. Bongo comprises 15 widely scattered villages of which three were selected for study: Gedu Trashigang, Chasilakha and Jumja. The villages fall under humid subtropical zone and share similar physical and social environments and comprise 89 households, with relatively high populations of Mithun-Siri cross and Siri

cattle.

### **Sampling of households for interviews**

The sampling frame in this study was the entire list of households keeping cattle; the sampling unit was households with Mithun-Siri cross and Siri milking cows. A list of households owning Mithun-Siri cross and Siri cattle was obtained from livestock census records maintained by extension agents. A preliminary visit was made by the researcher and an extension agent to locate the farm, and brief the farmer-herder on research objectives and potential benefits of participating in this research. Herders willing to participate voluntarily were selected in three strata: small herds of 1-5 milking cows (eight farms) medium herd of 6-10 milking cows (four farms) and large herds with more than 10 milking cows (two farms). In total, eighteen households (20 percent of total of 89 households) with at least one type of milking cow were purposively selected for informal interview/discussions. A few farmers-herders with Jersey cross cattle kept in the villages were also included to check if there were any differences in management systems.

## **Results**

### **Milking practices**

During the first three to four weeks calves are allowed to freely suckle their dam, to get sufficient colostrum and milk. Thereafter calves are subjected to restricted suckling before and after milking. During every milking calf suckle the dam for few minutes to encourage milk let-down after which calves are separated from the cows, which are hand-milked, usually from right side. After milking, calves are allowed to suckle the remaining milk.

The number of quarters milked varied between farms. The frequency of number of quarters milked—two, three and three/two (three in mornings and two in evenings)—was observed and confirmed with the herders. The expected frequencies were calculated and a Chi-squared test conducted.

Results revealed a significant association between farm size and the number of quarters milked ( $p < 0.001$ ). Most medium-level farms milked two quarters completely; the remaining two quarters are left unmilked for the calf. One large farm milked three quarters in the morning and two quarters in the evening. A few herders milked three quarters, leaving one quarter to be suckled by the calf. The proportions of cattle types which are milked for two, three, and three + two quarters differed (Fig. 1), but differences between number of quarters milked and cattle types were not statistically significant ( $p = 0.062$  or  $p > 0.05$ ). Within a farm the same milking regime is followed in most cases, irrespective of cattle types.

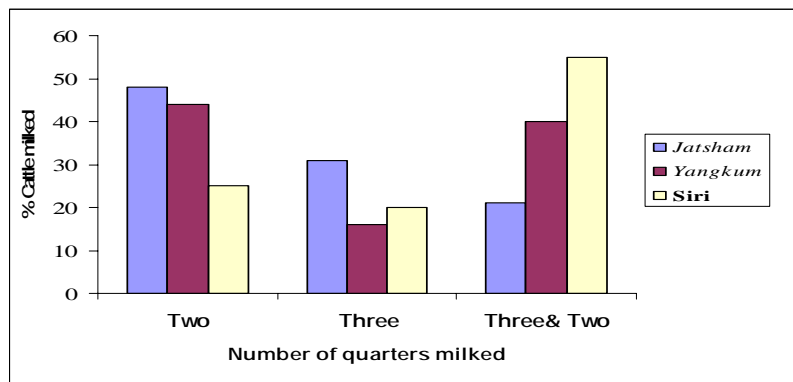


Fig.1 Number of quarters milked, by cattle type

## Cattle Management

### Cattle migration and grazing management

Mithun-Siri cross, Siri and Jersey-cross with low exotic inheritance are generally migrated. The seasonal pattern of cattle management involves upward migration from lower valleys (homestead) of 1600-1700 m asl to 2000 m asl, where many farmers had access to natural grazing lands (*tshadrog*) in the higher altitudes in the vicinity of broad leaf forest. Cattle are kept there for about two months or until grass and

tree fodders are no longer available nearby. Each section of *tshadrog* is quite distinct, being separated by ridges, rivers, gorges or cliffs. These boundaries are respected by herders, who confine their animals within their own areas.

If herders do not have access rights to grazing lands, or small areas inadequate for their herds, they usually hire additional areas from others. Annual hiring charges were five to six kgs of butter or 40 *dre* (a standard *dre* contains 1.68 kg rice) locally grown milled rice per season. Some herders were also reported to be paying cash (Nu.900) for a season's access.

During migration, cattle are allowed to roam freely in the designated grazing areas. In May or June cattle are migrated further up the hillside, to altitudes of about 2500 m asl and kept there until July. By August the herd will start to descend, halting at about 2000 m asl until late October. By November-December the days gets colder, the principal crops are harvested and the herd is migrated to the village. Similar cycles are repeated every year.

Shortage of fodder is the principal cause of migration but other reasons include the utilization of available land, improve health and production of the animals and avoid damage to cultivated crops. Most herders (67 percent) follow traditional patterns of cattle migration within the district boundary. The other 33 percent have either completely stopped or reduced migration of their cattle.

Near the town and also in villages, herders who only had few heads of cattle with higher exotic (Jersey) inheritance were managed under sedentary system. Cattle are kept near the home throughout the year, grazing them in nearby scrub forest, fallow and barren lands and road side during the day and tethering them at the homestead at night.

#### **Supplementary feeding**

Most herders (61 percent) provided supplementary feed to milking cows and calves while 39 percent of herders fed only

the calves. Breeding bulls were given special care and periodically fed with raw eggs, butter and milk, in addition to supplementary feed. Feeds given were mostly wheat flour mixed with whey. Some herder also mixed mustard oil cake, maize flour, crushed maize, rice bran and local brew residues, depending on availability. The feed was cooked into porridge and salt generally added. Dry cows are not offered supplementary feed but occasionally are given salt.

### **Housing**

Most farms (67 percent) had temporary housing for adult cattle and calves made of wooden poles, singles (crudely-made planks) with bamboo mat and plastic sheet for roofing. Sixteen percent had semi-permanent houses made of roughly finished timber, with stone or plank flooring. Rooves were made of bamboo mat or banana leaf, which were invariably covered with plastic sheet (Fig. 2). The external plastic sheets were clamped with poles, tree branches and stones. Seventeen percent of farms did not have housing for adult cattle but had temporary sheds for calves.



*Fig. 2 Temporary housing of cattle at the village farms  
Breeding management*

Natural servicing was widely used in the study area. More than 50 percent of herders managed their own breeding bulls. Most had one or more Siri bulls; some had Jersey-cross bulls and one herder had a *Mencha* (Mithun-Siri, 75:25). Bulls were locally bred. At least three herders were reported to have had Mithun bulls but these had died in recent years, probably of

old age. Use of AI services was uncommon.

Herders with no breeding bull (44 percent) hired them from neighbours and relatives. If service of pure Mithun bull is utilized, herder had to pay Nu.500 for every *Jatsham* (Mithun-Siri 50:50, female) born and Nu.400 for a *Jatsha* (Mithun-Siri 50:50, male). The services of a *Mencha* (Mithun: Siri, 75:25) are also used: the owner expects to collect Nu.200 for a female and Nu.100 for a male calf if mating is successful. In addition, herders are usually obliged to take mustard oil and eggs to feed the Mithun bull and a bottle (750ml) of alcohol locally brewed from grains (*ara*) to please the owner. Services of other types of bull are reported to be free.

Tradition of back-crossing for several generations with Siri bull are also not regularly followed. Backcrossing is stopped at the *Yangkum* (Mithun-Siri 25:75, female) generation in most cases. Some farmers have also started crossing *Jatsham* with Jersey bulls and their progeny is known as Jersey-*Yangkum*. Emphasis from Government agencies is for introduction of Jersey blood and farmers' curiosity on improving milk yield were reasons for trying the scheme.

### **Animal health**

Herders in the sample reported that some 13 adult cattle had died in the previous year. Causes included accidental falls, being caught in hunter's traps, attacked by predators, Enzootic Bovine Haematuria and bloat. Around 33 calves had died in the same period. Calf mortality rate was estimated at 24 percent. Highest incidences (31 percent) of calf mortality were due to attack by wild dogs, and diarrhoea (25 percent). Bloat, weakness, coccidiosis, accidental fall, liver flukes, and natural calamities such as hailstorm also killed some calves.

Severity of wild dog attacks on cattle was estimated by noting the observed frequency of severity (severe, moderate, mild) on calves and adults. The expected frequencies were calculated and a Chi-squared test applied. It revealed a significant association ( $p=0.04$  or  $p<0.05$ ) between wild dog attack and

age of cattle. Attacks on adult cattle were generally mild to moderate but severe in calves (Fig. 3).

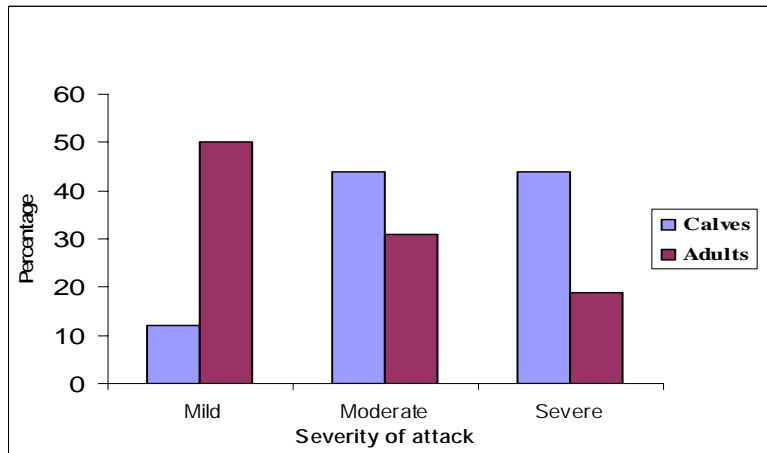


Fig. 3 Severity of predator attack on cattle

### Management constraints

Most herders believed that a good Mithun bull is preferred over other breeding bulls and have requested the government agencies to supply them one. Many herders however had their own breeding bulls other than Mithun bull. Herder narrated that some locally available bulls sired undesirably small calves and in other cases cows failed to conceive after the services probably due to the use of young or infertile bulls.

Fodder scarcity is reported to be a problem in the vicinity of the town and areas where there is commercial logging. Over the years there had been increase in the time required for fodder collection.

Many herders said that labour shortage is an emerging issue. Changing expectation and lifestyles of young people often means they are not keen to remain farmers. They prefer to live in towns and look for easier jobs. Most children who help the family in herding must also attend school. Thus, the

limited labour available in small isolated communities strongly affects management options.

## **Discussion**

### **Milking practices**

Calf survival strongly affects milking practices of village farmers. Cattle are very significant items of capital and wealth: death of calves often leads to cessation of lactation. Ensuring survival of calves dominates the suckling regime of village farms for sustained milk production, especially in early lactation. The conventional wisdom among Bhutanese herders is to not milk cows for about three to four weeks, allowing calves to suckle freely and gain a healthy start. Calves with free access to the dam's milk have better weight gain than calves which are subject to restricted suckling (Coulibaly and Nialibouly, 1998). Such a healthy start is essential for survivability of calves because they do not get extensive care afterwards, due to constrained resources and inadequate knowledge of herders on modern husbandry practices. Once calves are about one month old they are subjected to restricted suckling: typically two quarters are milked if the calves are less than five months of age and two quarters are left for calves to suckle. The dam's milk provides the major share of supplementary nutrition because herders cannot provide appropriate replacement feeds. By about six months of age calves are considered mature and able to graze and manage their own feed; one quarter is left available to suckle until lactation ceases.

### **Cattle management**

The most common cattle management practice is though periodic migration. But unlike high-altitudes herders, mid-altitude herders in the study area did not migrate their cattle over long distances but manage them within the periphery of the villages, and the forest and natural grazing lands in the same district. This might be a result of congenial weather conditions, especially rainfall and temperatures adequate for grass growth in nearby forests, plus favourable weather for cropping in the lower valleys.

The majority of the farms lacked cattle housing and feeding equipment and the rudimentary nature of cattle husbandry practices soon becomes apparent. For farms with no housing, adverse weather such as rain stressed the animals and there were reductions in milk yield. Damp and narrow sheds resulted in overcrowding of calves, making them vulnerable to diseases.

Fodders grazed under forests are coarse and could have lower nutritive values than pasture grasses. Supplementary feeding is necessary to meet nutritional requirements if farmers are aiming for increased production levels. But the low milk yields of local cattle do not encourage farmers to offer adequate quantities of protein-rich feed stuff such as mustard oilcake. The diet remains largely unbalanced with high proportions of roughage and fibre, low levels of protein, and no vitamins and minerals except salt. The poor performance and early drying-off of cattle is inevitable when the availability of good quality fodders is low and nutrient demand is high.

Breeding is mostly undertaken through the natural service. Artificial insemination is not used because of the distance from AI service centre. The traditional breeding practice of successive backcrossing for several generations appeared not to be common in the study area. In the word of 60 years old herder Ap Khandu of Gedu Trashigang village, "*progeny generation after Yangkum is useless and has no economic value*' (Ap Khandu, *pers. comm.*, 2004). The small number of milking cows in the sample villages between the *Yangkum* to *Siri* generations also supports the views.

Many herders still prefer Mithun bulls for crossing with local *Siri* cattle at the village farms. The low output from Government Mithun breeding farms has made it difficult to meet herders' strong demands for Mithun bulls (MoA, 2001). As an alternative, the importation of Mithun bulls continues but it is becoming more difficult to obtain good quality Mithun from their home tracts in India. As a result of the

destruction of habitat through uncontrolled hunting and slaughter during periods of elections and religious ceremonies, the Mithun is believed to be under threat of extinction in India (Gupta *et al.* 1999). Uncertainty about the availability of replacement stock for the government's Mithun breeding farm and the lack of quality breeding Mithun bulls at the village level is becoming a cause for concern.

Calf mortality in particular was seen as causing double loss, *i.e.*, for families with small capital reserves, the death of a young calf represents a two-year investment gap plus the loss of food and income from one season's milking. The high mortality of calves could be attributed to poor management and lack of proper care. In the tropics, Williamson and Payne (1965) mentioned that mortality of calves can be as high as 50 percent due to poor management.

Herders frequently mentioned predator attacks but other major diseases of calves are diarrhoea and coccidiosis, which probably result from inadequate housing and sanitation. Young calves were more vulnerable to predators such as wild dogs because they cannot defend themselves or escape, as adults do. Though adult cattle especially *Jatsham* and pure Mithun according to farmers are very self defensive and predators cannot attack them easily, they cannot protect their calves as they are grazed in different area to prevent suckling. Traditional approaches to cattle management are inevitably changing. A number of herders have now stopped migrating cattle to their family home in the north during the summer and to the lower areas in winter. They have been permanently settled in the study area for about a decade. The reduction in the transhumant system is an indication of herders' gradual shifts in attitude, now favouring a more modern, market-based production system. Such changes are welcomed by development agencies, as they ease the introduction of cross-breeding programs and health monitoring.

Some herders have also begun diversifying their range of economic activities, establishing shops at the roadheads and

towns, while others are involved in contract and other off-farm work. It is very likely that the traditional systems of cattle herding and management will decline as alternative economic opportunities emerge in the future.

#### **Farm labour shortage**

Limited labour availability is one of the key issues faced by the herders. As most farms are family managed and part of very small communities, family size largely determines labour availability. With the high priority now given to education, most children who would have helped in farming—especially animal herding—are now enrolled in schools and only available to help the family during vacations. Some educated children are employed in government and private organizations away from home and their ageing parents are unable to extend their range of activities. Herders now face options such as hiring labour, changing farming practices or leaving land fallow and renting out cattle to tenant herders.

#### **Conclusion**

Traditional free grazing practices involving mostly Mithun-Siri cross and Siri cattle is a dominant cattle management system at the village farms with only few farmers practising sedentary system. Limited labour availability could have contributed to the continued practice of conventional "low input—low output" cattle management systems, with slow adoption of intensive cattle management practices in the far flung villages.

In the vicinity of town, farmers are increasingly rearing few but higher yielding Jersey-Siri cross cows which are better fed and housed. Close to the town there is real demand for liquid milk and also the price incentives. Their access to a ready market for liquid milk seems to be a driving force in restructuring the traditional herd. It is forecast that traditional cattle management system may not continue long near urban milk markets. However, most Bhutanese rural families live some distance from urban communities. For these people, the tradition of Mithun-Siri cross cattle will

continue because of real benefits obtained from combinations of milk yield, draught work, adaptation, hardiness, market value and other significant factors. It is therefore becoming clearer that promotion of high yielding exotic breeds in remote rural areas is unlikely to be successful if no substantial market for liquid milk is available. The cattle development interventions should be designed to benefit both peri-urban and rural households.

There are indications that changes are occurring in traditional cattle herding lifestyles. There is a gradual reduction in transhumant systems in some areas and some farmers are diversifying their economic activities such as opening shops for additional source of income are some of the examples. In future, some farmers may also invest more on cash which has high market value, such as cardamom. It is likely that, as more alternate economic opportunities emerge, traditional cattle herding systems may continue a slow decline although not disappear completely.

### **Acknowledgement**

The authors thank the Asian Development Bank–Japan Scholarships Programme and University of Melbourne, Australia for their generous financial support to undertake the study. Field support of Krishna Rai, Research Assistant, RNR Sub-Centre Drala; Ramesh Urao, Extension agent, Gedu, Dadi Ram Sharma, Extension agent, Drala is duly acknowledged.

### **Reference**

- Burgois Leuthi, N. "Bovine and Equine in Bhutan", in *Special Publication No 2: Renewable Natural Resources Research Centre*, Jakar, 1999
- Coulibaly, M., & Nialibouly, O. "Effect of Suckling Regimes on Calf Growth, Milk Production and Off-take of Zebu Cattle in Mali", in *Tropical Animal Health and Production*, 1998, 30(3): 179-189.

- Gupta, S. C., Gupta, N., & Nivsarkhar, A. E. 1999. *Mithun: A Bovine of Indian Origin*: Indian Council of Agricultural Research, New Delhi.
- MoA (2000) *Renewable Natural Resources Statistics*, Thimphu: Ministry of Agriculture
- MoA (2001) Ninth Five Year Plan for Livestock Sub Sector, Ministry of Agriculture, Thimphu, Bhutan.
- Norbu, L. (2000) Cattle Grazing - an integral part of broadleaf forest management planning in Bhutan. Ph.D Thesis, Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich.
- Phanchung, Dorji, P., Thubten, S., & Pelden, K. (2001) *Sustainable development of small holder dairy farming in Bhutan*, Kathmandu: ICIMOD, Nepal
- Roder, W., Wangdi, K., Gamtsho, P., & Dorji, K. (2001). *Feeding the Herds. Improving Fodder Resources in Bhutan*, Kathmandu: International Centre for Mountain Development, Nepal.
- Williamson, G., & Payne, A.J.W. (1965) *An Introduction to Animal Husbandry in the Tropics*, London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd.