

Indigenous Facts of Bhutan

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The Proceedings of the Third Colloquium

Second Edition 2009



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Paro

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“Indigenous Facts of Bhutan”
The Proceedings of the Third Colloquium

Editors:

1. Dorje Tshering, Director General, DoC
2. Dr. Yonten Dargye, NLB
3. Khenpo Phunshok Tashi, Director, NMB
4. Singye Samdrub, Curator, NMB
5. Ariana Maki, NMB

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Layout & Design

1. Pema Choden, NMB
2. Sushma Lama, NMB

Computerized By

1. Dorje Wangchuck, NMB
2. Kamal Pokwal, NMB
3. Sarawasti Gurung, NMB
4. Ugyen Tshomo, NMB

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FOREWARD

The National Museum is pleased to introduce the second edition of the Proceedings of the Third Colloquium, one of a series of meetings held since 1997 that seek to explore and study the history of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Bhutan. The express purpose of publishing these colloquium articles and papers is to support and encourage the realization of the country's most coveted philosophy of Gross National Happiness through the preservation and promotion of our unique culture. Because Bhutan is a Vajrayana Buddhist-oriented nation, religious dimensions are interwoven within the fabric of everyday life, and these articles seek to shed light on the ways in which we can understand Bhutanese society.

The following, **Indigenous Facts of Bhutan**, presents a number of articles which focus the creation and development of many of Bhutan's *dzongs* (fortresses), which were originally built during the time of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, who reigned over the country during the second half of the 17th century. This publication also addresses unique aspects of the Lhop cultural community, who are often described as the earliest inhabitants of Bhutan.

Many of the contributions within represent the fruits of strenuous efforts undertaken by noted Bhutanese scholars, who were able to conduct their research through grants provided by the Royal Government of Bhutan and the Japan Foundation. It is hoped that this volume will be of great benefit to both current and future generations, serving as a foundation and inspiration for researchers who will then continue to explore and document Bhutan's rich culture. This resource also aims to disseminate important information to the general public regarding Bhutan's historical and cultural heritage, which is becoming increasingly

eclipsed by an overload of external information streaming into the country. The research papers that constitute this volume will ideally serve as excellent resources, ones which analyze and discuss various perspectives, and this updated, second edition further incorporates information that emerged as a result of meaningful exchanges with other scholars and observers over the course of the colloquium itself.

It is our fervent hope that this publication will contribute to further enrich and enhance knowledge of Bhutanese history and culture for people within Bhutan as well as those outside the country who appreciate and seek a greater understanding of our rich national heritage.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Phuntsok Tashi', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Khenpo Phuntsok Tashi
Director
National Museum of Bhutan
Paro, 2009

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HISTORY OF PARO RINPUNG DZONG

Dasho Sangay Dorji

Foreword

As part of an annual project initiated by the National Museum, an entity under the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs, in developing certain materials relating to the history of our country, I have been directed in 2001 to write a short essay on Paro Rinchenpung Dzong pertaining to the period of Zhabdrung Rinpoche.

To write anything on the past history of a place, especially in the absence of available references is a very difficult task indeed. Yet, keeping in mind the benefits of such a research, humble as it may be, to the nation and the government, I started to work on it beginning from August 2000 to February 2001 for as long as seven months. To this end, I tried to refer as many books on the history of 'Hungrel Drungwang Rinpoche' and other related books besides meeting and gathering as much information as possible from the present day descendants of 'Drungwang Rinpoche', the elderly people who are working in Paro Dzong and other senior citizens in the locality. Having thus completed my work, it was presented during the proceedings of the Third Colloquium held from 15th to 17th January 2001 and the suggestions and recommendations provided by the experts were too accommodated in this work in an effort to make it worthy of the subject matter.

That, this work is the fruit of all those who have helped me during the course of my research, I stand to extend my deep gratitude to all of them. I hope that this work, small as it may be, will be of useful service to the Tsa-Wa-Sum in the future.

DZONGKHA DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

19 February 2001

Sangay Dorji
Secretary

Introduction

Paro and its meaning

On referring the books written in the 7th century during the time of the first king of Tibet, Chogyal Songtsen Gampo, and the hidden treasure texts by Guru Rinpoche pertaining to the 8th century, the valley was not called '*Paro*' as it is known today but *Padro* and *Pado*. The word *pa* means beautiful or ornamental and in this context the valley is considered as the most beautiful of nature's creation and one that goes to make it the ornament of the nation. *Dro*, on the other hand means homely, enchanting and fertile. This homeliness of the valley is believed to be the blessings of the statue of Buddha Shakyamuni in the Kyichu temple and also because it is a place blessed by Guru Rinpoche and other past Buddhist masters. The blessings are due again to the five statues of the goddess of longevity, or *Lhamo Tsheying Chenga*, and that once a person visits the valley he or she does not feel like going back to one's own hometown. These statues are located in five different temples namely at Drangjekha, Tengekha, Dzongdrakha, Gangteng and Ramnag.

In course of time, however, the word Pado and Padro came to be written as Paro. As to when this way of writing the name started is again beyond our imagination. What we know for sure is that the names Paro and Bumthang, a valley in central Bhutan are the oldest of their kind.

The origination of the names Rinpung and Hungrel

Closely addressed with the name of Paro Dzong are the words *rinpung* and *hungrel*. These names were given after the visit to Paro of Guru Rinpoche in the 8th century. Guru Rinpoche visited Taktshang, Chumphu, Rago and Drak Karpo and, after having subdued all the heretic and malevolent spirits, he blessed them as holy places. On this same visit, Guru Rinpoche gave the name Rinpung to the site where the dzong now stands, after perceiving that the hillock looks like a pile of gems, while the name Rinpung Drak was bestowed upon the nearby cliff. A demon and his partner, a river mermaid,

dwelt in this cliff and consistently harmed the people living nearby. As much as ‘Guru Rinpoche’ was tempted to subdue them, he found that the time was not ripe, and instead built small stupas and placed them on the rocks at the cliff to confine them there.

Much later, in the beginning of the 15th century, the Buddhist master Thangtong Gyalpo visited Paro, where he built Duntse *Choten* (reliquary) under Dophu Jangsa village. It is said he had deities and spirits of the valley to help him with the construction. The only one who refused to cooperate was the Rinpung demon. Thangtong Gyalpo was infuriated, and went over to the rock in which this demon dwelt. Though the master called out to the demon, the malevolent spirit paid no heed. So Thangtong Gyalpo resorted to his spiritual power, and, pointing his finger in the direction of the rock he uttered the syllable *Hung*, the resonance of which broke open the rock, exposing the demon. The master chided the demon for not cooperating and dragged him to the work site and forced him to take a vow to never harm people in the future. Following that incident, the cliff was called Hungrel Drak and the place above that cliff as Hungrelkha.

Hungrelkha and its landscape

Paro used to be divided into six blocks, collectively known as *Barke Tsho Druk*, and which consisted of Doteng, Dolshar, Wangchang, Lamgong, Shaba and Lungni. These blocks were each administered by a Drungpa or Sub-Divisional Officer. In addition, two dzongs were in the valley: Drukgyal Dzong in the upper end and Dobji Dzong at the lower end. Drukgyal Dzong had six villages under its jurisdiction and the administrator was called Dasho Druzob. On the other hand, Dobji Dzong had four villages of Dungyul and six villages of Jabana under its jurisdiction and was looked after by the Dobji Ponlop. Hungrelkha formed part of Dophu Tshochen, which is known for its eight great cliffs, namely:

1. Hungrel Drak
2. Dedhar Drak
3. Namcha Drak

4. Rago Drak
5. Shala Drak
6. Pugang Drak
7. Phulchung or Singye Drak
8. Tshalung Drak

Of these eight cliffs, the Hungrel Drak was considered foremost or chief of the group, primarily due to its central location, but also as a result of its exquisite rock patterns. Drung Drung Rinpoche, who built the Hungrel Dzong, wrote of this cliff and the valley as hereunder:

*'Here in this country, commanding four directions;
Here, which has a wide spread of literacy is the Paro valley-a valley of medicines,
On a hillock stands a heavenly palace like that of a stack of precious gems,
Behind this is a mountain like an elephant on its hind legs.
Forest of cypress and other greenery adorn the landscape and the air is filled with the songs of celestial birds,
The mountains to the fore look like queens in waiting and those on the right are like hanging silken scarfs,
The mountains to the left are like seven auspicious substances heaped close to each other and those mountains in the upper valley are home to the great gods and goddesses.
Traversing the valley is a river having the eight qualities of a heavenly stream, Like holy water that has descended from the heavens above, it forms a lake midway and the mermaid who dwells in it makes an offering of gems.
With water fowl singing, the surroundings give a feeling of a turquoise valley, And in the folds of this valley, the animals play in absolute glee.
The valley is if anything else a green carpet, spread far and wide where people grow crops of all kinds,
I marvel sometimes that there could be such a heavenly place anywhere on the earth which brings happiness and joy to all those who choose to live here.'*

Further, he wrote:

'The market has nothing short of anything to meet the requirements of the people.

Gold, turquoise, brocade and all other human needs pour into it like a river from Phari, the Tibetan border town;

From India comes gold, silver and cloth like the never ending monsoon rain.

In this valley, which is like a heaven descended on the earth, lies Hungrel Gonsarkha, a place for meditation.

For all who may live in the east – Punakha, Thimphu, Ngenlung and Khaling;

In the south – Wang, Wodo, and the plains of India;

In the west – Ha, Chumbi valley and Monlbo;

In the north – Nemjo, Tsendongna and Phari;

In the middle – Wangchang and Dophu;

This is a place for the rich to make offerings and the poor to seek help,

It is also a place where young men can put their skills to test and young girls to measure their voices,

It is nothing less than Dorje Den, the place of Buddha in India.'

This draws a clear description of Hungrelkha but more than anything else it tells us the economic situation of Paro valley in the time of Drung Drung Gyalchog Rinpoche. Should one take a close look at the physical landscape, it is said that Hungrelkha has the feature of the syllable *Hung*. Chubjakha is the head of the syllable, Donam and Ta Dzong the right half of *Hung*, Zuri the left half, Rinpung Dzong the central part of *Hung*, and the river that flows next to the Nyame village the tail of the syllable. Some also see the landscape as bearing the features of a conch. Notwithstanding these features, Hungrelkha is considered a special place by the people to the present. The following poetry says it all:

'From the high reaches of Jele La to the bottom of Nyame Zam there lies in between Ta Dzong which has the shape of a conch,

While Donam looks like a holy text, Gonsarkha a place for heavenly retreat, Zuri is nothing short of the copper palace of Guru Rinpoche.

And in the white castle of Paro Dzong sits Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal.'

The dzong site and name of the dzong

The dzong is located fifty-five kilometers from the capital Thimphu and at a distance of four kilometers to the north from Paro International Airport which lies next to Bongde Bridge. It is situated at the conference of two rivers Pachu and Dochu, the former originating from Jomolhari mountain and the latter from the upper reaches of Chumphu under Dophu valley. It is but a short climb from across this river up to Hungrelkha in the north-east direction to reach the Paro Dzong.

By looking down from Jelela across the span that encompasses from Chubjakha and down Donam until the river's edge at the bottom of the valley, you may discern the hillock that looks like a heap of jewels. Within is the guardian deity Hungrel Gonpo. Behind is Hungrelkha, a ridge 7740 feet above sea level. It is on this ridge that the Paro Dzong stands like a celestial palace.

Many names have been given to Paro Dzong. Initially referred to as Hungrel Gonsarkha in the early times, it later became known as Dzong Hungrelkha. Still later, it was called Densar Rinpung Dzong. Beginning the 17th century, however, following the establishment of Punakha and Thimphu as seasonal capitals under the governance of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, this dzong which lies to the west of the main seats of government began to be known widely as Paro Dzong and Druk Rinchenpung Dzong. The valley itself came to be known as Nubchog Chodengi Zhingkhram, Paro Dzongkhag.

The early history of Paro Dzong

The founder of Thimphu Dechenphug, Damtrul Loden Gyalpo had two sons. They were called Drung Drung Gyalchog and Drung Drung Gyalzom. The first son Drung Drung Gyalchog left Bhutan to Tibet following Tshungme Gyal Wangjey at an early age. While in Tibet, he extensively studied Buddhism under pre-eminent masters and eventually became a highly advanced master himself. Following a prophecy he then took a consort who bore all the signs of a *dakini* (enlightened female), by the name of Gedun Zangmo, and together they returned to Paro. The two settled at Paro Tsendong Chukka first. But on hearing that his younger brother Drung Drung Gyalzom was living at Gangtakha they went to live with him. Surprisingly, the younger brother, who was now a rich and popular figure, found his penury stricken brother shameful, saying there were

no beggars in his family, and forbade the couple from staying with him. Drung Drung Gyalchog then went to live at Gangta Eusarkha, but after arriving there, found that his brother ensured they would not find respite there, either. Drung Drung Gyalchog then moved to Paro Tshongdue and settled in a tent. But here again, a heretic spirit residing at nearby Hungrel cliff kept on terrorizing the couple. For Drung Drung Gyalchog the time had then come to reveal his spiritual power. And that he did; the spirit was quickly subdued. On its part the spirit, now recognizing Drung Drung's power, appeared before him and apologized for his malicious acts and further invited him to settle at Hungrelkha. He promised to assist Drung Drung in all ways if the holy master agreed to settle there.

Hungrel Gonsarkha and Rinpung Dzong

Realizing that the time had come to fulfill his prophecy, Drung Drung Gyalchog moved to the site of the present dzong, which was then a thickly forested area. Settling in a thatched hut, they gave the name Hungrel Gonsarkha to their new found homeland. The master adopted a new name, Hungrel Drung Drung. It is from here that the lineage grew, with later descendants of Drung Drung continuing to call themselves the line of Hungrel Drung Drung.

The spirit, keeping with his promise to serve the master, was on the move also, encouraging both people and the invisible guardian deities of the area to seek refuge in the master. Many did, making it possible for the master to spread his teachings far and wide. The people of Dophu Shari in particular adopted the master as their spiritual refuge.

But there was little peace owing mainly to the civil strife called Wangthap and Gungthap to the extent that the master was contemplating a return to Tibet. The people of Dophu Shari entreated him to stay on and promised to help him develop the building complex if he remained.

Drung Drung remarked to himself that Hungrelkha was not only a beautiful place but the landscape bore all the auspicious signs that support the establishment a religious site. The name itself, Hungrel, was an auspicious portent, with *Hung* symbolizing not only

the heart of the secret teachings, but the embodiment of all the Five Buddhas and *rel*, the continuity of his lineage. Convinced as he was by his own interpretation of the place, Drung Drung decided to stay on.

With that, the work on building a five storey structure on the top of Hungrel cliff started in earnest. People from Wangchang and Dophu, along with the invisible spirits of the area, including the Hungrel Gonpo, all came out in full measure to help in the construction. Historical records reveal that throughout the process, the master revealed many of his spiritual powers. One time, he requested his consort Gedun Zangmo to prepare a meal that could feed thirty workers, which he then ingested by himself before proceeding to drag each of the heavy pillars and beams from the forest floor to the construction site. At other times, he drove the timbers to the construction site. Once, as he was driving the timbers down to the construction site, he was met halfway by his consort who came to bring him tea and lunch. As they ate, the timbers took root and were allowed to remain there, giving the place the name Jasolgang. You can see even to this day the marks on the ground where the timbers returned to their tree form at this site. Drung Drung not only personally participated in the construction, but also took time in the mornings and evenings to give blessings and teachings to the workers. A saying by the people regarding this remains today:

'Listen, you the workers from Wangchang and Dophu;

The Hungrel Drung Drung is giving blessings.

Come you all, carrying your baskets and backpacks, to receive the blessings.'

On completion of the magnificent five storey structure which included a shrine room, bed room and an assembly hall, the Pel Khorlo Dampi Mandala was painted and consecrated in conjunction with a grand ceremony. Together with it, a new name was given to the dzong. The Hungrel Dzong became Densa Rinpung Dzong, as it was considered auspicious to acknowledge the name Rinpung given by Guru Rinpoche in the 8th century. Later, a temple was built for the local guardian deity Hungrel Gonpo below the dzong.

Establishment and building of Rinpung Dzong

According to Drung Drung Gyalchog Rinpoche's biography, the dzong was built during the second visit of Tshungme Gyal Wangjey (1428-1476) to Paro. Further information can be found on page 31-Ba-3 of the *Kagyu Serthreng* in an autobiography of Gyal Wangjey written by Sonam Chogden, where it relates that Gyal Wangjey first visited Paro in 1449 at 22 years of age. He is not believed to have stayed long in Paro during his first visit, and the autobiography makes no mention of the date of his return. What is mentioned is that Drung Drung Gyalchog followed him to Tibet upon the departure of Tshungme Gyal Wangjey. The second visit of Tshungme Gyal Wangjey to Paro is equally unclear, however it is mentioned in page 32-Na-3 of the above autobiography that he returned to Tibet in the year 1461 when he was 34 years of age.

On the contrary, there is a strong belief amongst the local people that his second visit took place in the year 1459 when he is said to have meditated for three years at Do Choten Gonpa. By this account, it would have taken at least five to six years for Drung Drung Gyalchog in following Gyal Wangjey to Tibet in 1449, undergoing meditation, getting married, producing two sons and then returning to Paro. Calculated accordingly, Rinpung Dzong must have been built after 1450s and completed latest by the year 1458, corresponding to the Tiger Year of the 8th rabjung.

The administration of the dzong by the successive descendants of Hungrel lineage

After Paro Rinchenpung Dzong had been built by Drung Drung until the time it was handed over to Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in the seventeenth century, five successive generations of the Drung Drung lineage were administrators of the dzong, namely:

1. Drung Drung Gyalchog Rinpoche, a contemporary of Gyal Wangjey
2. Namkha Gyaltsen, Gyalchog Rinpoche's son, a contemporary

of Drung Drung

3. Namkha Gyaltsen's son Zhenda Gyaltsen, a contemporary of Drung Nagi Wangchuck
4. Choden Legpai Lodro, a contemporary of Kunkhyen Pekar.
5. Choden Legpai Lodro's sons, contemporaries of Mipham Chogyal:
 - a. Choje Sonam Gyaltsen
 - b. Lodro Rinchen
 - c. Namgyal Dragpa

During the time of these three sons, the Hungrel Chozhi was divided into three parts and a term called Hungrel Lingsum was created. Subsequently, the administration of Hungrel Dzong was carried out by the following:

6. Choje Sonam Gyaltsen's son, Lagyen Chokpa, a contemporary of Yab Tenpai Nyima
7. Lagyen Chokpa's son Lama Drukgyal, a contemporary of Zhabdrung Rinpoche
8. Lama Drukgyal's son Lama Druk Samten

Up until Lama Druk Samten, the 8th in the lineage, Ama Hungrel Dzong, the upper palace of Chewekha, Gonsar Shedrubling, the lower palace of Aen Dechenling, Dophu Kortey Thang or Koten Thangkha founded by Drung Drung Dorje Wangchuck including Ney Samdrub Dechen, Geding Gonpa, Lhari Gonpa, Phuchung Gonpa and Sechu Gonpa were all administered by the successive descendants of Hungrel lineage with support from the people of Wangchang and Dophu.

The interim history of Paro Dzong

i. The handing over of Paro Dzong to the 'Dharma Raja Zhabdrung Rinpoche'

Through the blessings of past Buddhas and bodhisattvas and

materialization therewith of the deep prayers of all sentient beings, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal came to Bhutan and instituted the dual system of governance. He first established the Cheri Dudul Phodrang followed by Sangnag Zabdun Phodrang, Gyalsa Pungthang Dewachenpoi Phodrang, Druk Wangdue Phodrang and so forth. Slowly thereafter, the Thimphu Dogon Dzong also came under his control. Having thus laid a small foundation for the region, the comparatively cool climate of Thimphu was decided to be the summer retreat for the monastic body. Not long after, Paro was invaded by the combined forces of Mongol and Tibet, however, the Drukpa forces managed to repulse the invasion. This military strike precipitated Zhabdrung to better understand the strategic importance of Paro as a major site for defense and internal order. To this end, he decided to build a dzong there towards the later part of 1644.

Zhabdrung went to Paro and stayed at Druk Choding. While there he started to hunt for a suitable site for the construction of the dzong, visiting Chang Pelri, Jangsar, Labtsakha and Drangjekha, before one day the guardian deity of Rinpung Drak, Hungrel Gonpo, appeared before him, offering the whole valley of Paro to Zhabdrung Rinpoche.

During this time, Paro was ruled by Hungrel Lingsum, the descendants of Drung Drung. The chief of Hungrel Lingsum was Sonam Gyaltsen's son Lama Druk Samten, as well as his younger brother Lama Tashi, their uncle Lama Drukdra's sons Lam Kunchog Drukgyal and Lama Jinlab, while the second line of Hungrel Lingsum, consisted of Lodro Rinchen's successor Druk Odzer's eldest son Choje Drukdra, the younger son Choje Rinchen Drukgyal, and the third line of Hungrel Lingsum, were Choje Namgyal Drakpa's successor Samten Gyalpoi's son Lama Tsendhar Tashi and his sons Zilnon Wangpo and Tandin Wangyal. Together, all the lineages gathered to present themselves before the Zhabdrung at Druk Choding with a gift of armory to offer Hungrel Dzong to Zhabdrung. In making the presentation, they said that there was no better site in Paro than that of Hungrel Dzong upon which to build a new dzong.

Zhabdrung was very much pleased with this offering. He told them of the high esteem in which he had always held the people of Hungrel and that their offering would go a long way toward realizing the great objectives that he had formulated to benefit the people and the religion as a whole. Further, he said that the gift of armory was a very auspicious sign, one which indicated the dzong would serve as a good defense structure for the country in the future.

After accepting the offering, to reciprocate their good intentions, Zhabdrung issued an order thereby waiving any kind of tax or labor contributions by the people of Hungrel in future. Additionally, the order also directed authorities in other districts to accord warm welcome to the members of Drung Drung family. In addition to these benevolent gestures, Zhabdrung also agreed to pay the leaders for the cost of the site.

ii. The transformation of the dzong into a centre for turning the wheel of the dualistic system of governance

Soon after the Hungrel Lamas offered Hungrel Dzong to Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in 1644, the ruler began to demolish the old five storey dzong and in its place laid the foundations of the new, larger dzong, which consisted of the large central tower, assembly hall and other components as it stands today.

Since the old dzong was built by Drung Drung Rinpoche's own hands, the people rushed to collect every small piece of wood and stone during its demolition in the belief that it would help ward off any misfortune or illness. Some of these pieces were hung around the necks of people as a talisman. All those who watched as the beams and pillars were dismantled were highly impressed by their size, and they realized the previous building was not the work of ordinary hands.

On completion of the new dzong and its filling with the appropriate statues, *chotens* (reliquaries) and religious texts, Zhabdrung Rinpoche invited Karma Rigzin Nyingpo from Kongpo, Tibet in 1645 and the two together consecrated the dzong with a grand ceremony. Regarding Karma Rigzin Nyingpo, he was the reincarnation of

Rigzin Zhigpo Lingpa who in turn was the emanation of Lhase Damzin. Lhase Damzin was the seventh in the lineage of the great treasure revealer Sangay Lingpa. It is said that during the consecration ceremony there in and the air permeated by wonderful aromas. The occasion also saw the creation of a holy pill called Damzey Rinpung Rilbu which is believed to help to liberate any soul from the sufferings of the samsaric world.

With its new name, Rinchenpung Dzong, its influence extended as far as Dalingkha in the west, Phari in the north and Pasakha in the south, making Paro a centre of life and culture in the western region. The first governor appointed over the domain was Zhabdrung Rinpoche's own brother Choje La Ngonpa Tenzin Drukdra, whose life we will briefly explore below.

The successive governors of Paro

Yab Tenpai Nyima, the father of Choje La Ngonpa Tenzin Drukdra, came to Bhutan from Druk Ralung in Tibet to help spread the light of Buddhism. Yab Tenpai Nyima picked up a spiritual consort on the way and Tenzin Drukdra was born to the couple in the year 1602. Although his given name was Tenzin Drukdra he was later known as Choje La Ngonpa as a result of the alacrity with which he could recollect his past life, even at a very young age, as one called La Ngon Choje, a patron of Kunkhyen Pekar in Tibet. After Tenzin Drukdra grew up, he too left for Ralung, where lived with Zhabdrung and his family as he received all the religious teachings, eventually becoming a highly learned Buddhist master. Later, when Zhabdrung came to Bhutan, Tenzin Drukdra followed him as well. Known for his total dedication to Zhabdrung, he helped to vanquish both internal and external forces opposed to Zhabdrung. In recognition of his achievements, Zhabdrung went on to appoint him as the first *ponlop* (governor) of Paro in the year 1646. The names of subsequent ponlops that succeeded him are mentioned below in their chronological order:

1. Tenzin Drukdra, served as ponlop from 1646 to 1657
2. Ngawang Chodra

3. Ngawang Penjore⁴
4. Samten Pekar
5. Jamgon Ngawang Gyaltsen
6. Tenzin Norbu
7. Karpey Dondrub
8. Sherab Wangchuck
9. Pema Wangda
10. Druk Phuntsho
11. Druk Samdrub
12. Tha Drakpa
13. Tandin Chogyal
14. Gedun Gyatsho
15. Ponlop Haap
16. Takzig Drolma
17. Yonten Rinchen
18. Nim Dorje
19. Thinley Zangpo
20. Tshewang Norbu
21. First King of Bhutan Ugyen Wangchuck, 1878-1882
22. Thinley Tobgay, brother of Ugyen Wangchuck, 1882-1884
23. Dawa Penjor, 1885-1918
24. Tshering Penjor, 1918-1949
25. Third King of Bhutan Jigme Dorje Wangchuck, 1949-1952
26. Gyalse Namgyal Wangchuck, 1964-

Looking at the above list, there were as many as 26 governors who served in the seat of Paro ponlop. That Samten Pekar succeeded Ngawang Penjor as the governor is mentioned in the biography of Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye. Moreover, since it was during the time of the 8th Desi and when Jamgon Ngawang Gyaltsen was serving as the governor of Paro that Samten Pekar became the Paro ponlop, his name is placed after Ngawang Penjor. Similarly, Karpey Dondrub became the governor under the time of the 10th Desi, Gongsar Mipham Wangpo, by revolting against the government, and after his death was then succeeded by Sherab Wangchuck the order in which they became governors could be elucidated. As far as Pema Wangda

is concerned, in the list of the recipients of gifts from Sherab Wangchuck when the latter became Desi, there is mention of a Paro ponlop by the name Pema. Therefore, it is likely that Pema Wangda became the governor of Paro after the 13th Desi Sherab Wangchuck. Druk Phuntsho, on the other hand, went on to become the 14th Desi directly after holding the office of Paro ponlop, meaning he assumed the office of Paro ponlop after Pema Wangda.

As to who became the governors after Druk Phuntsho, this is related in the biography of Chogyal Shakya Rinchen. In this source, Druk Phuntsho was succeeded by Druk Samdrub; Druk Samdrub by Tha Drakpa; Tha Drakpa by Tandin Chogyal and Tandin Chogyal by Gedun Gyatsho. This succession is further confirmed when one considers it was Tandin Chogyal, who, during the tenure of the 13th Je Khenpo Yonten Thaye (1724-1784), patronized the painting of a thousand Buddhas in gold in the central tower of Paro Dzong and also the building of a new Buddha temple.

Our understanding of the order of governors may be further substantiated by the following story: One day when the Haa ponlop was on his way to make an offering at the temple of Jawog Nep, the local guardian deity below the dzong, his nephew Tazig Drolma usurped the seat of Paro ponlop, causing the Haa ponlop to flee to the watch tower which houses the present day National Museum. The people at the watchtower were taken by surprise at the sudden appearance of their governor, and it was they could do to bring out a goat skin for the governor to sit. However, the governor was highly pleased with their reception, commenting that the goat skin was a good sign for his future wellbeing. But during his respite, his nephew Tazig Drolma had sent the strongest of his attendants, named Drang Goleg, to kill him. Though the governor was significantly weaker than Drang Goleg, he nevertheless managed to kill the assassin through clever means.

Upon hearing of the usurpation and attempted murder, high government officials rushed to broker peace between the uncle and nephew. Ponlop Haap was appointed as the independent governor of Drukgyal Dzong with jurisdiction over six villages of Tsento. It was then that Ponlop Haap built the Zangdopelri temple at Taktshang.

iii. The names by which the various governors were known and their achievements

The names of some governors reflected their birthplace, while others bore religious names. For example, Tha Drakpa, Ponlop Haap and Kawang Mangkhey all bear names that indicated their birthplaces, while others like Sherab Wangchuck (also known as Kusho Situ) and Druk Phuntsho, known as Tenzin Drukdra, were religious names. In general, however, since the governors were initially appointed by the religious heads, the title conferred to them was that of *chila*. Later, it changed to ponlop in a show of respect by the people. Still later on, when the governors were appointed from amongst court attendants, they were addressed as either ponlop or *kusho*.

Some ponlops were highly intelligent and skilled persons while others were culled from the ranks of learned celibate monks. Other office holders were known for their physical strength or descended from noble lineages. In any case, there is sufficient evidence to show that each of these governors made particular contributions during his tenure as governor, either in their service of the nation or through their dedication to religious services on behalf of the country. Most notably, the building of both Paro Dzong and Drukgyal Dzong, which commemorated Bhutanese victory over Tibetan forces were undertaken in this way. Kusho Situ, for his part, installed the golden dome on the central tower of Paro Dzong, in addition to installing many statues inside the dzong. Karpey Dondrub, with material support from Chogley Sakya Tenzin, built the Paro Sang Chokhor monastery. Dawa Penjor restored the dzong to its original glory after it was burnt down by fire. The full list of the governors and their notable achievements is quite vast, and its scope extends beyond the limits of the present essay.

iv. Restorations carried out on the dzong after being destroyed by fire

Although, many of the dzongs built in other districts by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal were destroyed by fire and other

natural calamities, the Paro Rinpung Dzong remained intact for over 260 years after being built by Zhabdrung Rinpoche in 1645.

The first destruction of the dzong occurred in 1906 during the rule of governor Dawa Penjor. On that fateful day, corresponding to the 6th day of the tenth month of Fire Sheep year, the kitchen master Shari Bar Dorje was in his room trying to warm his tea in a fire pan when an errant spark caused the dzong to catch fire. Though Dawa Penjor's attendants, resident monks and the local community rushed to extinguish the fire, their efforts were in vain. The only remaining course of action was to rescue as many treasures as possible from within the dzong. These included the great *thongdrol* (large embroidery), several golden statues, the treasure cymbal, rolls of silk and brocade and dresses worn during the mask dances.

However, they could not remove the most important of all treasures, which that was the box of holy pills formulated by Zhabdrung Rinpoche, as well as the golden statue of Buddha from inside the assembly hall and the bodily remains of the great treasure revealer Tertön Sherab Mebar. It is said that out of the many treasures lost to the fire, Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck was most deeply disappointed to learn the holy pills of Zhabdrung were lost. Dawa Penjor was the most disturbed of all, falling unconscious for some time upon hearing the news. Upon regaining consciousness, he pledged in writing to the Zhung Deba Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck and the clergy his oath to restore the dzong to its original glory within one or two years at the most. Accordingly, renovation work began in earnest during the following year, that of the Earth Monkey, under the supervision of chamberlain Rithangpa Sigay, with senior carpenter Gedun from Paro Shomo and Zochung from Paro Chang heading the construction. In the course of the restoration, the original design of the five storey central tower was maintained, capturing continuity of spirit with the way it was previously built by the Zhabdrung. Further, no major changes in size were instituted on outer structures or the assembly hall, though the carpenters made every effort to enhance and update some aspects of the architectural design. As foresworn, the whole restoration was completed in two years time.

As a result of Bhutan's past battles with its neighbors, Rinpung

Dzong had a concealed underground passage leading to the river's edge below. Similarly, Donam Dzong, Ta Dzong and Zuri, a temple atop a nearby ridge, were also all connected to the river by such underground passages. Over time, each of these were degraded and were not repaired due to the comparative peace of modern times, where such defensive measures were deemed less necessary. As such, the passage connecting the dzong with the river was not renovated either during this early twentieth century reconstruction.

Regarding the key religious treasures inside the dzong, one of the most important was the two storey high golden statue of Lord Buddha of the three times. Initially consecrated by Khenchen Sonam Odzer, and interestingly, had made a prophecy during the ceremony that far in the future, the dzong would catch fire. Later, the Paro Chila Sherab Wangchuck took note of this prophecy and commissioned the Karsel Lhakhang at Deyangkha, installing in it three statues, those of the Buddha, Guru Rinpoche and Zhabdrung, each measuring two and half of a man's height, to be used as replacements inside the dzong in the event of such a disaster.

Therefore, after the restoration works were completed, the governor Dawa Penjore, on an auspicious day in 1909, corresponding to the 10th day of Iron Dog year, installed the Buddha statue as the main figure in the monks' assembly hall inside the dzong in conjunction with a grand ceremony. Similarly, he installed the Guru statue in the temple of the eight manifestations of Guru Rinpoche and the Zhabdrung's statue inside the Chagzo Lhakhang. After the removal of its three statues, the Karsel Lhakhang now laid empty. So Dawa Penjore further commissioned a replacement, this time a statue of Avalokiteshvara with hundred hands and eyes for installation at the temple.

It was but a six months period in which Dawa Penjore managed to have the images installed in place and with great joy, the dzong was consecrated in the sixth month of the Iron Dog year. This is the same Paro Dzong as it stands today, with its former magnificence undiminished.

The speech re-incarnation of Zhabdrung Rinpoche, Chogley Yeshe Nguldrub, was living at the time when Paro Dzong caught

fire. Therefore, it is likely he helped in making and consecrating the statues. As related in the Dzongkha version of Rainbows and Clouds published in 1999, a biography written by Her Majesty the Queen, Ashi Dorje Wangmo in honor of her father Yab Ugyen Dorje, page 118 relates that while the body of the big statue of Buddha inside the Assembly Hall was made by Jinzop Kota, Chogley Yeshe Ngudrub was requested to make the head. On his part, he is supposed to have engaged the skills of his spiritual son, Yongdra Tshampa Gosep, also known Kunga Gyaltsen, in executing the job. In addition, the account also mentions how Chogley Yeshe Nguldrub helped to draw the exact measurements for the body of Buddha statue.

vi. Present day Paro Dzong

a. The physical structure of the dzong.

The Paro Dzong bears the features of the three worlds – that of *svarga*, the earth and the world of the nagas (serpent deities, or *lu*). The world of nagas, is considered to be the lake beneath the dzong, which is also believed to be the residence of the guardian deity Jawo Nep. Evidence of a lake beneath the dzong can be discerned as there are two streams that flow out from below the dzong.

One time, about 43 years in the past, the streams dried up and a newly-formed lake appeared in the forest glade above Chang Nangkar village. These happenings disturbed the people's mind. Astrologers were consulted, and they confirmed that the lake below the dzong had indeed shifted itself to the forest glade. The government then ordered shamans and astrologers to do shift the lake back to underneath the dzong. Rituals and prayers were performed which requested the lake guardian to return to its original place, which it soon did, much to the surprise and happiness of all. As the waters at the new lake began to dry up, soon after the streams below the dzong began to flow once again.

The new, present lake site is next to Druk Hotel above the Paro International Airport. It is observed that even today, as the lake waters rise in height, the stream waters below the dzong become smaller and vice-versa. In any case, the lake below the dzong is

believed to be a store house of precious gems where many wealthy naga families reside. This is why there are palaces built for the eight great naga kings and others below the dzong. Until recently, there was a tradition that a young girl selected from the neighboring village of Phagtshangna would go around the dzong, making offerings to these nagas every time there was a *luthep*, or day auspicious for propitiating the nagas. For that, she could pick up all necessary offering materials from the government store. Such was the practice in the past, and it was believed that Bhutan in general and Paro in particular continually received the blessings of the nagas. There was also the belief that a beautiful girl would always be born in Phagtshangna a sign of the naga's blessings.

The middle part of the dzong is equated with the earth, and on that level live the high lamas and monks. Previously, government officials maintained their living quarters here. The soaring central tower, as the highest part of the dzong, is compared to the heavens above or the world of svarga, and as such is occupied by many temples and chapels which house key religious objects, including precious statues.

When it comes to the size of the dzong, it is 115 meters long and 75 meters wide. Excluding the attic, it has a height of 22 meters. The whole structure stands on a hillock that is supposed to resemble a heap of jewels. Looking up from the river, it appears as a five storey white monolith, but when viewed from above it seems to consist of four storeys as a result of the sloping earth below. There are two courtyards, one at a higher level than the other. The basement of the lower courtyard is mud and masonry work, and on it stands the house of the nagas. The level above is the granary. Added to them are two other storeys, all of constitute the dzong as a five storey structure when seen from the river side. Similarly, the higher courtyard has two levels below it, the basement of which consists of mud and masonry. The level immediately above is the granary and with two additional storeys, the upper end of the dzong has but four storeys. In this configuration, the attic, which has the living rooms of monks and offices of the Dzongkhag administration, is not included.

Historically, the granary stored not only foodstuffs but also military equipment. It is said that the quantity of grains stored within the granary was enough to sustain the regional population through years of battle or famine. Subsequently, after the system of paying tax in grains (kind) was discontinued, the granary became an empty space.

The dzong's roof is of corrugated iron sheets with a golden victory banner surmounting the roofs of the Chagdor temple, the Deb's palace, the temple of Buddha Akshobhya, the prayer hall and that of the monks' assembly hall.

The dzong originally had two entrances, one from the east and the other from the west. The western entrance was closed by Ponlop Dawa Penjore so that today the only entrance to the dzong is from the eastern side. This entrance is connected to the main dzong by a cantilever bridge which stands at a height equal of a two storey building. Should the bridge be removed for any reason then there would be no means to enter the dzong.

The central tower is a five storey structure as seen from the upper courtyard and a seven storey structure if measured from the lower courtyard. The two storeys of the lower courtyard consist solely of masonry work. The central tower is broad at the base and tapers towards the top in very much like that of shape reminiscent of a choten. At its broadest point, the base measures 33 meters and the narrow end 21 meters, while the broad end at its highest point measures 29.3 meters and the narrow end measures 18.5 meters. It has a height of 27.7 meters from the lower courtyard and 22.8 meters from the upper courtyard. There are balconies on all four sides. However, there are no special features that distinguish the front and back of the tower, leaving the means of determination to be discerning them according to the landscape. By this method, it may be said that the area facing southwest is the front and the part facing northeast, the direction of the National Museum, is the back side of the tower.

The dzong's main face is the portion oriented towards Chang village, namely, the southeast face. This part of the dzong houses the living quarters of high lamas and the Deb. The back part of the

dzong faces northwest in the direction of Dophu village, and in this part of the dzong is found the monks' toilet and kitchen.

In the central tower of the dzong is housed a statue of the goddess of longevity, oriented to face Chang village. That is why the women of Chang are supposed to be more beautiful than others in the valley. As the waist of the statue points toward Khangku village, the women there are believed to be more elegant. As the kitchen and the monk's toilet both face Dophu village, this part of the valley is reputed to be comparatively more fertile.

b. Religious treasures inside the dzong

Paro Dzong has one of the oldest thongdrols, a big religious scroll, in the country. Besides this, it has a wealth of other religious treasures both new and old, including the aforementioned statues built by Ponlop Sherab Wangchuck. Below are recounted some of the most well-known housed within the Dzong.

Just above the main entrance to the dzong is the Chagdor Temple. This temple has Vajrapani or Chana Dorje statue as the central figure. To the right of it is the temple dedicated to Buddha Akshobhya, the Mitrugpa Lhakhang. Inside the Chagzo Lhakhang is a big statue of Zhabdrung Rinpoche built by Sherab Wangchuck, the governor of Paro Dzong who is also credited for having built the Buddha statue inside the kunrey. The dukhang also houses a statue of Buddha, albeit larger in size and built by the governor Kusho Dawa Penjore. Right above the dukhang is yet another temple called Chusa Lhakhang, the central image of which is a statue of Zhingchong Wangmo. The Tsen Choten Lhakhang differs from the other temples in that rather than statues, it has eight stupas as the main objects of devotion.

There are also temples inside the central tower. On the fifth floor is the Lama Lhakhang, which has a statue of Vajradhara and those that depict the Kagyu lineage. Another shrine is found in the Tamdrin Lhakhang, with its statue of Buddha Amitabha, or Sangay Yoepadme. The Tsengye Lhakhang is on the fourth floor. The central figurine inside this temple is a statue of Guru Rinpoche built by Sherab

Wangchuck including representations of eight manifestations of Guru Rinpoche. Next to it is the Drolma Lhakhang in which a Tara fashioned out of pure silver and surrounded by twenty-one of her other forms are presented as the main images.

The third floor of the central tower consists of two temples, namely, the Gonkhang Chenmo dedicated to the three protective deities of Bhutan and Terton Lhakhang with the statue of Gonpo Mani. The name Terton Lhakhang was given to this temple because this is where the body of Terton Sherab Mebar was previously kept after he passed away. The first and the second floors have no temples in them, but rather consist of the living quarters of monastic teachers and the monastic body's central store.

Outside and to the northeast of the central tower is a temple built by Kusho Tshering Penjore's inner chamberlain Bongde Tandin. Called the Lhakhang Sap, it houses a statue of eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara. When it comes to religious texts, Kagyu scriptures are stored in the dukhang while others, like the Kunkhyen Kabum, Peling Chokhor, Kagyu Serthreng and Longchen Zodhen are all kept in the Chagzo. These are but a sampling of the myriad religious treasures inside the dzong, the full record of which lies with the government.

Paro Dzong as the center of religious activity and administration

After Paro Dzong became one of the most prestigious of all the country's dzongs, a monk body was thereafter instituted to carry out religious activities, performing prayers for the welfare of the nation and its people and upholding age old cultural traditions of the country. The monk body is headed by the Lam Neten, with the present Lam Neten being Dorje, a descendant of Zhabdrung Jigme Dorje. Today as many as 250 monks reside in Paro Dzong.

The exact date of the institution of a monastic body at Paro Dzong is unknown. According to the biography of Lama Drakpa Gyatsho written by Benchung Dharma, the first monk body of eighty monks was started in the late 17th century under the orders of Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye. Therefore, it is likely the first monk body was established during this time, when the second Paro Ponlop Ngawang Chodrak was also in power. This means that the

monk body at Paro Dzong was likely instituted during the time of Zhabdrung Rinpoche himself or during the time Tsang Khenchen's disciple Drakpa Gyatsho (1646-1719).

It may be noted that the earliest rulers of this country spent much of their time fighting external enemies and building dzongs across the country. The systematic creation of monasteries and establishment of monk bodies proliferated only after the fourth Desi, Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye (1638-1696). It is said that the monasteries at Dalingkha and Jangsar Dechen Choling under Kalimpong were also set up by him, institutions which remain today, under the jurisdictions of the Royal Government.

Considering that Paro was and is one of the main districts in the country, the monk body must have been certainly set up during this time, if not prior. In any case, it has consistently maintained its reputation as one of the top monastic institutions in the country.

Many hands went into making it so. The most notable personalities amongst them all were the 10th Je Khenpo Panchen Tenzin Chogyal (1701-1767) and the 25th Je Khenpo Sherab Gyaltsen (1772-1848). They are credited for the major repairs carried out on the *gonkhang*, or central chapel, and further contributing many religious texts and statues to the dzong. Additionally, they helped to bring about reforms in the ritual practices. It is for these reasons that the monk body residing Paro still undertake a particular ritual dedicated to these personalities. In the 20th century, the Paro monk body saw further improvements, as the fourth king of Bhutan helped increase the number of monks in the resident monastic body but further provided them with better facilities.

10. District administration

Before the Dzongda system was instituted, Paro Ponlop His Majesty Jigme Dorje Wangchuck, after becoming the third king of Bhutan, started to appoint *Dzongtshabs* to run the administration. The following list shows the names of the Dzongtshabs:

1. First Dzongtshab Dasho Kezang Dawa

2. Gelong Nyerchen Dep Tshewang Dorje
3. Bachu Phugyal
4. Dungnyer Drep Khangkup Yeshe

Thereafter and following the increased activities of the Dzongkhag administration, many underlying changes took place, leading to the post of Dzongtshab as being replaced by the district judge, while also retaining the post of Nyerchen as before. The list of the Nyerchens and district judges is given below:

1. Dasho Tamzhing Jagar
2. Dasho Gasep Kunga
3. Dasho Zhabthap Palden Dorje
4. Dasho Parop Dorje

i. Dasho Parop Lhabchu

Beginning in 1968, many more changes were instituted. The posts of the Nyerchen and Dronyer were abolished. Instituted in its place was the system of appointing *Dzongdas* under the umbrella of the Ministry of Home Affairs while the district judges fell under the control of the High Court. The list below shows the number of Dzongdas and district judges who were stationed at Paro:

1. Dasho Karma Dorje
2. Dasho Dago Tshering
3. Dasho Phadib Chagdor
4. Dasho Lhabchu
5. Dasho Hap Angay
6. Dasho Rinchen Tshering
7. Dasho Nakchu Tshering
8. Dasho Lhakpa Dorje
9. Dasho Pasang Tobgay
10. Dasho Jigme Tshultrim
11. Dasho Dophu Tshering
12. Dasho Sherab Tenzin

13. Dasho Jigme Zangpo – 2000

Thrimpons (District Judges):

1. Dasho Paljor Dorje
2. Dasho Chungsep Rinzin
3. Dasho Wachenpa Phub Dorje
4. Dasho Dorje
5. Dasho Tamzhingpa Rinchen
6. Dasho Chapchap Rinchen Dorje
7. Dasho Thinley Thogme
8. Dasho Sonam Tshering
9. Dasho Kunzang Tobgay
10. Dasho Adap Chagdor

Today the present Dzongdas and the Thrimpons are making every effort to fulfill the objective set by His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo in bringing Gross National Happiness to the people through consistent and highly visible advances throughout the district.

11. The widely known Paro Tshechu

The Paro Tshechu is the most renowned of all the *tshechus* (festival) in the country. The tradition of holding tshechus dates back to the consecration of Paro Dzong by Zhabdrung Rinpoche and Ponlop Rigzin Nyingpo in the 17th century. Ever since, the tshechu has continued to be an annual phenomenon, consistently growing in popularity.

In 1687, Zhabdrung Rinpoche completed 36 years of retreat. The same year, Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye was further promoting the tshechu celebrations. Soon after starting the Thimphu Tshechu Dromchen he introduced the Tsengye, Tungngam, Ging Tsholing, Ringa Chudru, Gyaldrü Pawi Ngacham and Raksha Mangcham dances to those of Shinje Phomo, Degay Cham and Hungon Cham that had been previously introduced by Zhabdrung. As such, the Paro Tshechu is one of the oldest tshechus in Bhutan.

In his autobiography, Drakpa Gyatsho (1646-1719) mentions

seeing the Tsengye and Raksha Mangcham dances at the Paro Tshechu held in the second month of the Fire Bird year. This tells us that the Paro Tshechu was held during his lifetime, and that it has been held in the second month of every year, a timing which continues to this day.

However, people do not know the exact date of the institution of the tshechu. Some say that it started after the thongdrol was completed, while others believe that it was introduced after Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye instituted the Lhamoi Dromchen at Thimphu, while still others contend it was started by none other than Zhabdrung himself.

The same inconclusiveness surrounds the origination of the timing of the tshechu. The common belief for the tshechu being held in the second month of every year is that during this time of the year the farmers have a respite from their farm work and, therefore, it is the best time for entertainment. Others posit the timing is the same as the original consecration of the dzong, or perhaps drawn from the scheduled thongdrol celebrations.

Regarding the venue, Kusho Dawa Penjore started to hold the tshechu on the grounds of Deyangkha after the dzong was burnt down by fire in the early 20th century. He built a mask dance hall for that purpose which is still used today. After him, Kusho Tshering Penjore added the Dramitse Ngacham and Peling Gingsum to the list of mask dances performed at Paro Tshechu. These dances are said to have been borrowed by him from Gangtey Gonpa, showing that the Layman's Dances at Paro Tshechu were instituted before their introduction at Thimphu Dromchen Tshechu.

12. The thongdrol, or large religious appliqué

The thongdrol depicts Guru Rinpoche as the central figure, accompanied by his two spiritual consorts and surrounded by the eight great primary manifestations of Guru Rinpoche, as well as Buddha Amitabha, Avalokiteshvara, Namgyalma, Zhabdrung Rinpoche and the image of the one who did the art work, Lam Ngawang Rabgye. It is believed that if you have the opportunity

to see the Thongdrol once in your lifetime, you will be liberated from the sufferings of the samsaric world. Such is the belief among the people that even if they do not have the time to go and see the tshechu dances during the rest of the festival, they do not miss the opportunity to see the thongdrol in the early hours of the last day of the tshechu.

Concerning the creation of this thongdrol, a certain chila deputed a man to Lhasa to acquire the materials for the thongdrol with a sack of rice for payment. He was instructed to buy the brocade from whoever he met first in Lhasa. Quite surprisingly, the first person he met in Lhasa was a merchant from China selling brocade. As per his master's instructions, he bought them all and brought them to Paro, and it is said that the amount purchased was just right for stitching the thongdrol.

Another version exists, which relates the Chinese merchant sold not brocade but rather a box of Chinese brick tea, inside which was found the face of Guru. A third story maintains the chila himself, disguised as a trader, went to procure the materials in Lhasa. As luck would have it, he ran into the treasurer of Lhasa on his arrival. Soon, the two had a bet as to whose gold was the best. That night a mystical man is said to have appeared before the chila and offered him a piece of gold for the forthcoming competition. Surely enough, the next day as the two men sat together to determine the comparative quality of their gold, the chila won the competition. As the loser, the Lhasa treasurer provided the chila with all the necessary brocade to stitch the thongdrol. However, later it so happened that there was not enough material to stitch the face of Guru. At that moment, two dakinis appeared to help, and they fetched the necessary materials from Shab Ribar Chum's house nearby. Whatever may be the story behind its creation, it remains that this thongdrol is unique in the country and is considered a great national treasure. Its special status is further enforced by the fact that it was stitched by none other than the greatest master of applique works, Lama Ngawang Rabgye.

However, Drakpa Gyatsho's biography says otherwise. According to it, the thongdrol was stitched under orders of Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye and is the handiwork of Drakpa Gyatsho. He was

one among many boys of the time recruited by the monastic body to be ordained as a monk. He was kept in Paro on a request to the government by Chila Ngawang Chodrak on the pretext of carrying out some painting commissions. In light of this story, Ngawang Chodrak must have lived before Drakpa Gyatsho.

It is uncertain as to when the thongdrol was actually fashioned. Going by the absence of Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye's figure on the thongdrol, it may have been stitched during the second Chila Ngawang Chodrak's time, before Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye ascended the golden throne. Notwithstanding the actual date of its completion, the thongdrol is the first of its kind fashioned in the country and the same one that survived the fire of Paro Dzong. Its long and significant history enables it to afford the best of blessings to those who see it. Any wear and tear on the thongdrol has consistently been all repaired by the government, most recently approximately twenty years ago, allowing it to remain today much like when it was first created.

13. The proceedings of the tshechu celebrations

Annually, beginning the 15th day of the first month, mask and folk dancers gather in the lower courtyard of the dzong. A *zhugdrel* ceremony is held and thereafter the dance practices begin. The final rehearsal takes place on the 5th day of the second month.

On the day following the final rehearsal, the local guardian deity Jawog Nep is invoked at the start of the tshechu by way of a simple ceremony and mask dance performances. Then on the 10th day, a shaman, accompanied by five young girls dressed in their finest regalia, goes to the nearby spring water called Lam Tshelkha to make offerings to the mermaid there. Afterwards, the shaman casts forth an arrow to divine the nature, good or bad, of things that will come to pass during the coming year.

Prior to all of these events, however, the monk body has to perform the Lama Gongpa Dupi Tshechu Soldeb Leo Dunma ritual from the 9th to the 15th day of the second month in very much the same way as it was first instituted by Zhabdrung Rinpoche. The initial

dance where performers don their masks takes place in the lower courtyard on the 11th day. The agenda for the day includes Zhana, Durda, Shinje Yabyum, Dege Cham, Hungnon Cham, Boe Cham and Dramitse Ngacham. It is when the *zhana*, or black hat dance, is performed that the cymbal discovered by the treasure revealer, Terton Sherab Mebar, revealed from the Nub Tshona Pata lake, is brought out and played to the public.

It is also the day when the senior comedian stands by the doorway of the dzong, waiting for the first person to arrive to witness the tshechu. He removes the person's lunch pack and takes it to the dance ground, where in an act of having a picnic with his other friends, the lunch pack is laid out in between them. But prior to its unpacking, the weight of the lunch pack is gauged, with a heavy lunch pack portending a good harvest for the coming year and vice versa.

Beginning this day, there are continuous mask dance performances, along with folk dancing and Wochupi Zhey. The Wochupi Zhey is first performed at Dzongdrakha before being displayed at Paro Tshechu in the belief that it originated there. The last of its performances also takes place at Dzongdrakha after the Paro Tshechu, giving rise to the common saying that the Paro Tshechu begins at Dzongdrakha and ends at Dzongdrakha. This further means that the Dzongdrakha Tshechu and Paro Tshechu are staged at the same time. To this end, there is also a saying which goes:

The Taktsang Tshechu at the upper end of Paro valley;

The Dzongdrakha Tshechu at the lower end of Paro valley;

The Paro Tshechu in the middle of them all is scheduled to start together.

For us all, known for our beautiful shirts, the time has come to go and witness the tshechus.

The Paro Tshechu takes place at the grounds of Deyangkha from the 12th day onwards. It is here that the various mask dances like the Shinje Yabyum, Zhana Ngacham, Boe Cham, Peling Gingsum, Acho Phento and Shawa Shakhi are performed. In performing the

Shawa Shakhi or the Stag and Hound dance, the dancers descend to the ground from a house on a ridge which belongs to the descendants of Drung Drung. The reason for the dance to emerge from this house is that it was through Drung Drung that it was first introduced at Paro Tshechu, as he had in turn borrowed it from Chang Gangkha in Thimphu, the seat of Nyima. It is also in memory of the dance being first introduced at Paro Tshechu that there is a custom of making offerings to the deities within the house and thereafter adorning the stag with a silken scarf. All of the expenditures that go in for the various offerings are still today borne by the government. Presently, the house is occupied by a man called Getey Phurba, who is a descendant of Drung Drung.

The other interesting part of tshechu history is the grand reception that was once accorded by the people of Hungrelkha to the Paro Ponlop upon the initial arrival of his procession at the tshechu grounds. This reception was solely arranged by the people Hungrelkha and no others. For this reason, the nine households that constituted Hungrelkha were called the ‘extraordinary hosts’ and were allocated reserved VIP seats during the festival. Other privileges included receiving free tea and lunch all throughout the days of tshechu.

The 13th day of the tshechu consists of several dances, including the Durda dance by the monks, Tung Ngam, Pholey Moley, Gendru Pawo, blessings by the comedians, another dance which reveals the release of the stag from custody, a ritual ceremony by the comedians and lastly the Dramnyen Choje. The 14th day program starts with the performance of Shinje Yabyum by the monks followed by dances like the Raksha Mangcham and Jela Tongdhenpa. The Jela Tongdhenpa is performed by a comedian. He would be dressed up in *gho* (Bhutanese male dress) and *patang* (ceremonial sword) and would go around displaying himself to the crowd. The day ends with the drum dance, or Dramitse Ngacham.

The final day of the tshechu is on the 15th day of the month. The day begins early in the morning around 3 o’clock, when the thongdrol is taken from the dzong to the tshechu ground in a long procession. It is displayed on the walls of the five storey building

for public viewing and prostration. On the grounds and in front of the thongdrol are be laid out butter lamp offerings and ritual cakes in elaborate arrangements and the morning air reverberates with the sound of monks praying, beating drums and clashing of cymbals. In the early days, the governor would head the prayer sessions in front of the thongdrol dressed in monk's robes. Now that there is no system of appointing governors, the head abbot of the Paro monk body, along with the district administrator and the district judge, leads the prayer sessions. The devotees also partake in the prayers by making offerings of money to the monks, which is considered a great virtue.

Once the prayer sessions are over, laymen stage the Dramnyen Chozhey dance and thereafter folk dances are performed by the women. The thongdrol is removed around 8 o'clock and then returned to the dzong in another long procession.

This is also the day when the statue of Zhabdrung called the Zhabdrung Khamsum Zilnon is brought to the tshechu grounds from the dzong in a procession led by the Lam Neten, the district administrator, the district judge and other senior officials of the Dzongkhag. The dances of this day include Pacham, Ging Tsholing, Guru Tsengye and Ringa Chudru. But the highlight of the day is a show by a comedian, this time, he dressed up like a mermaid and enacts giving birth to a child. The day culminates in the performance of Choje Dance. The statue of Zhabdrung Khamsum Zilnon is then taken back to the dzong in a long procession as people stand alongside in the hopes of receiving its blessings. This is also a moment in which those assembled pray that may see the tshechu yet again the next year. Once inside the dzong, there is a Zhugdrel ceremony in the hall of the Dukhang followed by the performance of Wochupi Zhey. It is almost 5 p.m. when all the day's activities are over. The following day, which is the 16th day of the tshechu, the dancers make an offering to the guardian deity Jawog Nep in thanksgiving for his blessings, marking the formal conclusion of tshechu for the year.

The Paro Tshechu differs from other festivals in that there many performances staged by the comedians signal good or bad

omens for the people and the nation as a whole. In fact, the senior comedian assumes the role of the local guardian deity, and many attendees believe his projections are extremely accurate. Altogether, Paro Tshechu is a festival of colors, community and culture. The people are adorned in their best clothes during this time, and they are laden with packed feasts and drinks to enjoy for the duration of the day. Given its popularity, attendants are not limited to residents of the valley itself, but rather it attracts visitors from throughout the country, and increasingly, from around the world.

14. Summary

Places of interest in and around Paro Dzong

a. Nyame Zam (Bridge)

One of the beautiful structures around Paro Dzong is the Nyame Zam, or Nyame Bridge. It is the best of its kind in the country and still retains the traditional cantilever construction. Regarding the name Nyame, it is derived from a nearby village. Standing at the head of the vehicular road, the Nyame Zam is in fact the doorway to Paro Dzong and where all receptions take place.

Like many things surrounding Paro Dzong, nobody can discern the exact time of its construction. What can be said with certainty is that all those who lived before Drung Drung Rinpoche above the dzong such as the 14th century Buddhist master Kunkhyen Longchen, Kechog Barawa, and the 15th century adept Thangtong Gyalpo, who built the Dungtse Lhakhang, made use of this bridge to cross over the river. Moreover, since the highway to Thimphu across the Jela Pass begins from this bridge, it may have existed a long time ago. Mention is also made in the autobiography of Drung Drung about this bridge but with a different connotation. He calls the bridge Nyame Chakzab, indicating that the bridge was probably built by Drubthob Chakzab. In any case, the bridge as it stands today is the one built after the original was washed away by flood in 1859. This flood, and the flood which occurred simultaneously in Punakha is said to be the ill effect of removing Zhabdrung Jigme Norbu from his seat.

Below the bridge is a lake and it is said that the blessed could actually see the skull of Hungrel Drung Drung in it. Others might see it travelling by night in the form of a blue light between this bridge and the new bridge at Kyichu. In fact, one of the water carriers of Kusho Tshering Penjore claimed to have seen the skull. Lore surrounding this skull also includes the blessings it was thought to bring to the household that kept it, in terms of increased crop yields and cattle heads. Driven by greed, the nine households of Hungrel decided to divide the skull among themselves rather than keeping it in turns as before. They took it to a large boulder below the dzong with the intention to break it into pieces when the skull flew away into the river. The picture of this boulder with the cut marks on it is given here and can still be seen today on the way to Jangsarpa temple from the dzong.

Next to the bridge are eight chotens. These were built by the Kusho Tshering Penjore in memory of his wives namely, Ashi Tashi Pem from Khangku, Ashi Bau and Namgyal from Tsendona. Others were built each in the name of Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck and some of his relatives. These chotens are of the kind called Drime Namnyi and said to be the first ever to be built in the country.

b. Paro Ta Dzong

The watch tower above the dzong was built in 1649 by the first governor of Paro, Tenzin Drukdra. Today, it houses the National Museum of Bhutan.

c. Jawog Neykhang

The main guardian deity of Paro Dzong is called Hungrel Gonpo. There is a small temple dedicated to him below the dzong against the rock. His real palace, however, is in a cave above the temple. There you can see a figure of person in rock which is supposed to be a manifestation of Hungrel Gonpo. Since Drung Drung Rinpoche had appointed him to be the protective deity of Palden Drukpa, all those who live nearby the dzong or work in the dzong go to seek his

protection. The good thing about this particular deity is that unlike other deities of his kind he is bound to this particular place, and he offers protection only to those who willingly seek his power.

d. Ugyen Pelri Phodrang (Palace)

There is a glade next to the temple of the guardian deity which is believed to be his garden. Later, Kusho Tshering Penjore built a palace on this vast ground called the Ugyen Pelri Phodrang. It is said that Kusho Tshering Penjore deputed his attendants to both Tibet and India to determine a beautiful template for the building of this palace and that he chose the design of the central tower of Samye Monastery from amongst the many designs presented to him.

Another version relates that the palace was built by an expert carpenter called Tshampa Go Serpo, a student of Chogley Yeshe Nguldrub who replicated the design of Namgyal Choling, a monastery which lies behind Sangnag Choling Monastery in Paro. It was here in this palace that the royal marriage of the third king with Ashi Kezang Wangmo took place in 1950, with the name Ugyen Pelri Palace subsequently given to it.

e. Jangsarpa Lhakhang

This temple lies a little below Paro Dzong. It is said that Drung Drung Choden Legpai Lodro's eldest son Neten Rinpoche wanted to make a statue which replicated the Jowo Buddha image of the Lhasa Jokhang, and he sought to install it in the Hungrel Dzong as the main treasure. He went to Lhasa and retained some of the best sculptors and craftsmen from Nepal to do the job for him.

Once the statue was completed, it was transported to Paro by way of Phari Chimla pass. However, porters encountered a big problem on the way. Upon crossing over into Bhutan and reaching Wododrak, they could not get the statue through the narrow passage. Left with no other alternative, they then made the decision to take the statue apart. At that juncture, the statue spoke, telling them not to dismantle it and then directed them how to get through. In the process, the right knee of the statue struck the rock, leaving a still-

visible impression.

On reaching the site of the temple, there was a grand reception arranged by the family members of Drung Drung and the local people. After the reception they began to transport the statue to the dzong. But again, it could not be moved. As the people tried further on, it spoke again, saying that his destiny lay there. A new temple was built around that place and given the name Jangsarpa, and is also referred to as Jansgsaphu.

In retrospect, the fact that Drung Drung had to build a new temple for the statue was really a blessing in disguise for him and his family. This is because Hungrel Dzong eventually went into the hands of Zhabdrung, at which point the descendants of Drung Drung had to live in this temple.

Today the temple has a Kagyur written in gold letters, compiled by Namkha Gyaltsen in memory of his late father Drung Drung Gyalchog. The other important treasure includes a self created statue of the god of longevity (Tsepadme) that emerged from the body of Drung Drung Gyalchog, a similar statue that contains the tongue of Drung Drung which would not burn in the cremation fire, and a number of Jangchub Choten. The vast repositories of culture that lie within make this temple very much like the 108 temples built by the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo, and is very holy indeed.

f. The second Karsel Lhakhang

The temple next to the steps leading into the dzong is called Karsel Lhakhang. It was built by the chamberlain of Kusho Tshering Penjore, Bangdep Tandin. However, another Karsel Lhakhang, at the grounds of Deyangkha, was built during the time of Kusho Situ, the dance hall (building) constructed by Kusho Dawa Penjore and the palace by Kusho Tshering Penjore for his residence.

Elders say that Deyangkha was originally not as spacious as it is now. The ground was expanded by Kusho Tshering Penjore for holding tshechus and other festivities in later years. During Kusho Tshering Penjore's time there were horse races conducted in this area on the last day of the tshechu.

g. Gonsarkha Lhakhang and Endruphu

The Gonsarkha Lhakhang was built by Drung Drung Gyalchog as his second residence after appointing his son Namkha Gyaltsen to hold the seat of Hungrel Dzong. In the later years, Drung Drung Choden Legpai Lodro also stayed in this temple, but it so happened that he caught leprosy and shifted to a nearby cave called Endruphu. There he meditated for six long years to finally attain the highest state of being. With this accomplishment, he also made sure that the descendants of Drung Drung would never catch leprosy in future and for all of that he was given the title Sangdag Legpai Lodro.

The central figure inside Gonsarkha temple is a statue of Drung Drung, which contains yet another small statue fashioned from dough. After fashioning the smaller statue, Drung Drung is believed to have asked it whether it could play his leadership role in the future and the statue is supposed to have replied that he could. Endruphu cave has other things, including a self-created holy rock scripture, the ceilings which bear the impressions of the sun, moon, stars and a self created mandala of the deity Demchog. As a result of these auspicious signs and relics, it is believed that whoever pays a visit to this place would be safe from leprosy.

h. Silripang and Jangchub Silmipang

Although the grounds below Deyangkha extend as far as the Nyame Zam which used to be the highway to Thimphu, Kusho Tshering Penjore had it fenced, shifting the highway to the other side of Lungchungna village. Then in a further development, the government in 1961 established its first development office here and today the area is the centre for Teachers Training College.

Drung Drung Gyalchog Rinpoche and his life

Phajo Drugom Zhigpo, the foremost of the Kagyu masters to introduce Drukpa Kagyu in Bhutan in the 12th century had seven children. The eldest of the children was Pha Dampa Sangay. Pha Dampa Sangay's reincarnation was Dampa who succeeded his father as directed. Dampa, after handing over to Khampa Sonam Gyalpo

the properties at Chubar Doden, went to meditate in the meditation centers established by his parents. Afterwards, he established a new meditation center at Dechenphug and handed over to his own son Druk Kunzang Dorje. Kunzang Dorje had a son who was the reincarnation of his father who was called Trulku Loden Gyalpo. Loden Gyalpo in turn had two sons namely, Gyalchog and Gyalzom. The two as a child would never leave the sides of their father and as such they were given the pet name Drung Drung.

a. Education and his future undertakings

Drung Drung Gyalchog Rinpoche followed Tshungme Gyal Wangje to Tibet. After receiving his education he returned to Bhutan and went on to build the Hungrel Dzong as explained above. But more than anything else he helped to subdue all the heretic spirits in and around Hungrelkha which earned him many supportive families in a short period of time. Not only that, even the patrons of his former master Gyal Wangje turned to him, making him their chief religious master.

Now that he was a powerful figure and following the requests of his wife, children and his patrons he seized Gangtakha and Gangta Eusarkha from his younger brother Drung Drung Gyalzom in a revenge for the ill treatment meted out to him in the beginning. But during Tshungme Gyal Wangje's second visit to Paro, he brought about a truce between the two brothers. Drung Drung Gyalzom's properties were returned to him and the later descendants even went as far as establishing intermarriages among them.

In the year 1496, Drukchen Ngawang Chogyal (1465-1540) and Drukpa Kuenley visited Paro for the first time. The Drung Drung brothers played host to the visitors. Drukpa Kuenley, however, sensed the remnants of ill feelings among the brothers and exposed them in these lines:

*Drung Drung Gyalchog and Gyalzom;
What use is there if you cannot realize your own mistakes
and sending your minds hovering around?*

On his part, Drukchen Ngawang Chogyal ventured out to establish as many monasteries as possible in and around Gangtakha beginning with Druk Choding. And Drung Drung, not to be left behind, thought that the best possible help to the people (and perhaps a very good source of revenue) was to set up water mills around the places. So he went about setting them up in the villages like Drakwang Bara Neyphu, Jangsar Gabteng, Jalung Kewang, and Dophu. That caused people coin this saying:

Please don't raise your knees; Drukpa will establish monasteries.

Don't let your nose run; Hungrelpa will set up water mills.'

b. Religious ventures

When Drung Drung Rinpoche became advanced in age, he appointed his eldest son Kunkhyen Namkha Gyaltsen as his representative in the Paro Dzong. He himself settled at Gonsarkha Shedrubling Gonpa, above the Rinpung Dzong. Then on a visit to Chubjakha one day, he found another place that appealed to his eyes. Lying above Densa Samtenling, the seat of Kunkhyen Drime Odzer on the grounds of Chewekha, on the right of which stood Zechukha, the seat of Kechog Barawa, was a site on which he thought of building a monastery for himself. But first, he wanted to find out its suitability. He dug his walking stick into the ground and prayed. Quite surprisingly, the stick, fashioned out of a juniper, started to grow immediately, signaling the auspiciousness of the place. A big monastery was built, which he named as En Dechenling. Later even the seat of Kunkhyen Drime Odzer was handed over to him. Drung Drung named En Dechenling as Zimkhang Gongma and the seat of Kunkhyen as Zimkhang Wogma. En Dechenling was transformed into a pure monk body and Zimkhang Wogma into a center for Tantric studies.

Drung Drung then went on to impart the highest of realizations to his wife, Gedun Zangmo, attendants and others alike who came to receive his teachings. These disciples, including servants, in a

display of their meditative powers and spiritual enlightenment, have left behind many a hand and foot print on the surrounding rocks. Further, Drung Drung also instituted a ritual performance called Dotor Chenmo dedicated to the protective deity Yeshe Gonpo with the tax levied upon his patrons. The week long ritual used to be performed along with mask dances like Shinje Cham, Zorcham and Gingcham every year to the merriment of the people of the area. The same ritual with three additional mask dances, namely, Rigon Phomo, Tsencham Shenpi Tshog and Hungon Dege Cham were later on introduced in Paro Dzong.

c. The last days of Drung Drung

After having lived a life dedicated wholly to religious activities and after giving teachings on the impermanence of life to his wife, children and disciples, he then passed away peacefully. But when he was cremated by his wife and children there emerged from his body two statues: one a self created image of Gonpo Tsepadme and the other an image of Avalokiteshvara. His heart, tongue and entire head did not burn in the cremation fire, thereby displaying a spiritual attainment of the highest order. On their part, his wife and children went on to build a statue of Tsepadme and a Jangchub Choten in his memory besides compiling a Kagyur text and sending out many offerings to temples in Bhutan and Tibet.

16. Estimated dates

Phajo Drugom Zhigpo's biography does not contain much information as to when others of his lineage were born and died. The few stories there are at present our only means of knowing anything. One of them is the following. When Phajo was about to pass away in the year 1247, he looked at his son Dampa and said, 'You have concealed a son from Drokmo Budrenma, the lady from Wang. He is now three years old.' On hearing this, Dampa felt ashamed and prostrated before his father. The father in turn said, 'You do not have to feel shy about it. Bring him over. He will be helpful in upholding the Dharma. Call him Kunzang Dorje.' According to this story, Kunzang Dorje must have been born around 1244. Further,

the timing of Jamyang Kunga Sengye (1314 – 1347) being invited to Dechenphug during the time of Trulku Loden Gyalpo, Kunzang Dorje's son, and Loden Gyalpo's son Drung Drung Gyalchog, and in turn following Tshungme Gyal Wangje to Tibet at the age of 22 (corresponding to the year 1449), gives us a feeling that Drung Drung Gyalchog must have at least attained the age of 15 or 16 by that time. This also means that he should have been born around 1432 or 1433. To this end, when Drukchen Ngawang Chogyal visited Paro for the second time in 1504, he found that Drung Drung had passed away and his religious rites were being performed. From this, it is highly likely that Drung Drung Rinpoche must have died when he was approximately 71 or 72 years old.

17. The later day descendants of Drung Drung

The Hungrel Lams have, since the beginning of Zhabdrung's visit to Paro, served him with heart and soul. From helping to drive back the first Tibetan invasion launched by Tsang Desi to eventually offering the dzong to Zhabdrung, their loyalty was unwavering. Such dedication and loyalty were shown by the earliest Lams of Hungrel through to the later day descendants of Drung Drung that have lived to serve the country well. There are several sources which show that the family served in varying capacities both the monk body and civil administration.

At the time Zhabdrung came to Bhutan, the two most powerful families in Paro were the Hungrelpa and Zarchen Choje. Although they were bound through intermarriage, the Hungrelpas never forgave the contempt showered on them by the Zarchenpas one time when they were in a house together at Gepteng. They were further hurt when the Zarchenpas, in order to win a greater favor from Zhabdrung, made offerings to him over and above what was agreed between them.

This ill feeling remains to be seen even today. Every year the Hungrelpas and the Zarchenpas fling *torma* (ritual cakes) against each other with the intention to harm the other party. It is believed that one time in the past when such cakes were flung at each other, the Chubjakha guardian deity is supposed to have destroyed the sight

of Zarchenkha guardian deity and the Zarchenkha deity in turn destroyed the hearing of Chubjakha guardian deity. Therefore, when the rituals are performed today, the Zarchenpas have to light a fire even by day indicating that their deity is blind. And on the contrary, when the Hungrelpas perform their ritual, they have to make the loudest of noise indicating that their guardian deity is unable to hear.

Yet another story is that after the Hungrel Dzong has been offered to Zhabdrung, there came about a Hungrel Lam by the name Tamdrin Wangyal. He had a son called Zilnon Wangpo who in turn fathered four children. The eldest of those children, Lama Druk Gyatsho, was a great womanizer, and married several times. Since many of them were other men's wives, he had to pay a lot of compensation to the husbands, thereby draining his treasury and having to sell most of his land. This poverty finally compelled him to leave in the direction of Karpey. There too he got married and fathered six sons. The second of the six sons, Lama Druk Tenzin, returned to Paro to manage what was left of his father's property. Though he married and had nine children, this was a period of great difficulty for the Drung Drung descendants.

Lama Druk Tenzin had a son who was called Druk Samphel (1652-1730), and he and his family were living in miserable conditions. Seeing that, one day Paro Chila Ngawang Chodrak summoned him to the dzong and expressed his deep concern regarding their unfortunate conditions. As the Paro Dzong was offered to Zhabdrung by the Hungrelpas, he said, there was need to pay back the gratitude. If that has not happened until then, it was because of the battles and other preoccupations. Therefore, he said that he was going to pay them the cost of land.

Saying so, Paro Chila Ngawang Chodrak not only paid the cost of the land to the Hungrelpas but gave them many gifts which included cattle. Naktshang Sumling was also returned to them. Further, except during winter, they were waived of the compulsory labor contributions in transporting goods for the government. They were also rewarded with high positions whenever they visited any other district. Thus, after many years of suffering, happiness

eventually returned to the descendants of Drung Drung Rinpoche.

From then onwards, the successive governors including other authorities in the dzong have always held them in high respect. The Hungrel gup was considered as the chief of all gups in the district and the nine households of Hungrelkha were given a special place during the Paro Tshechu, in keeping with the wishes of Zhabdrung as enshrined in his order to continually uphold the Hungrelpas.

18. The significance of Paro Dzong

Paro Valley is one of the foremost valleys in Bhutan to receive the light of Buddhism and also is one blessed by Guru Rinpoche, who is considered to be the second Buddha. A home to the five goddesses of longevity and where many a past Buddhist masters came and preached, the location of Paro with Tibet directly to the north and India immediately to the south also meant that from early on, Paro was a trade centre of the western region and informally considered the second capital of Bhutan.

The same could be said of Paro Dzong. It was one of the main centres of governance and one that withstood many a past invasion from Tibetans and Mongolians. The country's National Assembly, beginning from the second session until the completion of Thimphu Dzong in 1968, were all held in Paro Dzong. Further, this dzong was the site of the signing of several friendly treaties with our neighbors. In 1969, the government initiated the country's first socioeconomic development activities and Paro was a forerunner in this field. Initially, Paro Dzong was the main center of governance in the western region and many governors were appointed here, the first being Zhabdrung's own relative, Choje Tenzin Drukdra. A dzong initially consecrated by Zhabdrung himself, it continues to be a very important centre, even presently in the 21st century.

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THE SACRED PLACES OF PUNAKHA DZONG

Lopon Jigme Chogyal

The name alteration of Punakha Dzong

Long before the arrival of the *drubthob* (siddha) Palchen Nagi Rinchen, the Punakha Valley was seen to be located in the middle of the two rivers, i.e., Pho Chu and Mo Chu, which was called Chu Bug Nang (in the middle of rivers). Even at present, there is a geog called Chu Bug Nang under the Punakha district and the inhabitants of that area are called Chu Bug Nangpas.

Chu Bug Nang

Later, the residents of this area shortened and abbreviated the name of the place from Chu Bug Nang to Bug Nang, omitting the first word. For the well-being of the sentient beings and with the aim to liberate his mother from samsara (*khorma*, or the wheel of existence), Drubthob Nagi Rinchen came to Bhutan and undertook to build a small structure in the middle of the two rivers which was called Bug Nang by the residents. However, the drubthob failed to comprehend the accent of the Bhutanese and called it Puna similar to the accent of the Indians.

Puna

Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal arrived in the land of the Lho Mon Kha Zhi in the 17th century (1616) and was invited to celebrate the consecration ceremony of the newly established monastic institute in Punakha. While the celebration was in progress, the people of Punakha swarmed like buzzing bees with smiling faces and offered substantial amount of wealth that were piled (*pung*)

before him in order to pay homage and tribute to him. He was so impressed and deeply touched by the kind behaviors of the people and named the area as Pung Thang Kha (Plain of Piled Wealth) and the place came to be known as Pung Thang Kha.

Pung Thang Kha

During those days, there were very few literate persons who could pronounce the name of the place correctly. Most of them preferred to call the area Punakha rather than Pung Thang Kha. Then the precise name of the place gradually deteriorated into Punakha, which continues to this day.

Punakha

The dzong was established in the middle of a spacious area called *thang*, or plain, surrounded by the two important rivers of the kingdom, Pho Chu from the right and Mo Chu from the left, and named Thang Dzong (Fortress in the Plain). Later, however, the dzong was called Pung Dzong and the structure above took on the name Thang Dzong.

The construction site of the dzong

Punakha Dzong, established in the heart of the southern land of four approaches, is blessed with several sacred places which contributes to the special qualities of the dzong. To the north of the dzong is where the Indian Drubthob Nagi meditated, now called Sonam Gasa. A huge boulder was split in two by the drubthob by means of *namchag* (iron from the sky, i.e., meteoric iron) to liberate his mother, who was trapped within the rock. Then, for the well being of his mother and all sentient beings, he built three stupas in the same area.

To the northeast of the centre, there are two sacred pilgrimage sites, one above the other, discovered by Guru Padma Sambhava called Ugyen Phug. To the east of the dzong is a pilgrim site called Tshoda Langpoi Ne. To the northwest in Khuruthang is a sacred temple in which Guru Tsokey Dorje (Lotus-Born) is the

main statue and was made by the great drubthob. In addition to this temple, is the Khyime Lhakhang built over the spot where Druk Gon Kunga Legpa had subdued and pinned down the demon of Dochola.

In the centre of the above listed sacred sites, in a flat area resembling an elongated wooden bowl for offering tormas, which is the lower part of the spur stretching down from Jiligang like the snout of a sleeping elephant, stands the dzong. The sacred place is also adorned by the two rivers: the Mo Chu Gangmo Zang that first meanders sluggishly and then, as it reaches the dzong area, suddenly picks up a swift flow, whirling to and fro, resembling the movement of a young lady; the milky Pho Chu, descending from Gang Rinchen Dzo in the north, rushes down the right side as if in a hurry.

The coming of the Zhabdrung to the south

From the sutras, it reads thus:

The ocean, the dwelling place of the crocodiles,
Alter to the force of the waves,
The devoted disciples in the service of the sentient beings,
Always blessed and favoured by the Buddhas and
bodhisattvas.

Those devoted to serve living beings are seen and believed to do the best and in return, are always favoured and rewarded by the Buddhas and bodhisattvas for their compassion, sincerity, generosity and hard work. They strive to liberate sentient beings from sufferings in samsara. Similarly, the nation builder and great warrior, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, came to Bhutan in the 17th century to serve the people of Monyul. It is indeed, a wonder that the Zhabdrung, born in Tibet at the monastery of Gardong near the oldest Drukpa establishment called Druk Jangchubling in the U province, arrived in the south. His coming to the south was supported by several symbolic events.

The most remarkable event that changed the Zhabdrung's life

in Tibet was his identification as the true reincarnation of the great Drukpa scholar, Kunkhyen Pema Karpo, who was the reincarnation of the founder of the Drukpa Kagyu School, Drogon Tsangpa Gyare Yeshe Dorje. Unfortunately, the identification of the reincarnation was challenged by another contender, Pagsam Wangpo, who was the son of the hereditary prince of Gongye, a powerful principality in the Yarlung valley of Tibet. The alternate's identification was fully supported by the ruler of Tsang province, Tsang Depa Tensung Wangpo. He was then recognized and installed as the incarnate in Pema Karpo's monastery, thereby making the Zhabdrung's position in Tibet precarious and risky. In the meantime, the Zhabdrung succeeded his father as the 18th prince-abbot of Ralung monastery and devoted himself chiefly to religious studies. During this period, Phuntsho Namgyal succeeded his father Tensung Wangpo as the Tsang Depa.

Once again, the Zhabdrung requested Tsang Deb Phuntsho Namgyal to look into the matter and determine Pema Karpo's true reincarnation. However, the depa did not pay heed to the request. The Zhabdrung then, knowing that the depas were in favour of Pagsam Wangpo, decided to leave for the south, where he had many disciples. His decisions to leave for Bhutan were supported by several prophecies and good omens:

- One night he had a vision of the protective deities, Yeshe Gonpo (Mahakala) and Palden Lhamo (Mahakali), offering him the valleys of the Lho Mon.
- One morning, to his utter surprise, found a bundle of paddy at his side although none came to see him from the south for a considerable period of time.
- He also in one had a dream in which a black raven-an emanation of Yeshe Gonpo-was flying to the south.

The Zhabdrung thought that all these good omens had but one implication and decided to leave for Lho Mon where his ancestors had built several monasteries and had many followers. The Zhabdrung was also invited by a noble man named Sithel from

Gon Gasa, stating that if Zhabdrung was not on good terms with the Tsang Depa he could come instead to Lhoyul where there were enough fields for him. Thus in the Fire Pig year (1616), when he was 23 years old, left Ralung for Bhutan leaving the Ralung monastery for his father, Tenpai Nyima along with a thirty person retinue accompanied by Umdze Tenzin Drukgye.

Moreover, the Obtsho Lama, Druk Namgyal of Gasa, also sent him a personal message of invitation with offers of the whole valleys as his religious estates. On his journey to Bhutan, the Zhabdrung brought with him many relics, the most sacred being the Rangjung Kharsapani, which was a naturally born image of the Buddha of Compassion (Chenrezig). This sacred image was said to have appeared inside the cavity of Tsangpa Gyare's vertebrate during his cremation and is still preserved and protected in Punakha Dzong.

The design and the standard of the dzong

Before his mahaparinirvana, Tsangpa Gyare Yeshe Dorje made the following prophecy:

In the U province in the future,
Buddhism would flourish not,
To have the continued propagation of the Dharma,
A man from Kham would come to see me,
Give him initiations and direct him to the south.
The doctrine would flourish in the south
The rays of the peace will shine on the Drukpas.
I will also come to the south in the future
To establish stronghold of the dual system.
Let's pray to meet in the future in the land of the Drukpas.

In 1211, after the sad demise of Tsangpa Gyare, the Drukpa Kagyu School proliferated into three distinct branches through his three disciples:

1. Toe Druk (Upper Drukpa)
2. Mey Druk (Lower Drukpa)
3. Bar Druk (Middle Drukpa)

The man from Kham mentioned in the prophecy above was Phajo Drugom Zhigpo, who successfully introduced the teachings of Tsangpa Gyare and Drukpa Kagyu into Bhutan. During this period, the chief monastery of Tsangpa Gyare at Ralung was inherited by his nephew and chief disciple, Onrey Dharma Senge, who headed the Bar Druk. At Ralung, he was given the initiations and all the teachings, and instructed to go to Lho to fulfill the wishes of Tsangpa Gyare.

After arriving in Bhutan, Phajo visited several places and meditated. He then gave initiations and gave the teachings of Tsangpa Gyare to propagate the Drukpa Kagyu teachings in the country. Phajo's works were then continued by his five sons.

It was also reflected in Buddhist scripture by Kunkhyen Pema Karpo that Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, a real manifestation of the Three Buddhas (Buddhas of Three Eras) would be born to serve sentient beings. It was also stated in the treasure script of Gon Tshephu of Punakha:

At the confluence of the Pho Chu and Mo Chu rivers,
On the ridge resembling snout of a sleeping elephant
A boy named Namgyal would come
A place of Buddhism will evolve

True to the prophecy reflected in the treasure script, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal came to Bhutan. Soon after his arrival in the country, he was came to be known as Zhabdrung Rinpoche (The Precious Jewel at Whose Feet One Submits), and his residents were called Phodrang Dewa Chenpo (The Palace of Eternal Peace). Punakha Dzong was established on a ridge resembling the snout of a sleeping elephant, surrounded by the two rivers as already prophesied by an eminent saint, and a temple called Puna Lhakhang was built in between the two rivers by the Drubthob Palchen Nagi

Rinchen, which was later shifted to the present location of Dzong Chung. It was also made known by someone that a structure similar to the Ralung monastery in Tibet would appear on a top of a ridge resembling a nose of a sleeping elephant. The construction of Punakha Dzong at the present site was also prophesied by Terton Dorje Lingpa, who said:

“In the middle of two rivers,
The main seat of the Drukpa Kagyu would appear.”

The Zhabdrung thought that he would build a dzong on the present site, but he found himself devoid of workers to help him construct it. But to his surprise, he was soon promised support by the local Drukpa followers, which pleased him greatly. He then recruited a renowned expert mason named Balingpa from Balingkhar in Punakha. The mason unexpectedly presented a bowl full of milk which Zhabdrung considered a very good omen, who thought that the Drukpa teaching would abound like rich milk. The mason was then asked by the Zhabdrung to build a structure with two doors from the outside and 100 doors inside. However, the mason responded that he could not build such a structure, but when the Zhabdrung inquired if the mason would be able to build a dzong with the help of a model, Balingpa responded he would.

To present him the model of the dzong, the Zhabdrung requested Balingpa to sleep by his side. With the supernatural power of the Zhabdrung, the mason was carried to Ralung monastery in his dream, where he was able to discern the design and style of the dzong in his mind. Then in the morning, his visualization of the Ralung monastery was presented, which greatly pleased the Zhabdrung.

The Zhabdrung then recruited additional, minor masons and workers from different regions of the kingdom to help Balingpa construct the dzong. He was promised by the local deities that construction materials like wood, sand and stones would be contributed. For instance, the local deity of Chuzom helped him collect seasoned cypress timber.

On the 8th day of the eighth month in the Female Fire Ox year of the Bhutanese calendar (1637), Zhabdrung Rinpoche laid the foundation stone of Punakha Dzong. Pekar Rabgye was appointed to supervise and coordinate the construction activities, and he served his duty with utmost loyalty and dedication. The dzong was built in such a way that it looked exactly like Ralung monastery. It is said that at that the meeting hall for the monks, or *dukhang*, was estimated to hold 600 monks. When few members commented that it would be too large, the Zhabdrung replied that in future there will come a time when this would be too small.

Later, when Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye was enthroned as the fourth Deb in 1680, he undertook an expansion to accommodate the large number of monks, extending the monk's meeting hall (*dukhang*). During his reign, the number of monks rose to more than a thousand and the *dukhang* was again too small to accommodate all of them. Therefore, members of the discipline division were to reside in the main temple, the metaphysics group in Namsethang Dzong and Drapai group in Sonam Gasa Dzong. The store room was shifted to Martang Dzong while the store in-charge resided in the dzong. Thus, it is believed that the present dzong had undergone several alterations with regard to design, style and size.

According to oral tradition, it is also said that there was a lake under the dzong owned by a white *lu* (serpent). This was narrated by the incumbent *zimpon* (chamberlain) of Machen Lhakhang, Ugyen, who claimed to have heard it, though no references are found in any document. A small branch of the Pho Chu formed a lake close to the dzong which was filled with lotus flowers. It is also said that a lake was formed with the growth of the lotus.

In the thirteenth century, a Nyingmapa lama, Jamyang Rinchen, visited Punakha from Tibet and meditated at the crematorium, also building a residence for himself on this spot. Below is a temple called Dzong Chung build by Drubthob Palchen Nagi Rinchen, thereby separating upper and lower Punakha.

Ranjung Lhakhang (The self-evolved temple)

Ranjung Lhakhang is the seat of the most sacred relic of Bhutan, the Ranjung Kharsapani, which was a self-arisen image of the Buddha of Compassion, Chenrezig (Avalokiteshvara). This sacred object was said to have emerged from Tsangpa Gyare's vertebrae at the time of his cremation and was brought by Zhabdrung Rinpoche while coming to Lho Mon. This rare image is the most sacred relic of the Ranjung Monastery and the most valued possession of the Zhabdrung. Today, it is preserved and protected safely in Punakha Dzong. In front of the Ranjung Lhakhang are several stupas such as Jangchub Choten and Namgyal Choten built with the rarest and the most precious gems, namely turquoise and diamond.

Tsezimkhang

In a carved and copper coated temple is the six inch image of the Zhabdrung's father, Tenpai Nyima, which contains many precious relics of the lineage. Seated on a gold-copper painted structure, this statue has a gold painted face and a silver head adorned by red and silver brocades.

To the right of this temple is a statue of Zhabdrung's dungtse Ngawang Jampey Dorje. Initially the mortal remains of the dungtse were preserved, but due to spells cast by the 4th Zhabdrung Tulku Jigme Norbu, the dzong was damaged by the flood for the first time. During that time the preserved body was also carried away by flood but got struck at the end of Khuruthang. The local villagers noticed sparks and glitters at night and rainbows during the day at the spot. When the central monastic body was informed and came to find the relic, they found that the flesh was washed away. They then took the bones and a statue similar to the image of Tenpai Nyima was made and preserved in its present place.

In 1651, at the age of fifty-eight, on the 8th day of the third month of the Bhutanese calendar, before he entered into his permanent retreat in Punakha Dzong, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal handed over his responsibilities to Drung Damcho and Umdze Tenzin Drukgye. He appointed Pekar Jungney as the first Je Khenpo, entrusting to him the responsibility of all religious affairs.

At the same time Umdze Tenzin Drukgyal was nominated as the First Deb and from then oversaw all temporal matters.

The Zhabdrung's death was in fact kept secret until 1705. This was because although by 1651 the Drukpa had united almost the entire country under their control, there were still a number of chieftains campaigning and consolidating their opposition in several parts of the central and the eastern regions. If they were to know of the passing of the Zhabdrung, the stability of the entire country could be in jeopardy. Even after his death, to ensure safety and offer three meals a day to the Zhabdrung's Machen and the statues of his father and dungtse, the central monastic body appointed a zimpon and a *solpon* (steward) to oversee its care. This practice continues to this day.

The sacred object of the main residence

The statue of Buddha Amitabha (Yoepadme) equal to the size of a human was seated as the main image of the residence, and is surrounded by several statues of the Guru Padmasambhava and other sages decorated with copper and gold.

The monastic assembly hall (Kunrey)

The hall contains several images of great historical figures. In the centre as the main image is Jowo Jampa (Buddha Maitreya) installed by the second Druk Gyalpo, Jigme Wangchuck. To its right is a statue of the past Buddha, Thubwang, made out of silver (*ngulkar*) and erected by the forty-eighth Deb Jigme Namgyal, the father of first hereditary king Gongsu Ugyen Wangchuck. The assembly hall also contains a statue of Buddha of infinite life (Tsepadme) installed by Her Royal Highness Ashi Kezang Choden Wangchuck, as well as a statue of Dorje Sempa made out of silver offered by the second Druk Gyalpo.

The conference hall (Dukhang)

To fulfill the mandate of Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Her Majesty the Queen Kezang Choden Wangchuck installed a statue of

Jampeyang, the Buddha of Wisdom (Manjushri) in this hall.

The inner chapel

In 1643, in the first month of Water Female Sheep year, a professional mason was invited from Tibet to make the statue of Yeshe Gonpo (Mahakala) and Palden Lhamo (Mahakali). While the work was in progress, Tsang Khenchen came to Bhutan and as a present to the mason he gave a powerful dagger capable of killing thirteen men and horses at one stroke and another dagger as the inner object for the chapel. The chapel has other important statues which are as follows:

- i) Rigzhi Gonpo Zhi
- ii) Bungwa Thragthung Chig
- iii) Tiched Zhi
- iv) Seychog Gonpo Sum
- v) Kagyü Gonpo Gey
- vi) Gotsham Lhamo Gey
- vii) Jigje Chenpo Gey
- viii) Zhingchong Yabyum Nyer Zhi
- ix) Chogchong Chu
- x) Gyalchen Zhi
- xi) Gochong Zhi
- xii) Zhingchong Wangmo Chig
- xiii) Chigchar Nyongkha
- xiv) Genyen
- xv) Gomo
- xvi) Gondrapa

In all, approximately ninety-three statues of different deities are present in this chapel.

The chapel of the central tower

The chapel houses three powerful deities, with two guardian deities, Pal Yeshe Kyi Gonpo (Mahakala) and Palden Lhamo (Mahakali) in the centre. Four-armed Yeshe Gonpo is seventeen inches tall whereas Palden Lhamo (Mahakali) measures thirteen inches in height. The female deity, Palden Lhamo, is depicted in her

manifestation riding on a donkey, holding in her hands a dragger and three pronged trident. A guardian deity, Pal Lekey Gonpo, is also present, approximately twelve and half inches tall and holding a ritual dragger and skull in his hands. All the images are painted with gold and made of gold and copper.

The temple of Tara (Drolmai Lhakhang)

The temple has a image of Tara made out of gold and copper with a face painted with gold. It is surrounded by twenty-one smaller, additional manifestations, all of which are made out of clay and bear several Buddhist scripts.

The temple of metaphysics (Tshenyi Lhakhang)

As the main image of this shrine is a clay statue of Guru Rinpoche in his wrathful Dorje Drolo manifestation. Within the temple can also be found some sacred objects such as a five pronged thunderbolt (*vajra*) believed to have been discovered in an old Tango choten (reliquary) in Thimphu. A statue of Buddha Sakya Thubpa, contributed by the Punakha Dzongpon Ngodrup, resides here as well.

The reliquary temple (Choten Lhakhang)

The nicely modeled, two-storeyed silver choten named Tashi Choten is the focus of this temple.

The temple of ten sacred places (Nechu Lhakhang)

The statue within of seated Buddha Sakya Gyalpo is made of gold and copper and has a gold painted face. In its size it is equal to the height of a human. It contains the following Buddhist scriptures:

- Thirty volumes of sutra
- Twenty volumes of tantra

- Thirteen volumes of dulwa
- Twelve volumes of hundred thousand verses
- Six volumes of phelchen
- Six volumes of kontseg
- Three volumes of nyithri

The gonkhang of Palden Lhamo (Mahakali)

The temple has two images of female guardian deities Palden Lhamo (Mahakali) and Yeshe Lhamo. Palden Lhamo is at centre and is equal to the length of finger span. The image of Yeshe Lhamo riding on a donkey is constructed of gold and copper and is approximately 4 inches tall.

The house of the great deities

This temple has an image of the Buddha imported from Dorje Den (Bodh Gaya) its main figure as well as a clay statue of Tamdrin (Hayagriva) which is one cubit tall. Two clay statues of mighty gods and goddesses and a silver statue of the Buddha Dorje Sempa can also be found. The temple further contains antiques such as a lasso, ring and copper brooch, and a one cubit tall clay statue of Palden Lhamo (Mahakali). There are also the statues of other minor deities, namely:

- Khor Tshangpa
- Dho Lha
- Nye Wang
- Chabjug Wangpo
- Zhonnu
- Bing Giri
- Tshogkyi Dhagpo

The holy scripts in this temple are as follows:

- One volume of the Buddhist scriptures
- One volume of Dhagpo Thargyen

- One volume of Lhoyi Chojung
- Four volumes of tantra scripture

The victory palace (gyalkhang)

In this palace, seated by a clay statue of Guru Rinpoche (Pema Jungney), is a golden statue of the king, which is one knife length tall and nearby are five clay statues of another other king and his entourage.

The palace of the kings

The main sacred object is an image of the king with a gold painted face which is about human height, a clay statue of Chana Dorje (Vajrapani) and an image of Tamdrin, which is eight inches tall. The clothes offered to them are silver brocade.

Lamai Lhakhang (Temple of the lama)

The temple consists of a clay statue of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal with a gold painted face, which is equal to the height of an adult. Twelve images of the Zhabdrung Phunsum Tshogpa, which are the true reincarnations of the famous Drukpa scholar, Kunkhyen Pema Karpo, each with gold painted faces and approximately one cubit tall are within. Nearby are thirteen images of gods and goddesses of the Supreme Bliss (Demchog) and images of their twelve entourages. The dresses they are wearing are made of silk and silver.

Drapai Lhakhang

The holy scriptures inside this temple are as follows:

- 103 volumes of the Buddhist scriptures with covers, offered by the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpai Dorje

- Eleven sections of Tshechu Leyjang
- Six sections of Yangchen Lhamo
- Three sections of supplication to Pema Od
- Five sections prayer of Gon Dragpa

Temple of the thousand Buddhas

The temple is dominated by an image of the Buddha made of pure gold and copper. Seated in the centre, it is surrounded by images of the thousand Buddhas as installed by the 33rd Deb Dorje Namgyal and Je Khenpo Sherab Gyaltsen. All the images have their faces painted with gold and wear silver brocade. To the either side of them are deities such as Tshangpa (Brahma) and Jagyin (Indra) made out of gold and copper, who also have golden faces and hold bow and arrows in their hands.

Thubwang Lhakhang

As the central statue is an image of Guru Pema Jungney, one of the eight main manifestations of Guru Rinpoche which holds a ritual dagger in his right hand and a bowl with a three pronged trident in his left hand. Its face painted with gold, as is an image to the immediate right of Tenpai Nyima. On the left is an image of the Zhabdrung Rinpoche with a golden face smaller than the normal size.

The temple of Chana Dorje (Vajrapani)

The main image is a clay statue of the Buddha with a gold painted face holding a vajra in his hands. To his right are images of Chana Dorje and red Tamdrin. They are made out of clay as are a wrathful yaksha and Ugyen Dorje seen on the left. Both of them have their faces painted with gold and are as tall as a human. Also inside is a two storied Parinirvana Stupa made of wood (Deshe Choten) in which images of Tenpai Nyima and Zhabdrung Rinpoche are protected and preserved.

The temple of empowerment (Kago Lhakhang)

One of the eight manifestations of Guru Rinpoche, Lopen Pema Jungney (Lotus Born) takes the central position, made of clay and equal to the height of a human. The temple also houses the various masks used by the dancers in their performances. To the right of the main entrance of the dzong is the residence of the Je Khenpo and similarly, to the left are the offices of the High Court, Dzongda, Dzongrab and other high ranking officials of the other departments.

The dwelling place of Chumo from Ralung

Behind the temple of metaphysics (Tshenyi Lhakhang) and to the right of the central tower is the dwelling place of the serpent Chumo. Ralung Chumo was invited from Ralung monastery in Tibet and is the main guardian deity of the Dharma, protecting the temples and monasteries of the entire kingdom. It is, indeed, perceived to be a serpent (*lu*) dwelling in the subterranean world. To house Chumo, the Drukpas built a structure over thirty feet in length.

The main Punakha (Puna Gongma)

In the area is a particular crematorium/graveyard similar to the crematorium in India called Durthro Silwai Tshel. It is said that the dead bodies brought to this ground do not have to undergo empowerment and burnt offerings because it is believed that stones on this crematorium are all treasures revealed near this place. To display these stones to the public, are safely preserved in the box with glass frame.

The Bodhi tree (tree of knowledge)

With the aim to adorn the dzong and to promote Drukpa teachings in the Punakha region, the third Druk Gyalpo, Jigme Dorje Wangchuck, in the Female Iron Sheep year of 1952, planted a Bodhi tree (Jangchub Shing), which is said to have grown over sixteen feet through today.

The stupas of victory and subjugation of evils

To avert the evil curses rapidly spreading in Punakha region, in the Female Earth Sheep year, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche consulted the fourth Druk Gyalpo, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, with regard to the construction of two stupas. Then in 1972, to fulfill the wishes of Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and to keep his promise, His Majesty the King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, with the aim to bring peace on earth, built two stupas called Victory and Evil Subjugation stupas (Namgyal and Silnon Choten) in the central area of the dzong. It was sponsored by royal patron Ashi Kezang and Ridag Zangmo. The two stupas were constructed very elegantly so as to look as if they were airborne.

Religious rites and holy scriptures of Punakha

On the first day of the 10th month, led by the Je Khenpo, the central monk body moves from their summer residence of Thimphu to their winter residence at Punakha.

On the 2nd day, the monk body goes to bathe in Puna Tsang Chu.

On the 3rd day, early in the morning, they conduct a ritual for the well-being of the kingdom.

On the afternoon of the 3rd day is recitation of Buddhist scripture.

On the 4th day is performed the routine, annual Choga.

On the 8th day, offerings are made to Palden Lhamo (Mahakali) and daily performance in the temple.

On the 9th day, recitation of Soldeb Barche Lamsel for 100,000 times in the monk body's assembly hall, making offerings to the protective deities of the kingdom, Yeshe Gonpo (Mahakala) and Palden Lhamo (Mahakali) in the monk body's conference hall. The monk body then makes offerings to the king in its chapel and performs the burnt offering and empowerment ceremonies to the local deities in Dzong Chung.

On the 17th day, religious rites conclude.

On the 18th day, the monk body leaves for Garsa to perform rituals, arriving on the 21st day of the month.

On the 22nd day, they perform incense burning offering (*lhabsang*) and luck favouring ritual (*lungta*).

On the 23rd day, the actual ritual starts, concluding on the 29th day.

On the 30th day the offering to the raven (an emanation of Yeshe Gonpo) is made.

On the 1st day of the 11th month, the monk body bathes in the hot spring (Tsha Chu) and liquid medicine river (Men Chu) till the 8th day of the same month.

On the 9th day, the monk body returns to Punakha.

On the 13th day, rituals for the well-being of the Tsa-Wa-Sum and essence of prosperity begin and conclude on the 15th day.

On the 14th day, daily offerings are made for three consecutive days.

On the 23rd day, recitation of Mahakala's mantra begins and concludes on the 29th day.

On the 5th day, the Jampey Tshen Gyo commences and concludes on the 8th day.

On the 9th and the 10th days, the ritual of the Supreme Bliss (Demchog) starts before concluding on the 20th day.

On the 10th day, the ritual of the metaphysics (Tshenyi) and Drapa commences, finishing on the 17th day.

On the 10th day, the *tshechu* (festival) of Zunpa starts and concludes on the 13th day.

On the 5th day, incense burning offering and luck favouring rituals are performed in Wangdue Phodrang Dzong.

On the 6th day, coinciding with the winter solstice, prayers to Palden Lhamo (Mahakali) are performed, ending on the 13th day.

On the 14th day, offerings are made to Lagon (an emanation of Yeshe Gonpo).

On the 15th day, Narag Kongshag begins and concludes on the 29th day.

On the 1st day of the 12th month, appointments of the new leaders in the monastic body are made.

On the 4th day, Demchog Bumde commences, later ending on the 10th day.

On the 9th day, in the afternoon, are conducted the burnt offerings of Zhi Gye Wangdrag.

On the 5th day of the 1st month, coinciding with the performance of

puja, the mask dances are displayed to the public in order to purify and offer liberation through their sight. The mask dances usually performed are the following:

- Nga Cham
- Lego Dezhiyi Cham
- Raksha Mangcham
- Zor Cham, and
- Zhanag Cham

On the 9th day, early in the morning, ritual cakes are offered, and in the afternoon, the monks and *paṣap* (heroes/warriors) stand face to face like two restless oceans in which the image of Rangjung Kharsapani is made, and offered by throwing in the rivers. This is done in order to avert the Tibetans potential demand for the return of the Rangjung Kharsapani. After returning to the courtyard, the Je Khenpo witnesses the dances being performed by the monks.

On the 11th day, the recitation of the Buddhist scriptures (Kagyur) begins and concludes on the 14th day.

On the 14th day, undertake recitation of Rang Nyen Zhogkyi Dampa.

On the 15th day, in the morning, performance of the ritual of the Neten Chudru (Sixteen Arhats).

On the 17th day commences the tshechu, which concludes on the 19th day.

On the 22nd day, the offering is made to the ruler of the eastern region in his chapel.

On the 22nd day, the ritual cake is also offered to avert curses, completed on the 29th day.

On the 12th day, the monk body moves to Wangdue Phodrang to perform ritual and concludes on the 20th day.

On the 22nd day, return to Punakha Dzong.

On the 22nd day, the monks in Punakha perform burnt offering of Chenrezig (Avalokiteshvara).

On the 23rd day, the recitation of Depai Mani concludes.

On the 25th day, the recitation of Depai Zur Dhug Nyerchigpa concludes.

On the 6th day of the 3rd month, the commemoration of the Zhabdrung Kucho begins and concludes on the 9th day.

On the 15th day, the burnt offering of the deities of victory and evil spirits are performed.

On the 21st day, Yab Tenpai Nyima Kucho is performed.

On the 22nd day, the daily offering of the ritual cake is offered, concluding the religious rites of Punakha Dzong.

The first fire

In the Male Iron Rat year of 1780, Punakha Dzong caught fire for the first time in its history. However, it was renovated by the 3rd reincarnation of the 18th Deb, Tenzin Rabgye, known as Jigme Senge. He also installed sacred objects to for the continued propagation of the Dharma.

The second fire

The dzong unfortunately again caught fire in 1798, after which it was offered renovation by the 21st Deb, Druk Namgyal. He also installed sacred objects including holy texts such as tantra and sutra scriptures and other key Buddhist works.

The third fire

After the death of the 21st Deb, the dzong was destroyed by the fire during the performance of the ritual in the middle of the Male Water Fire year of 1802. However, the ruling Deb, Sonam Gyaltshen, renovated the dzong. It was believed that the dzong was set on fire by the enemies of the then-reigning Deb.

The fourth fire

Chila Dorje Namgyal, with a plan to become the Deb, fought a war with the ruling Deb, Chokey Gyaltshen. However, Dorje Namgyal could not defeat the force of the ruling Deb and sought help from Ambatala in Lhasa, by sending a letter of request

for assistance. The leader of the Ambatala instantly agreed to his plea and decided to war with the ruling Deb. But with the aim to maintain peace and not to disrupt internal stability, the ruling Deb resigned from his post. Dorje Namgyal then enthroned himself as the Deb and the conflict between the two settled for a while, however, in the Female Iron Rabbit year (1831), on the 13th day of the third month of the Bhutanese calendar, the dzong caught fire again. However, it was once again renovated by Deb Dorje Namgyal and he completed reconstruction in the Male Water Dragon year. While he was installing the statues of the thousand Buddhas, the earlier conflict reasserted itself and Deb Dorje Namgyal was assassinated in the conflict, and the installation of the statues was left incomplete. Je Khenpo Sherab Gyaltsen, in the memory of the deceased Deb, in 1833 completed the task for him.

The fifth fire

The central monastic body had to shift their kitchen to the Paro Rinlung Dzong after the Punakha Dzong caught fire for the fifth time in 1849. However, the dzong was refurbished by the 37th Deb Darlung Tashi Dorje, and he was able to complete the work within a year.

The sixth fire

When the dzong caught fire for the most recent time in its history in the Male Fire Tiger year of 1986, Nu.300, 00000 worth of sacred objects were completely burnt in the ensuing destruction. The cause of the fire was never found. It was said that during the reign of the 67th Je Khenpo Nyizer Tulku, the fire was believed to start at around 2 o'clock in the morning from the residence of the dzong. However, the police force, students of Punakha High School and the people of the Punakha jointly pinpointed the fire to around 7 o'clock. The thunderbolt (*dorje*) and the ritual bell which had been passed through several generations were completely burnt. To replace them, a nine pronged thunderbolt and ritual bell were offered from the residence of Jamgon lineage named Seula.

From the day of the destruction, the fourth Druk Gyalpo, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, immediately started reparations. His Majesty the fourth Druk Gyalpo placed the following personalities to coordinate the construction of the dzong:

- Kidu Lonpo, Tamzhing Jagar as the chief supervisor,
- Chang Reldri, the overseer from the east,
- Thrimpon, Lhabchu from Mangde Tshozhi,
- Thrimpon, Chungsepa Rigzin from Paro,
- Chu Bug Gup, Bangay as supervisor,
- Wangpo (mason) from Mangde Tshochen,
- Additional carpenters from different regions, successfully completed the assigned works of renovation under the Fourth Druk Gyalpo.

The first flood

When the fourth mind reincarnation of the Zhabdrung Rinpoche, Jigme Norbu, brought his mystic consort, Dechen Tshomo, from Yul Thang, the 41st Deb Damcho Lhundrub and the Je Khenpo Yonten Gyaltshen and the central monastic body did not think highly of them. They went so far as to besmirch his reputation, lowering his name and fame so low and further, conspired to harm them. The Zhabdrung, then knowing that he was disliked by the people of the kingdom, decided to leave for Tibet with the aim of visiting the place of Jowo Jampa. While leaving Tibet, he was rendered all necessary support and accompanied by the Paro Ponlop Tshultrim Namgyal to Tibet, leaving in the Female Earth Sheep year of 1859. When they arrived at the midway point of their journey, the ponlop offered tea and snacks (*suja* and *dresi*), with which the Zhabdrung made a small model of the Punakha Dzong with the left over *dresi*. The Zhabdrung then asked the Ponlop Haapa if he should pour tea on the surrogate dzong, and the ponlop pleaded him not to do so. However, the Zhabdrung did not accept his request and poured tea on a side of the sample, where a side of the model was washed away. Thus, it is believed that because of this,

the Pho Chu washed away that side of the dzong shortly thereafter. The destruction of the dzong was also reflected in Lhoyi Chojung by the true reincarnation of the Terchen Leyrab Lingpa, Je Geshe Gedun Rinchen. However, the dzong was successfully renovated by the Ponlop Damcho Lhundrub.

The second flood

In the Male Fire Dragon year 1961, under the reign of the 60th Je Khenpo Choje Ngawang Thinley, the roof of the dzong was flooded and the Dzongpon of Thimphu, Kunzang Thinley, dammed the Mo Chu for three days. On the 2nd day, the Dzongpon ordered an expert mason from Baling to observe the Mo Chu, where he had reported that it was sure that by the next evening the flood would wash away the dzong. To stop the flood, the Dzongpon recruited eight mighty men, and handing each of them a gun, placed them in the following places:

- Gungla
- Yang Ga
- Rim Chu
- Siligang
- Yebesa
- Lakhuna, and
- Sonam Gasa

They were ordered by the Dzongpon to fire their guns into the sky when the flood occurred. They did as ordered and as a result, the nearby residents of Punakha escaped harm when they heard the sound of the rifles. However, the Dzong Chen and the Dzong Chung were not spared by the flood and were washed away.

Restorations took place under the benefaction of the first hereditary monarch, Gongsu Ugyen Wangchuck with the aim to protect Buddhism and to re-establish peace and harmony in the kingdom.

The third flood

The flood was caused in 1956 when the Pho Chu, after

washing away an edge of the Dzong Chung, joined with the Mo Chu. Together, they formed a torrent wave, washing away the bridges of either side and causing great damage to both the dzongs. The flood then became so powerful that it washed away lands, properties, animals and humans residing nearby and as a result left many poverty stricken and landless.

However, the Third Druk Gyalpo, Jigme Dorje Wangchuck, undertook to rebuild with a better plan. His Majesty also looked assisted flood victims and helped them by awarding gifts and presents, thus fulfilling the deepest wishes of his people.

The fourth flood

The fourth flood was caused by the Pho Chu and occurred in the Male Iron Ox year 1961, resulting in minor damages to both dzongs. They were, however, offered immediate repair and maintenance by the Third Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorje Wangchuck, and the personalities who helped rebuild the dzong after the sixth major fire.

The fifth flood

In the Male Wood Dog year 1994, the flood was again caused by the Pho Chu, when too much ice melted at its source. The force of the flood was so intense that it claimed a couple of lives and posed a great hazard to the Dzong Chung, with the edge of the Dzong Chen also being washed away. The main statue of the dzong Chung, Jowo Jampa, seemed about to collapse; however, owing to the consecration done by the Drubthob Palchen Nagi Rinchen, the statue remained securely in its place.

To solve the problems of the flood victims and to offer restorative measures, the Fourth Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck sent Kidu Lyonpo, Dago Tshering, Char Zhi Lyonpo, Tsenkab Dorje, and Dasho Penjore from Thimphu to investigate the scene. His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo also commanded the armed forces and people of Punakha to renovate the dzong. The Royal Government of Bhutan budgeted Nu.43,000,000 solely for the projects.

The work was assigned to and coordinated by Dasho Dorje Tenzin, the Secretary to the Department of Roads. Several pieces of large scale earth moving equipment were employed to clear the areas surrounding the dzongs. The sacred images and statues were sponsored by the following devotees: Kidu Lyonpo, Dago Tshering, Dorje Tenzin, the Secretary to the Department of Roads, and Wangchuck, the Executive Engineer.

The workers then removed the ruined materials and replaced them with pure seasoned timber. Some parts of the dzong and the installation of sacred relics are still in the process of completion.

Dzongpons of Punakha Dzong

- Pekar Rabgye (late 1670)
- Fifth Deb Gedun Chopel (early 1670)
- Tenpa Wangchuck
- Fifteenth Deb Druk Tenzin
- Thirty-first Deb Sangye Tenzin
- Katama Pelbar
- Tshultrim Pelbar
- Druk Palzang
- Darlung Tobgay
- Drang Tashi
- Damcho Rinchen
- Punap Ngodrub
- Phuntsho Dorje
- Thongley
- Wangchuck
- Wang Shar
- Gup Mani
- Adhangpa Tsholing
- Ura Gup Ngodrub Namgyal
- Wachey Gotu
- Boto Karpo
- Namgyal
- Dargo
- Phurpa Tshering
- Langther Tashi Tshering

- Pasang Tobgay
- Sangye Rinzin
- Tashi Phuntsho
- Thinley Odzer
- Dodo Tshering
- Dawa Tshering

The Thrimpons (Drangpons) of Punakha Dzong;

- Ngodup Namgyal
- Wachepa Gotu
- Dechen Wangdue
- Lozhongpa Yeshe
- Boto Karpo
- Wachepa Dorje
- Ngawang Gyaltsen
- Thinley Thogme
- Mani Gyaltsen

Puna Dzong Chung

The devoted chief disciple of Drubthob Shawa Ripa, Palchen Nagi Rinchen, with the aim and objective of helping his own mother, came to Bhutan in the beginning of the 14th century. As stated previously, he visited a place called Chu Bug Nang in the middle of the two rivers, Pho Chu and Mo Chu, where he prophesied that Zhabdrung Rinpoche will come and build a dzong similar to Ralung monastery in Tibet.

Then, in order to purify the site of construction, Drubthob Nagi Rinchen constructed a small structured temple and in it installed an image of the Buddha Sakya Thubpa. This image was installed by his own hands, with images of lotus flowers in the background.

It is believed that blood was seen oozing from the ears of the Jowo Yidzin Norbu, witnessed by some of the oldest people when the reverend saints were assassinated and arose serious problems.

The people said that the two storied inner chapel was washed away during the fifth major flood. However, one storied building

was established later in which an image of Drubthob Nagi Rinchen was installed to the left of the Buddha. Stupas behind the dzong, that were believed to built by the Zhabdrung Rinpoche, as well as his meditation centre remained, where one could still see holy water flowing from the stones.

With his extraordinary vision, Drubthob Nagi Rinchen saw his mother trapped within one of the stones. With the help of *namchag*, an iron weapon believed to be associated with demi gods, he broke the stone into two equal halves. He next released a frog believed to be his mother's birth and killed it, thereby offering the consciousness of his mother to the Region of Purity (Dhagpai Zhingkhram). The Drubthob then, in the memory of his deceased mother and for the well-being of the all sentient beings, built three stupas which remain today.

Yab Ugyen Dorje and Yum Thuje Zangmo undertook the building of a structure called Phuntsho Pelri Phodrang. While the construction was in progress, Yab Ugyen Dorje, in his vision was prophesied to establish a temple in the dwelling place of Do Jagar Lam. Then in 1991, a temple was constructed on a rock as a foundation and therein installed the statues of Guru Rinpoche, Zhabdrung Rinpoche, Chenrezig, Drubthob Nagi Rinchen and Lhamo Tsheringma as the sacred objects of the temple. Then it was inaugurated and consecrated by the 69th Je Khenpo Geshe Gedun Rinchen.

The people of Punakha decided to take the statue of Guru Tsokey Dorje to Punakha Dzong. The statue was removed and after it eventually arrived at Khuruthang where a temple stands today, the statue was unable to be moved again by the people. A temple was built surrounding it and installed facing it the statue of the Buddha of Dzong Chung. The statues of the Buddha and Guru Rinpoche were placed as such in the hopes of thwarting floods in Punakha. It is said that when Khuruthang itself was flooded, not even a drop of water fell on the statue of Guru Tsokey Dorje.

Drubthobs had made a conch out of the earth and white washed it. Later, it had minor cracks due to the carelessness of caretaker; however, it is still preserved and kept safely in the temple

as the most sacred offering object.

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF DAGA TRASHIYANGTSE DZONG

Khenpo Phuntsok Tashi

Preface

a) Nomenclature of palaces, gyalkhar and dzongs

According to the oral tradition, the structures built prior to the seventh century where kings and queens resided were called *phodrang*, or palace. *Pho* refers to a place or centre where lamas and great kings lived and *drang* to dwelling, den or camp. The dwelling places of lamas known as *Labrang* and such became more pervasive later on. Some examples of these types of palaces in Bhutan were King Ougtsen's palace called Raza in the east and Umling in Kurto known to be resident of one of the kings, called Bangtsho. Besides palaces, other types of structures, namely *gyalkhar* and dzongs were constructed in the 7th century.

The term *gyalkhar* refers to a dwelling place or structure established between the eighth and twelfth centuries. For instance, King Sindhu Raza's palace called Chamkhar and Prince Kyikha Ratho's palace built by the people of Ralung in Tibet are two of the best examples of *gyalkhar*. Kyikha Ratho's palace in Bumthang Chokhor eventually came to be known as Bumthang Gyalkhar and his *cham's* (wife) palace as Chamkhar. Over time and up to the present, these particular names have become ingrained in the written history of Buddhist scholars when discussing Bumthang.

In the 9th century, when prince Tsangma is said to have come from Tibet to seek refuge in Bhutan, the people were told to build his palace in a sacred place, the location of which was called Tsenkhar. When the prince Tsangma later requested the local people to build him a palace, they responded that such a task would be easy, a response which gave rise to the palace being named Jamkhar which means "it can be built easily" Thus, the prince Tsangma's palace was

known as Gyalkhar.

Similarly, at time went on, people of different regions built and offered several palaces to Tsangma's descendents which were named Samkhar, Pelkhar, Mugtangkhar, Chagsikhar and Melongkhar. *Khar* refers to the height of these royal dwellings, which seemed to touch the sky.

It was at the end of the 12th century that construction of *dzongs* began, under the direction of Pelam Sangye Rinchen, a descendent of Ngo Gyalwa Lhanangpa. Pelam Sangye Rinchen was the devoted disciple of Drigung Chobpa Rinpoche, who told his follower to go to Paro and Thimphu. Following the prophecy, he constructed Chelkhar Dzong in Paro, Dogon Dzong (Blue Stone Fortress) in Thimphu, Khabutaglung Dzong, Jathel Dzong in Bumthang and Beme Tokhar Dzong. These were some of the first dzongs to be built in what is now Bhutan.

Later in the 13th century, Lam Phajo Drugom Zhigpo, a master of the Drukpa Kagyu School, came to Bhutan and visited Taktshang in Paro. While undertaking meditation at Taktshang, Phajo was foretold by the great Guru that he would come to control four dzongs, four caves and four cliffs. The four dzongs have been realized as Tango Choying Dzong, Lingzhi Jago Dzong, Yangtse Thuwo Dzong and Taktshang Singye Dzong.

In these early incarnations, dzongs served as meditation centers and were generally built on a ridge overlooking a valley. Once Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal arrived in Bhutan (Lho Mon) in 1616, he brought much of what is now Bhutan under his rule, lending a new unity to the region. To celebrate his victory over lifelong rivals and also to establish a strong centre of administration, the Zhabdrung systematically rebuilt and expanded these structures, creating a vast network across the landscape. Those dzongs built during the time of the Zhabdrung were called Dra Dzong (Enemy Dzong), Ta Dzong (Watchtower), Chu Dzong (Water Dzong). The nomenclature of these dzongs indicate protective and military concerns that emerged in the process of nation building. For instance, Drukgyel Dzong in Paro and Daga Trashiyangtse Dzong were built to celebrate victory over enemies, bearing the name Dra Dzong (Enemy Fortress).

b) Dagana: The three regions and three realms

Historically, Dagana was considered a difficult place to live, as its forests were filled with dangerous animals and were so dense that it was difficult for people to contact each other. Dagana lies at the centre of three regions and three realms. The three regions were east, west and centre. In the east were found places such as Tagshap, Saling, Gatbap, while in the west, places existed such as Byrogang, Namzigang, Gatag and Batsa. In the centre, places like Lhalungling, Peling and Darling were established, large villages which are considered to be the three realms.

c) Pre-existing religions and festivals in the three regions of Dagana (Lungchog Kyi Solcho)

There was a time where there was no state religion in the country; the people of Dagana paid homage solely to the local deities. Each of the three regions in Dagana worshipped different local deities, and in order to please them, they slaughtered animals such as goats, sheep, and chickens, making offerings of flesh and blood. These appeasement practices continue even today in some parts of the Dagana *dzongkhag* (district). For instance, in a place called Khagorchen, the people offer homage to Ap Gangtse on 12th day of the fourth month of the Bhutanese calendar. On this particular day, propitiators are required to kill three hens, one of each that bears colored feathers of red, white and black.

Every household must further contribute a *bray* (Bhutanese container to measure grains) full of rice and a bottle of *ara* (alcohol). It is believed that, if one fails to offer appeasement on that day, penalties and ill fortune will result. The continuation of these practices clearly allude to long-standing local traditions that predate the entrenchment of Buddhism.

Versions of the Subjugation of Dagana

Version one

i) Subjugation of three regions of Dagana by Druk Namgyal (chief of protocol) under the command of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal

In 1647, at the age of 54, the Zhabdrung was approached by a seasoned man from Dagana, who came to Punakha to implore the Zhabdrung for help subduing the then-dominant leaders of Dagana, who were then mistreating the people. However, owing to the large number of religious and political duties he was required to perform, the Zhabdrung could not make his visit for two years.

Rather, it was the chief of protocol, Druk Namgyal, who, after unifying the eight eastern dzongkhags (Mongar, Bumthang, Trashigang, Zhemgang, Pemagatshel, Samdrup Jongkhar, Trashiyantse and Lhuntse; together, Sharchog Khorlo Tsibgye), was sent to Dagana to look after the well-being of the people. Accompanied by many other powerful and charismatic leaders, it was Druk Namgyal who was the most adept. At Dagana, he tamed all the wicked and rude people within one and a half years, successes that were primarily credited to the will of the Zhabdrung, secondarily to the mystical power of the local deity, and thirdly, to the skill and experience of Druk Namgyal. It was he who then brought Dagana under his control and celebrated victory by constructing a Dzong, called the “Dzong of Eight Lucky Signs” as auspicious symbols such as the golden fish (*sernya*), white conch (*dungkar*) and lotus (*meto*) are discernible in the landscape.

According to oral tradition, the land further featured additional auspicious signs such as representations of a stone pillar and holy water pouring from the cliff. Places within the area, such as a village called Karling Zingka, the Nam Shathong gonpa, Yul Nyidhug kha, Ngatseza Gotpo, Peling and Darling, also had the appearance of lucky signs, giving rise to the region being called Darkarnang, the ‘Dzong of Eight Lucky Signs’.

After the unification of Dagana, Druk Namgyal returned to Punakha to submit his report on the work performed. The Zhabdrung was deeply impressed by his remarkable achievements, and to award Druk Namgyal for successfully completing this daunting task, that

he decreed the dzong be named Darkar Trashī Yangtse Dzong.

ii) The design, features and functions of Daga Dzong

Daga Dzong was designed to conform to the shape of the ridge upon which its foundation was laid, a placement which would allow its residents to survey the valley below for sign of possible invasion. The main door was designed and installed facing the south, while the monastery and the central tower (*utse*) of the dzong were oriented to face the north.

The utse of Daga Dzong is unlike those of other dzongs, distinguished by its comparatively extreme height, a necessary remedy to counter its lack of a separate watchtower. Further, the staircase is designed to be much steeper, to better thwart intruders.

The length of the centre tower measures 10 by 08 bow lengths, and the distance between the courtyard and the first floor of the center tower is 13 bow lengths, while the size of the dzong measures 20 by 18 bow lengths.

iii) The temple and the inner relics of the dzong

To the right of the utse is the place where most of the inner relics were preserved, while the monastic body, headed by Lam Neten, resided to the left of the tower. The top floor consists of the inner chapel (*gonkhang*) where Mahakala and Mahakali reside.

The inner chapel is also the place where rituals for well-being of the Tsa-Wa-Sum are performed. The main sacred objects are the three protective deities; Mahakala, Mahakali and Genyen-Jagpamelen and the local deities called Damchen Chochong. On the middle floor is the Lamai Lhakhang (lama's temple), where the main sacred object is Drogon Tsangpa Gyare and doctrine of Golden Rosary.

To the right is the temple called Kunrey Lhakhang. The meaning of *kunrey* is 'for all' while *lhakhang* is the word for temple, rendering a translated name of 'temple for all.' Inside, gilded statues of Buddha and Zhabdrung are the main images. In front, there is a temple called Jigje Lhakhang (Temple of Vajrabhairava) and inside can be found a speaking Guru image surrounded by his entourage. Later, Dzongpon Chungkhab Rigzin undertook renovations of this

lhakhang.

In the temple called Gyalkhang (Victorious Temple), the main images consist of Gyalpo Chenpo Pehar and his entourage. The middle floor consists of a temple called Neten Lhakhang (Relics Temple), which houses a speaking statue of Jowo Jampa (Maitreya Buddha) brought by Zhabdrung Jigme Chogyal from Talo. Surrounding Maitreya Buddha are small statues of the Sixteen Arhats (Neten Chudru). This temple took its present shape during the time of Zhabdrung Jigme Chogyal and was known as Lhakhang Sarp (New Temple).

At the ground floor of the right-hand temple is a shrine of empowerment. The main images are those of Maitreya Buddha, Guru and the Zhabdrung. Usually when the discipline master, or *kudrung*, of the monastic body was elected, the head of the monastic body (Lam Neten) gives religious speeches in this lhakhang, thus giving it the name of 'empowerment temple.' To the left side of the ground floor is a temple called Mitrugpa Lhakhang (Peace bringing temple) for a total of eight shrines. During the reign of Dzongpon Chungup Rigzin, several new temples were added, while others were damaged or destroyed by earthquakes, torrential rainfalls or other natural disasters.

Version two

i) The achievements and the functions of Daga Ponlop

Following the command of the Zhabdrung in 1651, the chief of protocol, Druk Namgyal eventually triumphed in subduing the people from Dagana and thus built the Daga Dzong. Tenpa Thinley was elected as Daga Ponlop (governor), where he assured the welfare of the people. The election was conducted at Punakha and people of Dagana served him with utmost dedication and loyalty. It was said that from there on, the term ponlop came into consistent usage in Bhutan.

It was in the middle of the 17th century that the tradition evolved that the Thai government has appointed three ponlops. From then until the establishment of the monarchy in 1907, each of the main three regions (east, west and south) appointed their own ponlop. All matters concerning territorial and other issues were in the hands of the respective ponlop of that region. However,

matters of extreme urgency or national importance were submitted to the central government for deliberation. Regarding the discussion at hand, the Trongsa regional Ponlop was given the power to look after the eight eastern Dzongkhags only, while the three regions of Dagana were under the supervision of the Daga Ponlop. Early on, only literate monks were considered eligible for the post of ponlop and though other citizens appeared capable, they were not given an opportunity.

ii) Daga Ponlop under the nine councils during the reign of Desi

During the reign of the Zhabdrung and the Desi, the decisions of matters concerning the nation were not ultimately in the hands of the ponlops. They had to submit them to the central government for further investigation. There, committees were formed before calling a council who would then duly render decisions on important matters. Among those, one of them was Daga Ponlop. The nine councils were:

1. Chief of Protocol (*gZhung-mDronyer*)
2. Chairman of the Councils (*gZhung-bKa-blyon*)
3. Royal Chamberlain (*rGyelpoi-gZim-dPon*)
4. Pungthang Dzongpon (*sPungsthang-rDzong dpon*)
5. Wangdue Dzongpon (*dBang-Dues-rDzong dpon*)
6. Thimphu Dzongpon (*Thinphug-rDzong dpon*)
7. Trongsa Chila (*Krong-gSar sPyi-dLa*)
8. Daga Chila (*Dar-dKar sPyi-bLa*)
9. Rinpung Chila (*Rin-sPyung sPyi-bLa*)

The post holders during that period were as follows:

The Chief of Protocol, Druk Namgyal

1. Zhung Kaylon, Tenpa
2. Pungthang Dzongpon, Pekar Rabgye
3. Wangdue Dzongpon, Choje Namkha Rinchen
4. Thimphu Dzongpon, Au Tshering
5. Gyelpoi Zimpon, Chogyel

- 6. Trongsa Chila, Chogyal Minjur Tenpa
- 7. Dagana Chila, Tenpa Thinley
- 8. Paro Chila, Langonpa Tenzin Drukdra

Note: Here Chila refers to Ponlop (Governor)

The chronology of Daga Chila (Ponlop)

| Sl. No. | Name | Designation | Period |
|---------|-------------------|-------------|-----------|
| 1 | Tenpa Thinley | Ponlop | 1651 |
| 2 | Tshultrim Jungney | Ponlop | |
| 3 | Rigzin Lhendup | Ponlop | |
| 4 | Rabten | Ponlop | |
| 5 | Tenzin Wangpo | Ponlop | |
| 6 | Pekar Jungney | Ponlop | |
| 7 | Tshering Dhendup | Ponlop | |
| 8 | Dorje Norbu | Ponlop | |
| 9 | Tashigangpa | Ponlop | |
| 10 | Tshewang Phuntsho | Ponlop | |
| 11 | Samten Dorje | Ponlop | |
| 12 | Bjamo Serpo | Ponlop | |
| 13 | Dodon Chelwa | Ponlop | |
| 14 | Sithup | Ponlop | |
| 15 | Tshewang Dorje | Ponlop | |
| 16 | Phowo Bom | Nyerchen | |
| 17 | Martogpa | Nyerchen | |
| 18 | Chungkhab Rigzin | Dzongpon | |
| 19 | Gatsheng Dungpa | Dzongtshab | |
| 20 | Rinzin Dorje | Dzongpon | |
| 21 | Haap Doleg | Dzongpon | 1954-1959 |

| Sl. No. | Name | Designation | Period |
|---------|-------------------------|-------------|-----------|
| 22 | Tandin Dorje | Thimtshab | 1959-1964 |
| 23 | Kawang Rinchen | Dzongda | 1964-1967 |
| 24 | Parop Jangwang Darpo | Dzongda | 1967-1974 |
| 25 | Shar Chethey | Dzongda | 1974-1978 |
| 26 | Shar Namgay | Dzongda | 1978-1980 |
| 27 | Karma Sherpa | Dzongda | 1980-1983 |
| 28 | Parop Thinley Odzer | Dzongda | 1983-1986 |
| 29 | Shar Tshultrim Gyaltsen | Dzongda | 1986-1987 |
| 30 | Gasep Lhundup | Dzongda | 1987-1988 |
| 31 | Karma Dorje | Dzongda | 1988-1990 |
| 32 | Hari Sonam Topgye | Dzongda | 1990-1991 |
| 33 | Bjala Yeshe Tshering | Dzongda | 1991-1998 |
| 34 | Nubi Ugyen Tenzin | Dzongda | 1998-1998 |
| 35 | Orongpa Mingbo Dukpa | Dzongda | 1998- |

iii) Offerings to Zhung Punakha by Daga Ponlop

Initially, tradition dictated that the Ponlops from the various regions of the country would make an offering to Punakha, the seat of what was considered the central government (*zhung*). Annually, offerings of wealth, property and cattle would be sent to the heads of state. From the east, where many residents to this day are considered expert weavers, the Trongsa Ponlop offered clothing items, while the

Daga Ponlop offered rhinoceros horns and elephant tusks, which were considered both precious and priceless. To this day, one can find elephant tusks in shrines and chapels. Because of his illustrious gifts, the name and fame of the Daga Ponlop was duly recognized and acknowledged throughout the kingdom.

At the entrance to Punakha, the three staircases are meant to enable the three Ponlops to enter simultaneously when they arrived to make their offerings. Nevertheless, the middle staircase was seen as the most important, and reserved solely for the use of the Daga Ponlop, in recognition of his significant contributions.

Version three

i) The Zhabdrung's visit to Daga Dzong

The three lineages of Zhabdrung (specifically, Zhabdrung Jigme Chogyal, Tago Tulku Kunga Drakpa and Gangto Tulku) paid their visits to Dagana region. While Zhabdrung Jigme Chogyal was at Dagana, the Dagana people cordially welcomed him, and in return received blessings and initiations from Zhabdrung. Zhabdrung stayed at Drugyegang for fifteen days and left his footprints as a reminder of his presence, which caused the village nearby to come to be known as Drujeygang.

Tanagbe is also another area believed to have been visited by Zhabdrung, as one can see the seats of Zhabdrung on a rock under a cypress tree and a stupa (choten) that was built in his honor. Those worthy and important sacred objects are preserved at Drujeygang.

ii) The renovation of the dzong

Until now, Daga Dzong has been damaged twice by earthquakes and storms. However, numerous Ponlops and Dzongpons undertook to offer immediate renovations. During the reign of 7th Ponlop, Dorje Norbu, the roof of the dzong was destroyed by strong winds and the walls became cracked and unstable.

However, within a short span of time, it was repaired. In

the later part of the twentieth century, the dzong was once again damaged by earthquake, which caused extensive cracking on its right side. Fortunately, Dzongpon Chungkheb Rigzin undertook the necessary repairs, and Zhabdrung Jigme Chogyal performed the consecration ceremony. After the successful repairs, the sacred objects, such as the aforementioned statues of Maitreya Buddha and the Sixteen Arhats, which are believed to ensure the peace and prosperity of the resident monastic body, were also re-installed. After the construction was completed, it seems that the dzong has been somewhat reduced from its original size. One can discern the fencing and foundation stones of the previous configuration near the present dzong.

iii) The sacred places around the dzong

To the west of dzong lies Ngondukha, which originally consisted of a few households, but later came to be known as Dekyiling after a highly skilled lama was believed to have meditated there. This meditation centre was later looked after by a lama of the Sakyapa school of Buddhism.

In the forest nearby, one stone pillar (Do Namgi Kaw) can be seen. The size of the rock pillar is quite large, being nine bow-lengths one arm of length and nine bow-lengths long and one arm and a finger span wide, and upon which we can see the footprints of Dakinis.

To the left of the dzong is a cliff called Menchunang. Local tradition relates that a treasure revealer had discovered a concealed teaching from that cliff, where today herbal water can be seen flowing from its side. It is said that if that water is used for washing or drinking, all karmic impurities and obscurations will be exorcized.

Adorning the area above the dzong is Shamthong Gonpa. The name of the place has a unique origin; it is said that once when Drubthob Shavaripa meditated in that area, he saw two reindeers (*shawa pho mo*) drinking water. Thus, the place came to be known as Shathong Gonpa (a place where the reindeer is seen).

FOUNDING OF WANGDUE PHODRANG DZONG

Dr. Yonten Dargye

Introduction

The Wangdue Phodrang Dzong is one of the five great dzongs of western Bhutan. It is 77 kilometers from the capital of Thimphu, a trip that takes about two and a half hours by car. It was built by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the embodiment of Avalokiteshvara, in 1637 upon a strategic hilltop, resembling the trunk of a sleeping elephant at the confluence of two rivers – Puna Tsangchu and Dangchu. It was mainly built in order to bring under control the enemy forces resisting the consolidation of Drukpa power in Wangdue valley.

The dzong is impressively encircled by many monasteries and temples built by our illustrious forefathers. In the east of the dzong are Nyizergang Lhakhang, the seat of Tertön Wugpa Lingpa and Khothang Rinchenling, one of the eight *lings*, or places, founded by Kunkhyen Longchen Rabjam; in the south is Khujuk Chokyang Phodrang, the seat of Drukchen Ngawang Chogyal; in the northwest is Chime Lhakhang, the famous seat founded by the great Mahasiddha Drukpa Kuenley; in the northeast are Beyul Langdrak, the hidden sites of Guru Rinpoche, Shar Kunzangling – another *ling* – founded by Kunkhyen Longchen Rabjam and Badrong Lhakhang, the seat of Thangtong Gyalpo. Besides, numerous Drukpa masters such as Ngawang Chogyal, Nagi Wangchuck, Ngawang Drakpa, many other highly realized masters belonging to other religious schools visited Wangdue Valley in successive periods of time and built many temples all around, in the middle of which today stands the Wangdue Phodrang Dzong imposingly overlooking both the north-south and east-west roads – especially the famous Wangdue bridge.

The dzong is located below the highway leading to eastern Bhutan. Ever since its establishment, it functioned as the seat of the

successive powerful Wangdue Dzungpons who had administrative control over whole of Sha Dargye (eight divisions of Sha) until the establishment of monarchical system in Bhutan. Associated with this dzong is a rich history which has matured over the years, and as such it is considered one of the most prominent dzongs. Even today it functions as the headquarters of district administration as well as the seat of clergy of Sha Dargye.

2. Rationale behind building the dzong

Having arrived in Bhutan, Zhabdrung started the process of unification and establishment of the dual system of government – secular and religious powers – in the country. While carrying out activities of the unification process, externally he was attacked by Tibetans from the north on many occasions; and internally he was strongly resisted by leaders of other religious schools known as the Five Groups of Lamas (Lam Khag Nga). The enemy forces, however, could not bring any harm to Zhabdrung due to the powerful protection of guardian deities and his own fighting skills.

The Zhabdrung gradually started to build a chain of dzongs at strategic points in almost every valley in order to consolidate his rule and as a stronghold to secure against enemy attack. In 1637, the building of Punakha Dzong was started, and the central tower and dzong were soon completed while the rest remained in temporary structures to later be completed. At that time, the patrons and supporters of the Lam Khag Nga, including Lama Nenyingpa living lower down the valley, Uma and Darkar were concerned about Zhabdrung's increasing popularity in the region and they felt their existence was threatened. Aware of the need to overpower his rivals in the region, Zhabdrung recollected the prophecy he received earlier from Yeshe Gonpo while resting beneath the *gumashing* (*quercus lanata*) on the way to Khujuk Chokyong Phodrang. In order to bring strong opponents living lower down the valley under his control, he decided to build a dzong at a strategic point where the present Wangdue Phodrang Dzong stands.

3. Prophecy and construction

In the 12th century, Lama Zhang Yudrakpa (1123-1193) came to Bhutan from Tibet at the invitation of Lama Pangshongpa, *alias* Sonam Drakpa, and his mother. He travelled through Laog Yulgsum, Bumthang and arrived at Wangdue Phodrang where the present dzong stands, and there prophesied that in a later period of time an incarnation of Naropa would establish his seat at the site. As regards to Lama Pangshongpa's family background, in the 12th century Yoesel Bumkhri, an emanation of a dakini, after having had a divine vision, went to Lama Zhang. Due to a previous karmic connection, she became pregnant while staying with Lama Zhang and a son was born to them. Lama Zhang, knowing that his son would benefit beings in the future, named him Sonam Drakpa, and he subsequently encouraging him to practise religion by giving him profound teachings, which eventually culminated in his son's mastery of meditation.

In accordance with his father's prophecy, Lama Sonam Drakpa at the young age of 15 travelled to Gonyul, Kabisa, Loyul along with his mother, displaying spiritual miracles. He received patronage from local rulers of that area and through their support he established Pangshong Gonpa and a cremation ground and Gonpa at Langma Zekha.

When Drukchen Ngawang Chogyal arrived at Chime Lhakhang, Yeshe Gonpo offered him supreme siddhi (*mchog gi dgos grub*). Similarly, when Zhabdrung Rinpoche arrived in Bhutan he underwent meditation at Chime Lhakhang in order to see whether his mission in Bhutan would be prosperous one, at which time Yeshe Gonpo manifested himself as a black man and prophesied that if he could stay in meditation upon a hill-top resembling the trunk of a sleeping elephant, he could bring entire country under his control.

The next day Zhabdrung sent his attendants to see as to what was on the hill-top lower down the valley. When they arrived, four ravens were perched on the hill-top and as soon as they arrived the four ravens took off, soaring high and then flying off in the four directions. When this sight was reported to Zhabdrung he remarked,

“It is auspicious! Ravens represent four divisions of my protective deities (*las mgon*) and flying off in the four directions is a sign that my teachings and rule would spread to the four directions.” The Zhabdrung, along with his attendants, left for the site where the ravens had perched. He pitched a tent at the site where the gonkhang stands at present and remained in meditation, during which time he subjugated evil spirits – Chudu and Gangtsen – and made them to protect areas from destruction by wind. Today, howsoever windy it may be at Wangdue Phodrang, it does not bring any harm to the dzong. It is said that this is because of protection provided by the above local deities.

Although there was a clear prophecy of Ugyen Rinpoche, Tsangpa Gyare, Tenpai Nyima and Yeshe Gonpo for the Zhabdrung’s mission to be successful in Bhutan, the Zhabdrung was doubtful whether he could establish in Lhomon the reign of Palden Drukpa or not, as the people were found to be obstinate, wild and tough by nature; moreover, the patrons of Lam Khag Nga were numerous. But nevertheless at the end of his meditative session, Tadin Golek, a rich land owner of that locality came to Zhabdrung and willingly offered him a large area including Bardring Dangsa and Chagzam as a religious endowment (*mchod gzhis*). Zhabdrung was very delighted at rich man’s good gesture and from thence onward he was confident of establishing power of Palden Drukpa in the southern land of four approaches.

Thereafter, Zhabdrung laid the foundation of a dzong in 1638, corresponding to the Earth Tiger year of the 11th rabjung. The construction work was carried out under the charge of Lupon Nyima Kukey. Labour for the construction was not exacted as a compulsory labour tax but was voluntarily contributed by the valued patrons from Punakha, Thimphu and Wangdue including famous masons from Rinchengang. While construction was going on Zhabdrung, accompanied by Tango Choje Mipham Tshewang Tenzin, paid a visit to the south of the valley, i.e. Uma and Gaseng area, in order to suppress supporters of Neyning Jetsunma of that area. When they were at Gaseng Khato news reached Mipham Tshewang Tenzin that Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye was born at Tango on the 13th day of

the eleventh month corresponding to Earth Tiger year. Zhabdrung was pleased on hearing this news and said to Mipham Tshewang Tenzin, “It is an auspicious coincidence to hear such good news in the village of Gaseng imbued with prosperity and blessing.” The occasion was celebrated by hosting a tea party amongst themselves.

Zhabdrung took over the seat of Neyning Jetsunma, one of the five groups of lamas who strongly opposed Zhabdrung’s hegemonic campaign. He gradually brought the remaining rival lams and patrons under his control. Most of the time he resided at Punakha and Wangdue, overseeing the simultaneous construction work of the two dzongs, with Punakha Dzong being completed prior to Wangdue Phodrang Dzong.

Jatang Pekar Tashi was summoned from Cheri and was appointed as the first Uma Ponlop. As a representative of Zhabdrung, he took over all the seats of Nyenying Jetsunma in the region and ruled with stringent administrative codes. Any provisions that he obtained were supplied to Ponlop Nyima Kukey at Wangdue for the construction of the dzong. In this way the dzong was completed in one and a half years and was named Wangdue Phodrang as a mark of auspiciousness.

Two oral traditions survive which account for the naming of the dzong. One version relates that when Zhabdrung Rinpoche arrived at the site where the dzong was to be constructed, he saw a boy playfully building a house out of stones to which he enquired as to what he was doing and what was his name. The boy instantly replied that he was building a palace – *phodrang* and his name was Wangdue. It is said that Zhabdrung thus named the dzong “Wangdue Phodrang Dzong” as derived from the boy’s reply. A stone heap still seen today below Gangjug Lhakhang is said to have been piled up by the boy at that time. However, there is another, more probable version which relates that as Zhabdrung Rinpoche arrived at Loyul Chime Lhakhang, he tested through meditative vision whether it was a favorable site on which to build a dzong. In this vision, the protective deity Yeshe Gonpo foretold that Zhabdrung could conquer the entire country if he built a dzong there, which came to pass, and the dzong was named thus based upon the prophecy.

4. Extension and renovation

The four storied *utse* (tower) structure in the lower main dzong and below were said to have been built by Zhabdrung Rinpoche himself, while the two-storied *utse* structure in the upper dzong and its surrounding structure – *shabkor* – were said to have been extended by the Dzongpon Dedun Chopel on the instruction of the fourth Desi Tenzin Rabgye (r. 1680-1694) in 1683. Furthermore on his instruction, in 1685 a huge cantilever bridge was built below the dzong by the masons of Rinchengang, a project headed by an expert mason known as Drakpa. This successful undertaking spanned the Puna Tsangchu for the convenience of commuters. Alongside the bridge, in the middle of the river, was built a temple-like structure with paintings of the mandala of Akshobhya in order to ward off floods. It is said that whoever walks through it can be freed from falling into the lower realms of rebirth (*ngan song sum*). Although the main bridge had been later washed out by floods during the time of Wangdue Dzongpon Domchung, it did not bring any harm to the retaining walls on the two sides and the structure housing mandala of Akshobhya. Again a bridge was rebuilt by Dzongon Domchung.

The upper part of the dzong appears to have been built by Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye at the same time he extended the lower part of the dzong. It also appears that later the seventh Wangdue Dzongpon Sonam Lhundrub *alias* Zhidar had extended it with an upper story. It is mentioned in the biography of the 10th Je Khenpo Tenzin Chogyal written by the 13th Je Khenpo Yonten Thaye (r. 1771-1774) that in 1667, Dzongpon Sonam Lhundrub had extended the upper story, supported by a huge four pillars upon a large gateway or entrance inside which housed a beautiful gold-gilded copper image of Jowo Shakyamuni of 12 years old, described as magnificently ornamented with *sambhogakaya* ornaments of turquoise and a crown of coral curled to the right, amidst numerous paintings of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. The other objects enshrined were Sangye Rabdun (Seven Universal Buddhas), a statue of the tenth Je Khenpo Tenzin Chogyal, Namgyal Choten, Drepung Choten larger than a human;

and on the upper floor housed three shrine rooms with golden-roofed (*rgya phibs*). The Lam Neten of Wangdue, presently holding the post of Yangpai Lupon in the Zhung Dratshang, holds a view that the structure extended by the Dzongpon Sonam Lhundrub must have been the present structure on top of entrance II and its surrounding structure extending up to entrance I.

The dzong appears to have been destroyed by fire once as small pieces of broken statues and burnt pieces of wood could be seen while the ground around the dzong was being dug out. Moreover, burn marks on windows of the central tower could still be seen on the ground floor and also the above mentioned sacred objects installed by Dzongpon Sonam Lhundrub are presently not found in any of the temples in the dzong. This is a clear fact that the dzong was destroyed by fire once, although the exact date is not known due to lack of proper supporting materials.

However, the Lam Neten is of the opinion that the dzong must have been destroyed by fire some 217 years [i.e. 1783] prior to now. In 1783 of the 13th Rabjung, corresponding to the Water-Rabbit year during the time of the second Zhabdrung Thugtrul Chokyi Gyaltsen (1762-1788) and the eighteenth Desi Jigme Singye (1778-1788), the English traveller Samuel Davis visited Bhutan and wrote travel reports on the dzongs and landscapes of Bhutan, which were later compiled by Michael Aris *alias* Ugyen Chophel. There are four different drawings of Wangdue Phodrang Dzong drawn by Samuel Davis in his book, according to which the dzong appears to have been destroyed by fire not more than 145 years from now, but rather subsequently. One of the drawings in the book reveals that there was utse on the roof top of the two-storied building of entrance I, while the present structure has no utse but only the *gyaltsben* (victory banner). We can deduce from this that it was rebuilt later after destruction by fire.

Furthermore, the dzong is said to have been damaged by earthquake during the time when Palden Senge (who later became the 53rd Je Khenpo Palden Senge [r.1912-1915]) was Lam Neten of Wangdue Rabdey. It is stated in the 1974 book entitled “Dragon Country” authored by Nirmala Das that the dzong was damaged

by fire in 1837 and by earthquake in 1897. While the date of fire destruction offered by Nirmala Das appears to be correct, the date of earthquake does not correspond with the account of fire destruction during Palden Senge's tenure as the Lam Neten of Wangdue Rabdey.

It is not known exactly by whom or when the renovations were carried out. Religious and political histories of Bhutan as well as the accounts of successive Desis mention in detail as to how the two principal dzongs of Trashichho and Punakha were renovated and how the sacred religious objects were reinstalled therein during the rule of successive Desis, but surprisingly there is no mention of fire destruction and renovation of Wangdue Phodrang Dzong.

Today there is a passage separating the upper and lower dzong. This passage is a pathway said to have been used by band of soldiers of Wang Tshochen Gye after their victory of war over Sha Dargye.

The upper dzong was once renovated by Dzongpon Domchung while the lower dzong was renovated by Wangdue Dronyer Pema Wangdue during the time of the third king, His Majesty Jigme Dorje Wangchuck.

5. Different temples

Residing at Wangdue Phodrang, Zhabdrung Rinpoche established a gonkhang in the dzong by installing one of the most sacred images of Yeshe Gonpo (Mahakala) which was brought from Druk Lhamoche in Ralung when he escaped from Tibet. This image had earlier been brought from Durthro Silwai Tshal to Tibet by Shri Galo. Thereafter, Zhabdrung invited Tulku Dzing, the prominent sculptor of the tenth Karmapa Choying Dorje and who was believed to be the incarnation of Jetsun Jampa Gonpo, from Tibet. On Zhabdrung's instruction, Tulku Dzing had numerous sacred objects – representing body, speech and mind of the Buddha, and also images of the protective deities – erected and installed at the two dzongs of Punakha and Wangdue. In particular, Zhabdrung himself erected an image of Dusol Lhamo (i.e., Palden Lhamo or Shri Devi) together

with its *tendoe* and then installed it in the gonkhang of Wangdue, following which an elaborate consecration ceremony was held. As a result, due importance equal to that of Punakha Dzong was accorded to this dzong. Thus the two dzongs, Punakha and Wangdue, became principal seats, around which rich history has evolved since. They were not only used as the main residence of Zhabdrung during his lifetime but also that of the successive Desis.

After the construction of Wangdue Phodrang Dzong, Zhabdrung for the first time introduced a monk community to the dzong for upholding, preserving and spreading Buddha Dharma in the country. Later the Je Khenpo Tenzin Chogyal increased the monk enrollment and brought great improvements to their studies of Buddhist literature. This is why even today the *kuchoe* of Tenzin Chogyal is being observed at Wangdue Phodrang Dzong.

Abiding by the strict monastic rules and regulations in accordance with the *Chayig Chenpo* of Zhabdrung Rinpoche, the monks over the years pursued religious studies enthusiastically and carried out religious performance of all kinds – from death rites, *kurim*, *kucho bumdey*, healing rituals to meditation practice – for the welfare of sentient beings. Even today the monk community continues to benefit society at large under the abbacy of Lam Neten. It is said that only the monk community of Wangdue Phodrang Dzong was known by *Rabdey* which means “division of [real] renunciate”, while monk community in other dzongs were known by *Rabchub* which means “ordinary renunciate” in earlier times.

As the detailed record of sacred religious objects is with the government, (i.e., with the division of cultural properties under the Department of Culture), here only the list of lhakhangs in the dzong are provided:

The upper dzong

On the upper floor of entrance I:

1. Tsepadme Lhakhang (on the top floor)
2. Chenrezig Lhakhang (middle floor)
3. Tsengye Lhakhang (on the left hand side of the courtyard I)

The lower dzong

Ground floor of the utse III:

1. Menla Lhakhang (top floor)
2. Kagye Lhakhang (middle floor)

On the left hand side of the courtyard II:

1. Sungkhor Lhakhang
2. Chipai Lhakhang
3. Namsey or Chagdzo Lhakhang
4. Mitrugpai Lhakhang

On the ground floor of the utse I (central utse):

1. Gonpoi Lhakhang (third floor)
2. Lama or Zhabdrung Lhakhang (third floor)

The Five Groups of Lamas, or the Lam Khag Nga, knew that they alone would never succeed in fighting Zhabdrung. Taking advantage of bitter enmity between the Tsang Desi and the Zhabdrung, they sought the support of the Tsang Desi Karma Tenkyong Wangpo, who had succeeded his father Phuntsho Namgyal. In 1634, at the instigation of the Five Groups of Lamas, the Tsang Desi sent a considerable number of troops, and together with the Five Groups of Lamas, attacked from six different points – two from the Paro area, one from Gon Tongsengkha, one from Cheri Dechusokha, one from Nyingla Pass and one from Bumthang. Although there was a prophecy to spread the Drukpa teachings in Bhutan, Zhabdrung was not sure of this as there were frequent attacks from within and outside. He was quite worried. Entrusting the responsibilities of countering this attack to *Umdze* Tenzin Drukgyal, he himself went to Wachen Dzong, taking along with him all the sacred objects including the Rangjung Kharsapani; he entrusted some of the objects to Wachen Dzong. Taking the route via Khothakha and Jala, he went to Jarogang, where he took refuge at the house of a rich woman named Zompa. Some of the sacred objects that he entrusted at Jarogang at that time were later brought and enshrined at Wangdue

Phodrang Dzong after the completion of its construction. Those objects now preserved in the Lama Lhakhang are said to be the ones brought from Jarogang at that time.

Ground floor of the utse II:

1. Kunrey (ground floor) – The top floor is used as a classroom for monks.

5.1. Gangjug Lhakhang (below lower end of the dzong)

The second Je Khenpo Sonam Odzer, the principal disciple of Zhabdrung Rinpoche, subdued a *tsen* (spirit) residing at the lower end of the dzong while he was Lam Neten there. It is said that the *tsen* subsequently offered his solemn commitment to Sonam Odzer to serve the Palden Drukpa.

5.2. Radrak Lhakhang (adjacent to market area)

The Radrak Lhakhang located near the market of Wangdue Phodrang is a branch lhakhang of Wangdue Rabdey. It is a temple of the local deity called “The Three Brothers of Radrak” and the people of Shaa Dargye rely upon him as the *Yul lha* (the regional deity).

During the reigns of the Desis, the country was in constant war, with rampant strife between different political factions. Before going to war, they would visit the Radrak Lhakhang and seek refuge in the Radrak Nep for help in winning the battle. History relates a fierce war between Trongsa Ponlop Dungkar Gyaltshen and Jakar Dzongpon Choje Pema Tenzin. The Trongsa *Ponlop* (governor), not being able to adequately retaliate, requested military help from Wangdue Dzongpon Adruk Nim, who in turn despatched military support headed by chamberlain Pema Tshewang Tashi. Before heading for Trongsa to fight war, Pema Tshewang paid a visit to Radrak Lhakhang and consulted the Radrak Nep for a prediction of the outcome of his military campaign in Trongsa. The prediction showed that the Trongsa Ponlop’s party would fail. Despite this, he

led the campaign as he could not go against the wish of his superior, the Wangdue Dzungpon, and eventually his party suffered a crushing defeat, whereupon Pema Tshewang committed suicide.

6. The successive Dzungpons

In different districts there were many officials holding post of Dzungpon. Amongst all the Dzungpons, the three Dzungpons of Punakha, Wangdue and Thimphu were of highest post, on equal rank with that of Ponlops and directly under the control of the central government. They were equal to cabinet ministers and hence members of Lhengye Tshog. The three Dzungpons were either appointed by Desi or by the Lhengye Tshog; others had no power to appoint them. The Desi was nominated from one of the three Dzungpon's posts. It was mandatory that three Dzungpons attend Lhengye Tshog whenever there were important national issues to be discussed. Based on the Druk Karpo written by Lopon Nado, a list of successive Wangdue Dzungpon is given below:

1. Choje Namkha Rinchen
2. Gedun Chophel (the 5th Desi)
3. Ngawang Tshering (the 6th Desi)
4. Druk Tenzin (the 15th Desi)
5. Sangye Tenzin
6. Legpai Sherab
7. Sonam Lhundrub (the 16th Desi)
8. Sangye (the 40th Desi)
9. Kunga Gyaltsen
10. Phuntsho Namgyal (the 43rd Desi)
11. Darlung Tobgye
12. Sigyel
13. Tenzin Namgyal
14. Kawang Sangye
15. Adruk
16. Jigme Namgyal (the 48th Desi)
17. Thinley Tobgay

18. Azhang Jampa

19. Kothuk (*alias* Kunzang Namgyal)

The posts of *Dzongpon*, *Nyerchen* and *Dronyer* had been invalidated by the Third King His Majesty Jigme Dorje Wangchuck. Those districts had been restructured to fall under the direct administrative control of the Ministry of Home Affairs and since then, officers bearing the title of *Dzongda* were appointed for every district, assigned with the duties and responsibilities to look after general administration. The full list of *Dzongdas* could not be provided here due to spatial constraints.

7. Present architectural design

The dzong stands imposingly facing the south towards Rinchengang village with its back to the east towards Nyizergang Lhakhang. It was said to have been built in that position to mark auspicious coincidence that would enable Zhabdrung to bring the powerful enemy residing to the south of Wangdue under his rule. While all the dzongs in the country were being provided with CGI sheets, Wangdue Phodrang Dzong is the only dzong which is still covered with the traditional wooden shingle roof so as to avoid harm from the consistent winds of Wangdue as well as preservation of the traditional architectural design found in Bhutanese dzongs.

The dzong has an elongated shape with its widest breadth in the upper end, i.e., at the main entrance and its most narrow at the lower end. The approximate length from its upper end to its lower end is 194 metres; the breadth of its upper end is 36.90 metres; and the breadth of its lower end is 18.40 metres (see map).

There are a total of three courtyards in the dzong: courtyard No. 1 between entrance I and II; courtyard No. 2 between the entrance II and III; and courtyard No. 3 between the main utse and kunrey. The courtyard No.1 is wider than Nos. 2 and 3. During tshechu, the sacred dance is performed in courtyard No. 1.

There is a two-storied structure, i.e., the building on the right and left hand sides of courtyard No. 1. On the right hand side are the

offices of Wangdue Dzongkhag administration, kitchen of Rabdey and store; on the left hand side are Guru Tshengye Lhakhang, monastic residences and store. On the upper floor of entrance I is the office of Dasho Dzongda and Dasho Drangpon of Wangdue.

Of the three-storied buildings on the right and left hand sides of the courtyard No. 2, on the right hand side are residential quarters for monks; while on the left hand side there are three lhakhangs as well as quarters for monks. On the left hand side of Kagye Lhakhang is the meeting hall of Dzongkhag Yargye Tshogdu. Of the two-storied building on the right and left hand sides of courtyard No. 3, on the right hand side is the residential quarter of Lam Neten while the left hand side contains the residential quarter of the Umdze and Kudrung.

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THE HISTORY OF TRASHICHHO DZONG.

Lopon Kunzang Tengay

Preface

With the aim to enrich the future youth of Bhutan, the Royal Government of Bhutan under the Department of Cultural Affairs has undertaken extensive research on the history of Thimphu Trashichho Dzong, however, I have supplemented it with information regarding the visit and its status under the rule of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in the *Lho Mon Kha Zhi*, the Southern Land of Four Approaches, as Bhutan is alternately known.

We have several eminent scholars who wrote on the life of Zhabdrung. Similarly, I, with little experience in the field of research, have written this essay based on the biography of the Zhabdrung and Lhoyi Chojung. So there may be many shortcomings in this paper. In carrying out my research on the history of Trashichho Dzong, I have used the following texts as references:

- The Biography of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal
- The Biography of Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye
- Lhoyi Chojung
- Druk Karpo
- The Biographies of Je Kunga Gyaltsen and Yonten Thaye
- History of Bhutan

As this topic is very rich and the amount of time I had to research it was less than ideal, I look forward to hearing any comments from scholars on the subject, as such insights would be highly valued and appreciated.

The advent of Buddhism in Lhojong

Generally, it is believed that both Jampa Lhakhang in Bumthang and Kyichu Lhakhang in Paro were built during the 7th century by the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo, who was said to be a reincarnation of the embodiment of compassion, Chenrezig (Avalokiteshvara). It was Songtsen Gampo who introduced Buddhism to Tibet as its state religion. The two Lhakhangs mentioned above that are found in modern Bhutan were a part of his scheme of constructing the 108 *thadul-yangdul* temples in order to subdue and subjugate pre-existing demonic forces, thereby creating a landscape hospitable to Buddhism.

Later, in the 8th century, the Great Guru (i.e. Ugyen Guru Rinpoche) who was at that time meditating at Yanglesho in Nepal, was invited to Bhutan by the King of Bumthang, Sendha Gyab to bring back his “life force.” Upon his arrival to help the king, Guru Rinpoche meditated at Kurje Dragmar Dorje Tsegpa and subdued the chief of the local deity called Shelging Karpo who stole the king’s “life force.” After this initial effort, Guru Rinpoche continued to work in Bhutan, converting several places into Beyul (sacred place) and undertaking many activities on behalf of the region.

In the late 12th century, the founder of the Drukpa Kagyu, Tsangpa Gyare, was in Ralung monastery in Tibet. One day he gave the following prophecy to his nephew Onrey Dharma Sengye: “A man from Kham will arrive after my death. Take care of him and send him to the southern valley which Ugyen Rinpoche had blessed by his visit. He is destined to disseminate the teaching of the Drukpa School there.”

True to the prophecy, a man from Kham arrived in the hopes of becoming a student of Tsangpa Gyare, who by this time had already died. However, Onrey Darma Sengye became his teacher, and after training him in the Drukpa Kagyu teachings, gave him the name Phajo Drugom Zhigpo and sent him to the South (Lho Mon). In 1218 CE, Phajo arrived in Bhutan via Thuje Drak and Phajoding and Lungten Zampa in Thimphu. Then he went to the head of the Thimphu valley and meditated there. It was in that place that he had a vision of the deity Hayagriva (*rta mgrin*), whose horse head excrescence gave the place the name Tango (*rta mgo*).

There, Phajo also built a small dzong that came to be known as Tango Choying Dzong, which became Phajo's main seat during his lifetime. As the power of Phajo grew through increased patronage, a letter was directed to Tango from Chelkha Dzong, the seat of the Lhapa Kagyupa, who warned Phajo to abide by their rules or else be driven from the country. In response, Phajo dismissed the order and justified his presence in the area by citing the prophecy made by Tsangpa Gyare. This angered the Lhapas to such an extent that they decided to assassinate Phajo through subversive and magical means, a plan which proved futile in the face of Phajo's superior powers, and Drukpa Kagyus soon became dominant in the region.

Successive propagators of Buddhism

In the later part of the 15th century, several prince-abbots of Ralung Monastery and other renowned saints were invited to Bhutan to preach and further consolidate the Drukpa teachings, and in so doing established religious institutions throughout the area. For instance, the 7th prince-abbot of Ralung, Kunga Sengye, was the first visitor to Bhutan, and while staying in Thimphu and Paro, founded the Dechenling Monastery at Gonkha.

While in Dechenphug at the head of the Thimphu valley, Kunga Sengye subdued the famous local deity Genyen Jagpa Melen and converted him into one of the main guardian deities of the Dharma. He then built a three storied temple dedicated to Genyen Jagpa Melen, enshrining the deity in the inner chapel. To this day, offerings and tributes continue to be made at Dechenphug to honor Genyen Jagpa Melen in the hopes of maintaining peace and prosperity throughout the region and the country. From Dechenphug, Choje Kunga Sengye was next invited to Chang Gangkha in Thimphu, where he established and consecrated a new temple and retreat centre, which was later renovated by the 4th Desi Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye.

In 1540, the prince-abbot of Ralung, Nagi Wangchuck, paid a visit to Bhutan for the second time and settled in Dechenphug, undertaking meditation practice there for a considerable period of time. Ngawang Chogyal, who would become the great-great grandfather of one of the most important persons in Bhutanese

history, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, came to Thimphu in 1529 and meditated in several places such as Pangri Zanpa, Phajoding, Pumo Rabten Chokhor, Togden Nyindhai Nagtshang, Neljor Namkhai Drubphug, Thinleygang and Khibu Lhakhang.

In 1590, Choje Kunga Legpai Zangpo, also known as Lam Drukpa Kuenley and popularly known to the Western world as the 'Divine Madman' arrived in Thimphu. There he fathered a son named Ngawang Tenzin from whom descended the noble lineage of Tango Choje. Drukpa Kuenley was notable in proliferating noble lineages throughout the country. Ngawang Tenzin himself fathered a son named Tshewang Tenzin, who was the father of Dungse Tenzin Rabgye, a major historical figure who helped build the present Tango Dzong that became the seat of his lineage and which helped propagate Buddhism in the kingdom.

In 1780, Trulku Jigme Sengye invited Je Yonten Thaye to consecrate the Tango Dzong, where he gave the religious institute the name Druk Migyur Lhunpo. In the intervening years, many important historical personages have reincarnated there, such as successive embodiments of the Zhabdrung and also served as seat of the descendants of Phajo Drugom Zhigpo.

The administrative rule of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal

Upon reaching his majority, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal succeeded his grandfather, Mipham Chogyal, becoming the 18th prince-abbot of Ralung monastery in Tibet. Although believed to be the rightful reincarnation of Kunkhyen Pema Karpo (1527-1592), his identification as such was challenged by another contender, Pagsam Wangpo, whose father was Tibetan nobility of the Yarlung Valley. The position of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in Tibet became increasingly precarious as his contender was installed as the incarnate.

The Zhabdrung then decided to leave Tibet and head south to Bhutan, the south of Tibet, where the Drukpa Kagyu were well-established, and where he had many disciples. His impending departure was supported by several good omens; one

night he experienced a vision of the protective deities Yeshe Gonpo (Mahakala) and Palden Lhamo (Mahakali) offering him the valley of Lhomon Khazhi, or Southern Land of Four Approaches, as Bhutan has been known. Further, one morning a bundle of paddy, which is grown in the south, suddenly appeared beside him though none had visited. Zhabdrung also dreamt of a black raven, an embodiment of Mahakala, flying southward to show him the way. Together, all these omens were considered auspicious, indicating the Zhabdrung should leave for Bhutan, where his forefathers had built several monastic institutions and had cultivated patrons and adherents.

At the age of 23, in 1616, he was warmly and cordially welcomed by the Obtsho Lama of Gasa, who had close ties with the Gya Family of Ralung. While preparing for his departure for Bhutan, the Zhabdrung decided to bring along all his sacred possessions, the most sacred of which was the Rangjung Kharsapani, a self-created image of the embodiment of compassion, Chenrezig, and which is now one of the most important relics in Bhutan. The Zhabdrung descended from Laya to Gasa, where a patron named Lhawang Tshering received him and made substantial offerings, including butter and grain. As Zhabdrung made his way to Thimphu, he visited Pangri Zampa and the aforementioned Dechenphug, where he offered prayers of thanks to Genyen. Tshewang Tenzin, the grandson of Phajo Drugom Zhigpo, invited Zhabdrung to Tango Choying Dzong and offered the sacred place to him. The Zhabdrung accepted, and thereafter moved to the Paro valley, where he is said to have been greeted warmly by its inhabitants. While at Druk Choding in Paro, he was attacked by a Tibetan invasion led by Deb Tsangpa, however, the Zhabdrung was able to prevail over his adversary. To commemorate this victory, Zhabdrung composed a ritual dance called “Zor Cham” which is still performed on particular occasions.

As Zhabdrung undertook meditation in a cave, he showed several indications of his spiritual power by leaving imprints of his body and head the surrounding stone walls. Soon, the Zhabdrung’s reputation and influence had spread far and wide so that he was soon gaining much power and recognition throughout the area.

In 1619, with the aims to unify the kingdom under one rule,

Zhabdrung returned to Tango from Chapcha. It was at that time that a great misfortune befell Zhabdrung as he heard of his father's demise at Ralung. He then brought the dead body of his father clandestinely from Tibet and started building Cheri Monastery to preserve the ashes of his father in 1620. It was at Cheri where Zhabdrung Rinpoche ordained thirty monks to establish the first monk body in the country. He invited his Tibetan master, Lhawang Lodro to be their teacher and appointed Kudrung Pekar Jungney as the head of the centre.

Then in 1629, Zhabdrung Rinpoche undertook the systematic renovations and buildings of dzongs in the area in the hope of creating a unified nation, with the first construction being Simtokha Dzong in Thimphu. This goal of unification soon proved to be a daunting task. While he was busy constructing Simtokha Dzong, his efforts were opposed by military forces under the control of Lam Palden from Langmalungin Wang. Although this rival was killed during the battle and the attack on the dzong was repelled, Zhabdrung Rinpoche was not universally accepted, as there were several other religious schools who did not want to lose power, most of whom were centered in western and central Bhutan. These schools came to form an unified, internal opposition, which compounded the external opposition posed by the Tibetans. For both groups, if the Zhabdrung were successful in unifying the country under the Drukpa rule, their own claims to legitimacy would be threatened. The schools forming the internal opposition were:

1. Lhapa
2. Nenyinpa/Nyingmapa
3. Shingtapa/Kathogpa
4. Chagzampa
5. Barawa

Together, this group came to be known as the *Lam Khag Nga* (The Five Groups of Lamas). In 1639, an additional Tibetan invasion occurred, this time at the explicit invitation of the Lam Khag Nga. The Tibetan forces were led by Deb Galungpa, and they combined with the Lam Khag Nga for a prolonged attack on

Punakha Dzong. However, their attack eventually proved ineffective as the Zhabdrung's forces, under the joint command of La Ngonpa Tenzin Drukdra and the brother of King Sengye Namgyal of Ladakh, were able to defeat them. Apart from the Lam Khag Nga, there were other lamas and incarnation lineages residing in Bhutan that competed Drukpa lamas for power, specifically:

Gangteng Trulku

Ridhang Lama

Dhatong Trulku

Nyinzer Lama

Tshamdrak Lama

Ritsho Lama

Shawa Lama

Phang-nyer Lama, and

Neypa Lama

These Nyingmapa and Sakyapa lamas ruled specific areas, however, they maintained close ties with Zhabdrung Rinpoche and did not openly oppose the Zhabdrung. Indeed, their support contributed to the Zhabdrung's eventual success in unifying much of what is now modern Bhutan.

The formation of dzongs as administrative centers

At the age of forty-three, Zhabdrung went to Gasa, paying a visit to both Upper and Lower Gon and visiting sacred places such as Tshechiphug and Tshephug Maratika. While meditating at the latter, he saw Guru Rinpoche along with an entourage of dakinis, who, gazing at him and smiling, gave Zhabdrung the prophecy to construct a dzong in between two rivers, which would serve to continue the propagation of the area as a stronghold of Buddhism. Then after some time, he returned to Cheri in Thimphu to consider the meaning of his vision. While in Cheri, he decided to built the dzong at Punakha, which included the confluence of two rivers. His cause was soon aided by Dharma protectors, who helped him cultivate several patrons from the east and west for the task. Patrons

invited him to come from Cheri, and in a traditional *chibdre* ceremony from the bridge of Dorjeden, he moved through Kawang, Upper Wang and Lower Wang in Chang Geog. The inhabitants of these places received blessings and initiations from the Zhabdrung as he passed.

He then moved to Punakha Valley and paid a visit to the following places:

- Nanying
- Jarugang
- Athang Rukha
- Khothangkha
- Sha Wachen
- Bjena
- Chungseng
- Dhomkhar
- Komathrang
- Kazhi, and
- Phangyul.

Then he came to the center of Punakha district, where he was greeted with substantial wealth. In return, he named the place as Pungthangkha (pile of wealth). By 1637, Zhabdrung had completed the construction of Punakha Dzong on the site, naming it Pungthang Dewachenpoi Phodrang.

Then one year later, in the Tiger Year corresponding to 1638, Zhabdrung undertook the building of Wangdue Phodrang Dzong nearby, introducing there a monastic body with Damcho Gyaltsen appointed as the Discipline Master (*Kudrung*) of the institute. Zhabdrung then propounded and codified many religious laws, also commanding the Desi to introduce corresponding laws for the political and administrative realms. Due to his foresight, military skill and spiritual aptitude, Zhabdrung Rinpoche is considered the pioneer and main founder of modern Bhutan. Some of the laws codified by him in the 17th century are still in practice today. Zhabdrung's efforts have proved to be incredibly effectual, as he utilized spiritual,

practical and military tactics to defeat local and foreign rulers of the country, thereby unifying the kingdom under Drukpa Kagyu rule, giving rise to the name “Palden Drukpa Gyalo,” which later came into prominence after the unification of the whole kingdom.

The history of Trashichho Dzong

As the kingdom was known as Lho Mon Kha Zhi (Southern Land of Four Approaches), this title signified the territorial extent of the country, from the eastern Dungsam Kha to Daling Kha in the west, and from Tagtse Kha near Lingzhi towards the north, and Pagsam Kha in the south. At its centre lies Punakha Dzong, and to the northwest lies Do Ngon Dzong (Blue Stone Fortress), or Trashichho Dzong.

Do Ngon Dzong, where Dechenphodrang stands today, was initially built and being used by the Lhapa Kagyu lineage, however, in 1642 when Zhabdrung Rinpoche had just turned forty-eight, he definitively defeated the Lhapa Kagyu and took over the dzong. To purify the place and assert his dominance, the Zhabdrung then performed a wrathful dance before making it his residence.

Later the dzong was structured to accommodate the monastic body during the summer, when their winter residence at Punakha Dzong would become less pleasant due to the heat. The central monastic body migrates to Trashichho Dzong in the sixth month of the Bhutanese calendar. Thus, these two dzongs, so closely associated with the Zhabdrung, continue to be the principal centres for the monk body. Additionally, Trashichho Dzong presently houses the offices of the king and cabinet ministers.

During the formative period of Trashichho Dzong, Zhabdrung Rinpoche appointed Aue as *Dzongpon* (*Dzongdag* in present day) of Trashichho Dzong, naming it Tenzin Palbar. Aue then installed and renovated the central tower (*utse*), the assembly/conference hall (*dukhang*) and the monk's assembly hall (*kunrey*), additionally altering and extending the size of the dzong itself. Aue also installed additional relics and sacred objects of the dzong thus, contributing directly to promote the Drukpa Kagyu school of the kingdom.

The 4th Desi, Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye, also undertook construction of a monastic assembly hall, which was later extended to accommodate more monks during special religious ceremonies.

When Tibet was captured by China in 1959, thousands of Tibetans fled their homeland, some whom took refuge in Bhutan. Among them, Lama Dzogchen Polokhen Rinpoche came and stayed in Dechenphodrang for a short period of time. While there, he came to realize the importance of the place, noting that it would become a more prominent centre of Buddhism. His words proved prophetic in 1973, when the Central Monastic Body, with the support from the Ministry of Education, introduced a monastic school where students could learn basic Buddhist studies, and the school soon became one of the best in the kingdom today.

The first fire destruction, expansion and subsequent renovation of Trashichho Dzong

Under the rule and care of the 5th Desi Gedun Chopel, Trashichho Dzong caught fire for what would be the first of multiple times; however, the Desi quickly undertook all the necessary renovations, completing them in 1698. The 13th Desi, Chogyal Sherab Wangchuck, had undertaken an initiative to extend the dzong as the renovations of the 5th Desi had reduced it in overall size. The 13th Desi rebuilt the assembly hall, installing a stronger foundation, completing the central tower and extending the courtyard. After several discussions regarding the renovations with Khenchen Tenzin Chogyal, the Desi was commanded by the Khenchen to recruit Dzongpon Druk Phuntsho to assist with the renovations.

The dzong contains important and priceless inner objects, including a statue of Thuchen Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and many Buddhas. Many treasures are housed within such as *dorje* (vajra), *phurba* (dagger), precious gems and *terma* (revealed treasures), as well as precious objects such as elephant's tusks and fish scale. Inside the walls of the dzong are silk and brocade, adding to the sumptuous environment.

Upon completion of the reconstruction in 1760, the reincarnation of Tara Sakya Rinchen, Gyalse Mipham Drukdra, along with Zhabdrung Jigme Drakpa, and Chogley Trulku in collaboration conducted a grand consecration ceremony.

Leaders of the different regions such as *Chila* (regional governor, also called *Ponlops*), *Dzongpons*, representatives, *Drungpas* (sub-divisional district officers), high ranking officials and other

leaders swarmed to celebrate the occasion. Even the constructions workers who contributed their skills to building the dzong, including sixty-two carpenters, six masons and forty-eight painters, their supervisors and the chamberlain all attended the celebration.

Second fire and subsequent shift in the reconstruction site

During the reigns of the 16th Desi, Sonam Lhundrup (popularly known as Deb Zhidar) and the 13th Je Khenpo, Je Yonten Thaye, the dzong caught fire for the second time in 1772. As has been said by the saint Nagarjuna:

*The misdeeds committed by one,
Will never vanish in a life time.
When an appropriate season approaches,
The fruits will ripe naturally.*

Local residents tried to their best to put out the flames; however, the fire had already gutted several parts of the dzong beyond salvage. With no possibility of saving the complex, Je Yonten Thaye and a previous Je Khenpo, Khenzur Kunga Jamtsho quickly removed the statue of Thuchen Zhabdrung, covering it with a silver brocade embroidered with the *tashi tagye*, or eight auspicious symbols.

It is said that in response to the requests of people of the Thimphu valley in particular and the people of Druk Yul in general, the reconstruction site of Trashichho Dzong was shifted to the bank of Thimphu *Chu* (river) where it remains standing today. Then Je Kunga Jamtsho himself was installed as Chief Discipline Master of the dzong while Je Yonten Thaye conducted the consecration ceremony. Then the two Je Khenpos, then former and present, sat face to face to discuss an appropriate name for the dzong. Immediately, the reigning 13th Je Khenpo Yonten Thaye successfully suggested the moniker Trashichho Dzong (Auspicious Fortress), though in the past it had been called Sonam Phodrang (Lucky Fortress).

While construction of the dzong was taking place, the

monk body temporarily shifted to Sangzap Dzong, while religious rites to prevent catastrophe were performed in Paro throughout the construction process. Similarly, Je Yonten Thaye undertook to complete the composition of religious scripts which honored the main local deity of Paro, popularly known as Hungrel Gonpa which had previously been left incomplete. During this period, the reincarnation of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, Drugdra Namgyal (1737-1762), and the reigning Je Khenpo were also busy performing religious ceremonies and mask dances to appease the guardian deity Palden Lhamo (Mahakali) in Paro, while the rituals were being conducted in Thimphu, displayed to the public during the Thimphu *Tshechu* (festival).

When it was a time to reinstall the relics and other sacred objects of the dzong, there were territorial conflicts along Bhutan's southern border that almost hampered the process, as the reigning Desi was called upon to settle the conflicts at Pagsamkha. However, the Desi chose not to go and instead completed the installment of sacred objects in both the dzong and the *gonkhang* (inner chapel). The protective deity of the dzong, Due Dragpa, had been driven out by the fire, and thus guardian deities were invited from Pumola and Dorje Dragtsel from Phajoding to were adopted as the protective deities for the new dzong. The dwelling place of Dorje Dragtsel was constructed above the dzong, at a place where it was believed that water percolated from the subterranean world, marked above ground by a particular tree. Even now, local residents visit the dwelling place of this and other deities, making offerings in the hopes of being favored by them with luck and protection. During the construction of Trashichho Dzong, stones were broken and the ground was dug up, actions which angered the earth-dwelling spirits that lived within. In order to please them and avert possible harm, Je Yonten Thaye undertook meditation on Simhananda Avalokiteshvara in the residence of the Je Khenpo.

In 1777, during the reign of the 18th Desi, Jigme Sengye, the monk's assembly hall was extended and ventilation improved. Later, the 25th Desi, Pema Chodrag in the Female Rabbit year (1807), sponsored gold painting inside the monk's assembly hall. In the year

of the Female Dog, 1826, the 32nd Desi, Phurgyal (also known as Chokyi Gyaltsen) constructed a new temple on the first floor of the dzong, installing with it a statue of Phagpa Jigten Wangchuck. The central tower of the dzong was also painted at that time with sixty-two loads of copper, 5800 *tolas* of gold and 23348 *tolas* of mercury. Similarly, the dwelling place of Genyen Jagpa Melen of Dechenphug was also painted with gold and copper as an offering. Tashi Dorje, the 37th Desi, in 1848 offered to Trashichho Dzong a pair of cymbals called Posang, popularly referred to as the cymbals of Tashi Dorje, and which are still in use during annual mask dance performances at the dzong.

The third major fire and subsequent reconstruction

The third major fire to strike Trashichho Dzong occurred during the reign of the 51st Desi in 1869, believed to have started from a grain storage container. After the dzong's reconstruction, the monastic body shifted from Sangzap Dzong to Thimphu and performed annual ritual ceremonies dedicated to Palden Lhamo and Amitayus, the Buddha of longevity. At the same time, in the temple named *Rangjung Lhabang* (Temple of Self-arising), statues of Buddhas of the three times—past, present and future—were erected, along with a sculpture of Zhabdrung. In the residence of the Je Khenpo, statues of the three Buddhas and a set of the sixteen Arhats (Neten Chudru) were installed.

In the residence of the *Tshenyid Lupon* (Master of Metaphysics), images of the three Buddhas, the god of Compassion (Avalokiteshvara) and the god of longevity and their respective retinues were installed, while in the monk's assembly hall, two gold-gilded Buddhas were consecrated as the main object of worship, along with a statue of the god of longevity. In the temple called *Kagyema* (Temple of Eight Pillars) were sixteen beams decorated with intricate carvings, the sacred objects including different aspects of Buddha manifestations were installed. Different kinds of expensive brocades were hung in the temple as offerings to the statues and also to add beauty to the environment.

Gilded pinnacles and parasols were affixed on the roofs of

the central tower and the monastic assembly hall. The sacred objects installed inside the dzong were repaired and maintained, and even refurbishment of some of the inner objects occurred during the reign of the 49th Desi Jigme Namgyal in 1870. Then in 1873, the 50th Desi Kitshelpa Dorje Namgyal merged the lama's residence with the second floor and the monk's assembly hall to the west of the dzong and made it a temple facing the crematorium, naming it Mithrugpai Lhakhang.

The third Druk Gyalpo, Jigme Dorje Wangchuck, considered the father of modern Bhutan, together with the princess of Kalimpong, Choying Wangmo, renovated the residence of the Desi. They also commissioned the painting the inner walls and white washed the external walls of the dzong in the memory of Gongzim Sonam Tobgay in the Fire Rooster year (1957). They also sponsored seven silver bowls to make water offerings to the deities.

Two major fires occurred when the dzong was located where Dechenphodrang is today. After the second fire in 1772, the site of the dzong was shifted to its present position. The plot to construct the dzong was offered by the parents of Aum Thrinlay Pelmo, named Aum Chozom and Aap Tashi from Ludrong near the dzong, as well as the parents of Aum Kunzang Wangmo and Aap Ponlop.

The dzong was once called Chokhor Sonam Phodrang but later renamed Trashichho Dzong after its construction at the present site. It is believed that the dzong caught fire for the third time in Earth Dragon year.

Extension and renovation by the third Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorje Wangchuck

As the dzong had become dilapidated over the years, the third Druk Gyalpo commanded renovations to be carried out in the Water Tiger year (1962). The Druk Gyalpo appointed Parpa Yoesel as chief of construction services and entrusted him with the task of supervision, recruiting several professional masons, carpenters, blacksmiths and workers from different parts of the kingdom. He also invited experts from neighboring countries like India and Tibet to help construct the dzong, with payment of daily wages.

As prophesized by Karmapa Khachab Dorje, the king did not renovate the central tower, the monk's assembly hall, inner chapel or

the masked dance hall. However, he dismantled all other complexes that had become frail and affixed new materials to reinforce its durability. He also expanded many parts, modified the size and style of the dzong and extended the courtyard.

The king built a one storied building as a kitchen and dining hall for the monastic body where a toilet, store room and guest house were attached to it on the north end of the dzong. The dzong was constructed in a traditional way to provide a strong foundation and also to uphold our unique cultural heritage. In the main part of the dzong, the offices of the Je Khenpo and the four Lopons of the monastic body, the monk's assembly and conference halls were built and the sacred objects of worship consisted of Ku Sung Thukten installed in the central tower.

In the lower part of the dzong, the following offices were established:

The Secretariat of His Majesty the King, the office of the Gyalpoi *Zimpon* (Chamberlain), the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, the Royal Advisory Council (*Lodro Tshogde*), and other important government offices.

The offices of other ministries and departments were established outside the dzong. The construction of the dzong with numerous sacred objects within was completed after eight years of work. Then in the Earth Rooster year of 1969, presided by the Third Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorje Wangchuck, Je Khenpo Yonten Tharchen, the former Je Khenpo Thrinlay Lhundrup, and Dorje Lupon Nyizer Trulku conducted a grand consecration ceremony. The traditional chibdrel procession was led by the two Je Khenpos followed by Dorje Lupon, Home Minister Tamzhing Jagar, the Chief of the Armed Force *Goglon* (General) Lam Dorje, and other officials proceeded to the dzong. A grand feast was organized outside the dzong for the people assembled to witness and celebrate this great historical event in Bhutanese history. Between 1987 and 1993, the assembly hall with offices of External Affairs, the Planning Commission and other high ranking officials was established in front of the dzong.

The sacred objects of the dzong

The Buddhist canon (Kanjur) written in gold as sponsored by the second Desi La Ngonpa Tenzin Drugdra and the fourth Desi Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye was burnt in a major fire destruction in the past, however, the sixth Desi Ngawang Tshering, with the aim to preserve and promote Buddhist culture, sponsored a version written in pure-gold with carved covers painted with copper.

In the Fire Horse year in 1966, when the dzong caught fire though the rest of the volumes were left the Je Khenpo Jamyang Yeshe Sengye was able to save fifty eight volumes of the canon written during the reign of the sixth Desi. The Third Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorje Wangchuck recruited monks from eastern Bhutan, Trashigang, Lhuentse, Bumthang and Trongsa to write them in pure gold (1103 *tolas*) in 1957. The king thought of offering 200 volumes of commentaries on the Buddha's teachings (Tenjur) written by famous scholars and thus recruited about sixty experts from within the kingdom and neighboring countries to work under the supervision of Dorje Lopen Yonten Gyaltsen. The Druk Gyalpo also offered the requisite covers to those canons. The *thongdrol* (large scale applique) of the Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche created under the command of the fourth Desi was offered as an inner object in the dzong.

The installation of sacred objects in the monk's assembly hall

In the Water Mouse year corresponding to 1972, the principal of Tango Choying Phodrang Tenzin Dondrub built a gold-gilt statue of the Buddha in memory of the Third Druk Gyalpo, sponsored by the late Her Majesty Ashi Phuntsho Choden. the consecration ceremony for which was presided over by H.H. Karmapa Rangjung Rigpai Dorje and H.H. Tertön Jigdrel Yeshe Dorje. Similarly, the Memorial *choten* (stupa) located above the Lungten Zampa Bridge was constructed in memory of the Third King, sponsored by Ashi Phuntsho Choden and Dungse Thrinlay Norbu in 1974. The consecration ceremony was presided over by H.H. Jigdrel Yeshe Dorje. The Memorial Choten at the heart of Thimphu town is still considered sacred, and devoted people visit it daily to perform circumambulation and prostrations.

Thimphu Tshechu and the homage paid to Mahakali (Palden

Lhamo)

In the Fire Rabbit year corresponding to 1687 during the reign of the 4th Desi Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye, a Bhutanese monk named Ogyen Tshering was sent to Tibet to study masked dances, after which he returned to the kingdom. He then taught mask dances to Choje Penjore and introduced the mask dances in Thimphu. Once again sent to Tibet for eight years, Ogyen Tshering thoroughly practiced mask dances the most popular of which being the Dance of the Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche (Guru Tsengye Cham). Then he returned to Bhutan after having written down the mask dances, subsequently performing them for the Desi. The Desi was pleased by the dances being performed, and ordered Ogyen Tshering to teach the dances to Tshewang Dorje, the Discipline Master of the monk body, along with monks and other enthusiastic young men across the kingdom. The dances taught by Ogyen Tshering were as follows:

- Guru Tsengye Cham (The Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche)
- Tshamcho Tungam Cham
- Gyendrug Khadro Dhenga
- Pawoi Nga Cham, and
- Ging Cham

The aforementioned dances are annually displayed to the public during Thimphu *Tshechu* (festival) on the eighth day of the eighth month. During the first year of their institution, the first performance was the dance of purification called Tungam Cham. Then on the ninth day, i.e., the second day of events, Tshacho Tungam Cham and Dhurdhag Cham (Dance of the Cremation Grounds) were performed and on the tenth day of the month Guru Tsengye Cham (Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche), Pawoi Nga Cham (Dance of the Heroes) and Khando Dhenga Cham (Dance of Five Dakinis) were revealed, thereby introducing the mask dances for the first time in the kingdom.

The reincarnation of Dungse Jampel Dorje, Gyalse Kunga Gyaltsen, was born in 1689 at Tshamdrog Gonpa near Chaling Shogphug under Trashigang District, and in a visionary manner went to Zangdogpelri (Abode of Guru Rinpoche), where he was taught different dances by Guru. He then displayed these steps to

the public and introduced them throughout the kingdom.

The 56th Desi Pangpa Sangye Dorje in 1888 sponsored new dance costumes. With the development of the country, several rich people sponsored and created different dance costumes made of brocade. Similarly, to fulfill the mandate of the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, the Royal Academy of Performing Arts (RAPA) is in the process of promoting traditional mask dances and folk songs that exist throughout the kingdom.

The religious rites performed in the dzong

During the reign of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in the 17th century, prayer offerings were consistently made in the sixth month for continued well being of the country and its people. In the Water Monkey year in 1692, the 4th Desi Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye composed prayers which were performed for nine days as the monastic body moved to Thimphu from Punakha. Likewise, different prayer ceremonies were held in different times to ensure peace and harmony in the country and the service of the Tsa-Wa-Sum.

The structures inside and near to the dzong

The following temples are housed within the dzong complex:

- The record of the temples of the dzong
- The Rangjo, Dralha and Lhamoi temples on the top floor of the central tower
- The residence of the reincarnations of the Zhabdrung to the right side of the dzong
- On the left side of the dzong is located the residences of the incarnate trulkus
- Namgyal Lhakhang is on the third floor of the central tower, later named Demchog Kilkhor Lolang by Kenchen Tenzin Dondrub
- The residence of the successive Je Khenpos
- Kagyema Lhakhang
- Dra Tshenyi
- Zungpainang
- Chikhang Namsey Phodrang

Note: Other temples have been included in previous sections.

Trashichho Dzong, being located in the capital city of Thimphu where His Majesty the King, His Holiness the Je Khenpo, royal families, ministers, government officials and people from all walks of life settle, makes the area the most populated and most sought after place in the kingdom. Further, it is rich with religious and cultural history. At the head of the Thimphu Valley, temples such as Thujedrag and Phajodhing were established while Kenchen Shakya Rinchen and Pal Yeshe Sengye built Densa Khangzang and Jam Lhakhang. In the valley of Thimphu, Wangduetse was constructed by the 8th Desi Druk Rabgye. On the top of the ridge, Je Yonten Thaye and Jamyang Gyaltsen established Dode Drag and Dechen Choling.

Dechen Choling Phodrang, the residence of Trulku Sherab Gyaltsen called Talang Tashi Drugyal, the residence of Jetsun Kunga Gyaltsen called Lhungtsho to the east of the dzong, Trashigang, Nyungne Lhakhang, Guru Lhakhang, the residence of Togden Nyidha Yeshe called Phendhe Lhakhang, and to the east of this temple is Thadrag Rigzin Gatsel, and behind the ridge is Tamdrin, Samar Drag, in the middle of the cliff is Tango Dzong were established. Other temples are listed as follows:

- Sangag Choling
- Gyedhor Lhakhang
- Jatshon Choling
- Guru Nyithog Lhakhang
- Karbi Lhakhang
- Barpa Lhakhang
- Tshalu Marpho Lhakhang
- Yoeselpang Lhakhang
- Samarzingkhar Lhakhang
- Lungtenphug Dragpoi Lhakhang Gong Wog Nyi
- Dungkhor Lhakhang
- Dungkhor Dolmai Lhakhang
- Drubthop Lhakhang in Zilukha
- Zilnon Namgyal Lhakhang
- Guru Tsasum Lhakhang
- Chang Genyen Lhakhang
- Lhadrong Ludrong, and
- Dungkhor Lhakhang

The Thimphu valley is the place where the eight lucky signs are seen in the shape of the valley. It is believed that the root teacher (Tsawai Lama) of Ashi Phuntsho Choden residing in Dechen Choling Gonpa was very expert in examining the site construction and later the Polokhen Rinpoche explained in his writing that the site of the construction was suitable. Therefore, people living in Thimphu are considered rich and wealthy.

Chronology of Thimphu Dzongpons

1. Aue Tshering
2. Norbu
3. Ngawang Gyaltshen
4. Tashi Dorje
5. Druk Rabgye
6. Sonam Drugyal
7. Dondrub
8. Druk Phuntsho
9. Druk Tenzin
10. Choki Gyaltshen
11. Uma Dewa/ Sherab Tharchen
12. Kasha
13. Karma Drugyal
14. Khasa Tobgyal
15. Kawang Mangkhel
16. Lama Tshewang
17. Alu Dorje
18. Kunzang Thrinlay
19. Pema
20. Kunzang Thrinlay (Reappointed)

Note: Their successors are titled *Dzongdag* and the records are maintained by the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs.

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AN OVERVIEW OF BHUTANESE TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

Dungtsho Pema Dorji

Introduction

Bhutan, with its unique geographical setting, harbors a large and diverse biological wealth, of which many plant species are believed to possess medicinal properties. The country was sometimes referred to in the past as *Menjong*, meaning the land of medicinal plants. Today, it is among the few countries where the rich legacy of culture and tradition are intact; the environment remains pristine and contains unexplored species of medicinal plants amongst other natural resources.

The prevailing traditional medical system in Bhutan displays some of the main cultural and social aspects of Bhutanese people, including meaningful interface with the natural environment, and provides a rationale for maintaining Bhutan's rich cultural heritage and medicinal floral diversity.

Buddhism and the medical tradition

The introduction of Buddhism into Bhutan by the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo, in the 7th century CE, ushered into the country the dawn of a spiritual and historical consciousness.

In the 8th century, the Indian saint Guru Padmasambhava came to Bhutan. He had an immense impact on the country, to the extent that almost every Bhutanese religious, ethical and historical tradition emanates from his legacy. He established several sacred religious sites and introduced the Mahayana form of Buddhism, deeply imbued with tantric practices. Since then, a number of Tibetan lamas and scholars have come to Bhutan, further propagating the Buddhist faith. Buddhism has and continues to play a fundamental role in the historical, ecological, religious and cultural development of Bhutan

and its people. The knowledge of the medical system ascribed to the Buddha is one facet of the multidimensional aspects that Buddhism has brought to fruition in Bhutan.

History and origin of Sowa Rigpa

The term Sowa Rigpa (*gso ba rig pa*) consists of two words, *gso ba* to heal, feed, nourish, correct, and *rig pa*, or science, knowledge, perception, erudition. Thus Sowa Rigpa means ‘the knowledge/science of healing’. This Indo-Tibetan medicine tradition has become an inextricable part of the Bhutanese health care for generations. The details of the origin of this medical tradition are complex, as reflected in Buddhist sources. According to Buddhist mythic tradition, the Buddha Kasyapa, predecessor of the historical Sakyamuni Buddha, transmitted the teachings in detail to Brahma, who then imparted the knowledge to his divine disciples, through whom it gradually reached the human realm. The historical Buddha is believed to have taught medicine simultaneously with the teachings of Dharma according to an account found in Vedic sources, which explain the origin of Ayurveda. The only difference is the Buddha is regarded as the source of medicine in the Buddhist text while Ayurvedic texts consider Brahma to be the propounder. The main text of Indo-Tibetan medicine, *Gyu Zhi* (*rgyud bzhi*), is a Tibetan composition, based largely on Indian sources. Although the actual origin and history of the *rgyud bzhi* were the subject of heated dispute among Tibetan scholars, the Fifth Dalai Lama and his regent Sangye Gyatsho firmly upheld the view that *rgyud bzhi* was first taught in India by the historical Buddha, when he manifested himself as the Master of Remedies.

Sowa Rigpa in Tibet

Accounts regarding the emergence and development of the science of healing in Tibet can be found in Tibetan texts of general history and encyclopedias from around the fourteenth century onwards. However, the beginning of medicine in Tibet is the subject

of controversy. In a survey of Tibetan medical history by the Regent Sangye Gyatsho, at the end of the 17th century, there is mention of physicians existing prior to the introduction of Buddhist medicine in the seventh century. Two Indian physicians are generally believed to have first introduced the science of medicine based on the Ayurvedic system at the time of King Lha Thothori, around the second century. On the other hand, certain texts of the Bon religion mention the appearance of a medical tradition in the land of snows as early as the time of their founder Sherab Miwa, several centuries before the common era. Nonetheless, for the most part this account remains a legend. Reliable Tibetan historians date the beginning of medical study to the period of the famous King Songtsen Gampo, in the first half of the 7th century CE. It was during his reign that physicians were invited from Persia, China, India, Nepal and Byzantium, and various medical books from their respective medical systems were translated into Tibetan. This culminated in many years of intellectual and academic exchanges between Tibet and other countries, adding more sophistication to the system. The cross-cultural exchanges of knowledge with neighbouring countries - China, India, Nepal, the oasis towns of Central Asia, Iran, and other places had greatly influenced Tibetan medicine. Sowa Rigpa has assimilated elements from the ancient Greek medical system, the Ayurvedic medical tradition, many forms of Chinese medicine, and pre-Buddhist Shamanistic traditions. The variety of foreign influences, particularly Indian and Chinese, are consistently confirmed by contemporary documents as well.

Sowa Rigpa in Bhutan

In 1616, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal came to Buutan from Tibet. It was his Minister of Religion, Tenzin Drukgye, who was also an esteemed physician, that started the spread and teaching of Sowa Rigpa. The science of healing was established permanently in the country only after 1616. Although sporadic instances of Bhutanese being sent to Tibet to study this art before and after the 17th century are plausible, information is sketchy and historical data has not been

verified. Perhaps the existing traditional medical system might have started after the advent of Buddhism in the 8th century. However, very little is known of the traditional doctors from the time of Zhabdrung till the 18th century. Drungtsho Gyaltsen, was said to have been the personal physician to the first king's father, Jigme Namgyal, while his son Drungtsho Pemba personal physician to the court of the first king, His Majesty Ugyen Wangchuck. Another traditional doctor called Lama Rechangpa also worked at the court of the first king.

Successive rulers too, had their personal doctors. Drungtsho Penjor and Mahaguru served at the court of the second king. In fact, a number of individuals went to Tibet and were trained at the famous medical schools of Chagpori and Mentsikhang, both in Lhasa, at that time the capital of Tibet. This practice came to an abrupt end after the occupation of Tibet, a time concomitant with the process of institutionalization of the medical system in Bhutan. In 1967, during the reign of the third king, Jigme Dorje Wangchuck, who initiated the process of modernization, Sowa Rigpa was included in the national Health System and recognized as the official traditional medical system by the Royal Government of Bhutan.

Subsequent to the government's recognition of traditional medicine, a dispensary was opened in June 1967 at Dechen Choling in Thimphu under the Department of Health Service with Drungtsho Pema Dorje as a senior physician. Traditional doctors started to formulate their own medicines, identified medicinal plants throughout the country, located ideal collection areas, established links with traditional doctors from India and explored essential ingredients which are not available in Bhutan. In 1971, a school of indigenous medicine was started in Bhutan, providing a solid professional base for a medical system which has its roots deeply embedded in Buddhism. The accelerated development of traditional medicine in Bhutan was accompanied by radical changes in the historical, cultural and social domains of the Bhutanese, due to upheaval in Tibet, socioeconomic modernization in Bhutan and the construction of motor roads between India and Bhutan.

Bhutanese traditional medicine of today

Sowa Rigpa as a medical tradition has undergone profound changes within a short span of time. Formerly, taste was used as an indicator for determining the composition, properties and actions of the ingredients. Now, with the establishment of research and Quality Control Laboratory in 1990, the drugs are subjected to rigorous quality control procedures. Every batch of raw materials and finished products are scientifically standardized and critically examined. In order to facilitate production of drugs and enhance the quality, a new pharmaceutical unit was constructed in 1998, equipped with modern machinery and equipment. Drying units for medicinal herbs were constructed at traditional collection sites, i.e. in Trongsa (central Bhutan) for low elevation and in Lingzhi (close to the northern border) for high elevation medicinal plants. A succession of tradition doctors and compounders were trained. To preserve, promote, and perpetuate a sustainable harvest of useful medicinal plants species, medicinal plant gardens were established in selected districts, including Soe, Lingzhi, Barshong in the north (Thimphu Dzongkhag), and Lingmithang in the east (Mongar Dzongkhag).

Currently, the Bhutanese system uses approximately 300 different species of medicinal ingredients, most of them available within the country. The few remaining ingredients are imported exclusively from India, owing to easy transportation, affordability and accessibility.

The institute of Traditional Medicine Services (ITMS) not only coexists with international biomedicine, but the two systems interact under the auspices of the Ministry of Health and Education. Currently the ITMS has established traditional medicine dispensaries in eighteen districts. All dispensaries are attached to the local area hospital, and concurrently provide alternative medical choices to the people.

Current scope and challenges

Sowa Rigpa in Bhutan has entered another phase of change with

the growth of interest in alternative therapies. The necessity of scientific validation, widespread scholarly attention, and the intensification of research on traditional medicines around the world are perpetuating further changes and advancements. The scope of the subject has expanded enormously, encompassing botanical to zoological (animals parts are indispensable ingredients) aspects, ethnopharmacology to chemistry. It has diverged into a truly multidisciplinary field.

At this time, issues like drug quality, efficacy and safety have become major concerns. The assessment and valuation of resources, questions of sustainable use of natural resources, and the protection, domestication and conservation of biological diversity are some implications of the recent trend. In the dynamic of development, the prevailing medical traditions will be continuously enriched and undergoing transformation.

LHOP

A SURVIVAL THROUGH TIME

Dr. Jagar Dorji

Introduction and Background

The Dzongkha Development commission conducted a survey in 1989-90 on the different dialects spoken throughout the kingdom and discovered that as many as twenty-four dialects were found throughout our nation. Although a very small country, the richness of our culture is reflected in these languages. Each of these dialects somehow encompass in them a tradition that speaks of the past, adding more variety to the exotic culture, not those based in Buddhism but also of those that predate the arrival of Buddhism – often referred to as Bon practice. The focus of this paper is a tribe called the Lhops who lives in the Southwestern part of Bhutan in the Amo Chu valley.

This paper attempts to describe the Lhop community - the way they presently live with inclusion of the recent past where pertinent. Their ethnographical and cultural descriptions are provide a lot of clues to the way the Lhop people would have lived in the more distant past. Their marriages and romances, their living style and dietary patterns, and their beliefs and superstitions are fascinatingly original in their conception and practice. The most interesting and unique, perhaps, is their death ceremony. There is no religious ceremony involved but their unique tradition has lived for a very long time and even those immigrants who have been a major force of change in the Lhop culture, lately, have not yet altered this custom. I attempt here to inform readers regarding some descriptions of these aspects of Lhop life and livelihood.

A controversial name

At this point it seems appropriate to attempt to clear the controversy over the name of the tribe, namely, whether they are the *Doya* or the *Lhops*. *Doya* is derived from the Nepali word *doya* meaning 'kind'; when Nepalese immigrants came to this part of the

kingdom, they came across this indigenous community already living in the region. The shy, kind and gentle people of the *Lhop* community treated the newcomers rather kindly. This included their generosity of allowing the latter to till their ancestral lands in exchange for gifts of chang, a weakness of the Lhops. The immigrants began to use the word Doya in describing the local hosts and to show their gratitude for the kind gesture.

Soon the entire group came to be known as Doya, a moniker which became so widespread in its use that even many of the Lhops themselves began to use it. People in other parts of Bhutan also came to know them as Doya. Some foreign authors have also noticed that the word Doya is used by the Nepalese settlers (Pommaret, 1994:56), or is an alien term (Hasrat, 1984). Many Lhop people themselves insist that they are Lhops rather than Doya which they say is coined by *danchats* (foreigners). The new name has had great effect on them. Even personal names reflect attachment to this new title, such as Indu Doya, Gopa Doya or Bhakta Doya, to mention just a few examples. Many Lhop would like to change their names to something native if census records would allow. Throughout the rest of this article, the word Lhop(s) will be used as preferred by the people themselves.

Changing names of people and places by similar incidences like these is not uncommon. The ancient people of Rong (now Sikkim) used to pay respect to the deity of the mountain pass called Laptse. The Nepalese settlers happened to notice the Laptse and pronounced it as La`pche. It soon became clear to them that the Rong people worshipped the La`pche. So they came to be called Lapches, which slowly became Lepchas (Fonning, 1987).

There is yet another confusion. To some people, Doya and Taba Dromtop mean the different people. Taba and Dromtokha are villages where the Tabaps and the Dromtops live, while the Lhops live mainly in Lhotu and Kuchu, Sanglung and Satakha villages. Chakravarti (1978) thinks the Lhop (he uses the word Doya) people were the semi-nomadic group that took care of the cattle belonging to the permanent settlers of Ha and Paro. He apparently thought these were the same group of people who are mainly from the Dorikha and Jabana villages of Ha

Dzongkhag.

Aris believes that the Lhop people may be the same as those who live in the upper and lower Toktokha in Chukha Dzongkhag. In fact, Aris mentions Toktop as a common name for both the Lhops of Dorokha Drungkhag, Taba Dramtokha and Toktokha (Aris, 1979: 17). But presently, the Lhops consider themselves different from the Toktops. Aris would have us believe that the three groups of people may have branched off from the original Dung from the Dungna valley in the Western part of Chukha Dzongkhag (18). The older people in the Lhop villages say that until the 1960s the entire region of Lhop was brought under the administrative jurisdiction of a certain Dung Nyerpa- hence the connection.

The Toktop males wearing their distinctive garments crossed over the chest and knotted at the shoulders suggests that the Lhops and the Toktops are the same people. In such case, the Lhop territory also extends right into the western part of Chukha dzongkhag beyond the Amo Chu valley. It must be also remembered that the authors mentioned above hardly had any contact with the Lhop people nor did they conduct extensive studies on the tribe.

Without making a distinction between the two groups, Aris refers to these people as the earlier settlers of Bhutan who might have been pushed to these corners by the more influential and culturally advanced people of the north and central Bhutan. In fact, the Taba Dromtops, Lhops and the Toktops belong to the same group of people.

The remainder of this work mainly discusses the Lhops of Dorokha Dungkhag in two parts. Part One discusses the Lhops within their geographical territory while Part Two describes their ethno-cultural environment.

1. The ethno-geographic environment

The origin of the Lhop

The history and the origin of the ancient Lhop has remained a mystery and has thus far eluded experienced research. The present generation of the community itself is becoming less inclined towards

its history and tradition. The folk tales that could have given us some glimpses into their past are filled with myths, and there are very few elderly people who could remember their folk tales in clear and distinct order. But one thing that cannot be refuted even among the other communities in the valley is that the Lhops had lived and evolved as part of the Amo Chu valley since time immemorial.

They believe that once the region around Amo Chu valley was the home of the Lhop population that extended far and wide. Their tribe apparently lived as far as the Jaldhakha valley further west, now known as Bara-Tendu. It was probably some deadly diseases (*drumney*) or the communal wars with neighbors that reduced the population to the present size of approximately 180 households. A short but interesting folk story might explain this:

Once the entire Lhop population was believed to have disappeared due to some deadly diseases. Only a pair of young cousins had survived; a boy and a girl. In course of time the two children grew into adults. There were no other people around them. One day they saw two grasshoppers stuck together [mating]. Sometime later they saw several younger grasshoppers hopping around. The boy and the girl then realized that if they did as the grasshoppers, there would be younger people like themselves and they would no longer be lonely. So they did what they thought should be done to spread their own kind. They were consequently rewarded with many children. This was the beginning of another *kalpa* (eon) for the Lhops.

Tsenda Butti, a 73 year old woman, vaguely remembered older people telling her about communal wars among different Lhop villages in the old days. A few people went into hiding in far off valleys. Later when the fighting was over, they came out. This could be another theory to explain the existence of a small community of Lhops today.

Lhop literally means southerners, a term mostly used by the

people of Paro and Ha valleys. Its use may also go back to the ancient Tibetan reference of Bhutan as Lho Yul, the country to the south of Tibet and the people of Lho Yul as Lhop. They may have spread to this part of the country in search of land and pasture. Elsewhere it has been said that later migrants from Tibet might have pushed them away to the brink of the southern foothills (Aris, 1979 and Chakrabarti, 1978).

According to a tradition in Satakha, in one of the Lhop villages, they worship a deity called Ta-lang which is said to have its origin in the Doup[hu]-Shari village in Paro. The informants, who have never been to Paro, believe that there is an ox shaped boulder which is the image of the Ta-lang deity which is worshipped in the Dopu village. Although there does not presently exist any such known image in the Paro valley, this belief may provide a clue to an ancient link with Paro and Ha, which would warrant further investigation.

The Lhops and the early Bhutanese

Aris (1979) also connects the Lhops to the Mon people of Zhemgang and Trongsa districts in central Bhutan. If the Dzongkha Development commission (DDC) survey (1991) is correct in its statement that *Nyon-Ked*, or the early language of Bhutan, that is still spoken in the Mangde and some parts of northeastern Shar districts belong to the earliest settlers. The original populations were not entirely pushed to these southern foothills, leaving some parts of central Bhutan are still inhabited by the speakers of Nyon-ked. Both sides of the Black Mountain region are almost entirely inhabited by people sharing the dialect of the Nyon-ked type, although the accent varies from village to village. So the Lhops might have lived where they are now, out of the reach of the social, economic and cultural developments that had occurred in the rest of the country from an early date and not been pushed to the peripheries by later migrants.

The Lhops and the others like the Monpa and the Mangdeps may have been the descendants of the so called *Ri-Dragpa* (people of the mountainous terrain) described as short and sturdy natives of the ancient country, then known as *Ri Drag gi Yul* (country of

mountains and cliffs). Such a country and the people as described above, probably existed in an era that belonged to the third Buddha Kasyapa before Buddha Shakyamuni (Education, 1994). Elsewhere the Lhops are identified with the Kiranti people (DDC, 1991:16) who were presumably the original inhabitants of the sub-Himalayan foothills, but later evolved into separate and unique cultural pockets due to physical isolation from each other over a long period of time (see also Fonning, 1987:144-9). The rough terrain of the mountainous country and the means available in the valley for self-sustenance could be responsible for this isolation.

There is yet another people called the Toto to the south of Taba Dramtokha, almost continuous from the Bhutan-India border. The Lhops are certain that the Toto people are different from them, because their language is different from that of the Lhop. The former live far inside Bhutanese territory while the Toto live in the Jalpaiguri District of West Bengal State in India, probably in the Falakata area. The ethnic connection between the two groups is best left to keen anthropologists and historians, because Aris claims that the Toto people have also migrated from Bhutan.

For reasons that are more geographical than historical or political, the Lhops have remained isolated from the fast evolving culture in most parts of the country for a very long time. With the Tegola mountain range acting as a natural barrier between the Lhops and the rest of the country, the community would have had less access to the forces that would increase social and cultural interactions and likely bring about changes in their lives.

The older Lhops mention Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal with reverence and as a master founder of their religion. One of the explanations they provide refers to the present day Sombeykha village, the upper part of the Amo Chu valley in Bhutan (the river actually begins in the Chumbi valley of southwestern Tibet). The main protective deity of Sombeykha, Kuntuzangpo, is said to have been brought by a Lhop who had worked in the court of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. This village had apparently been a Lhop habitat in ancient times. They even sing songs that narrate the birth of the Zhabdrung and in praise of his fame.

The settlement

Several communities are found living in separate village settlements on both sides of the Amo Chu valley. The villages of Rangtsekha, Doga, Dorokha, Satakha, Sanglung, Lhoto-Kuchu, Lotok and Drambey are on the southern part of the Amo Chu. The villages of Thangtokha and Denchukha and several other villages from the settlement on the south face the slopes on the northern side of the valley. Dorokha was originally known as Dophuchen because of the abundance of rock boulders found in the area while the origin of the name 'Denchukha' has two theories. One theory posits that in ancient times there lived a tribal chief and his lady who had died and become a harmful spirit. The ruined mansion of the chief became haunted by Dun (evil spirits) so the house where they lived came to be called Donkhyim (or evil spirits house) and later changed to Denchukha.

An alternate suggestion is that during the Desid era in Bhutan loads of betel nuts and other goods from Samtse were brought to this place. The goods were then further transported to Ha, Paro and Thimphu. A transit house was built for storing the goods called Doe-Khyim meaning, transit house for luggage. Later the word Denchukha came from this name.

The inhabitants of Rangtse village are said to be originally a part of the greater Lhop community, and are called Yar-Lhop by the people of Lhoto-Kuchu villages. But they live in villages about a good day's hard walk away in the upper part of the valley and seem to have little contact with the community down the valley. The language of the so called Yarlhops has also evolved to a great extent so that it has lost its close affinity with the Lhop language. The Yarlhops themselves believe that they are different from the Lhops and speak a language more like the one spoken by the people of Sombeykha, which is closer to Rangtse.

The geographical extent and place names

The following Lhop folk tales contain interesting stories regarding their territorial extent. The offerings in the Bon tradition of central Bhutan mention territories while evoking the local spirits or deities. The Lhop tradition of offering has similar connotations that prevail in the Nyon-ked speaking areas. The following verses give some examples.

The following verse from an elderly Lhop is more definitive on the descriptions of the Lhop area:

*Tangpu-tangpu la rang ka pon Min-ya-an;
Tangpu la jang Sele La nag Lho Mainaguri tuktu;
Sar se-ti chio nag nup jaldaka tuk-tu;
Lopu ka euka mih ya-an.*

“Long, long ago, from Sele la in the north to Mainaguri in the south, and from Se-ti in the east to Jaldhakha in the west was extended our Lhop country.”

Ti in the Lhop language means water or flowing stream. Any stream or river with ‘-ti’ affixed to its name, therefore, could be an indication of the extent of Lhop habitat. For example, the Amo Chu is called Mo-ti (meaning Mo Chu). Likewise, other streams such as Yash-ti, Do-ti, Kam-ti and Dam-ti are still used in their dialect. Later immigrants added ‘-khola’ to these names and came to be called Seti Khola and Hati Khola. *Doo* in the Lhop dialect means a kind of tree and so Doo-ti that flows through Phuntsholing town is named after the trees that are commonly found around its source. This also supports the discussion in chapter one of the link between the Toktpo in Chukha Dzongkhag and the Lhops.

The present day Damdum river which flows out into India draining the valley to the north of Samtse town, has its original name in the Lhop language. It consists of two rivers, namely the Dam Ti and Dom Ti. Dam Ti originates in the slopes of a lofty

hilly range seen in the northeast opposite Samtse town while the Dom Ti emerges in the southern slopes of the Hoyung (meaning high hill), near the Yeba La range. Yeba La is a continuation of the Hoyung mountain range that can be seen from Samtse. It stands as the watershed between the Amo Chu valley in the north and the southern part of the slope facing the Indian plain drained by the Damdum.

The confluence of the Dam Ti and the Dom Ti, in Lhop dialect is called the Dom Zum, meaning meeting. The Lhops suspect that the present day name Damdum came from their original name of Dom Zum. It could also be a combined name of the two rivers Dam and Dom (Damdom) that later evolved into Damdum. Physical maps of Bhutan indicate that only the river that comes from the Hoyung range is Damdum, but the Lhops are not mistaken about the identity of the river –Dam Ti flows from the west and Dom Ti flows from the east.

The Lhops believe that once their people lived in the present day places called Sibsoo, Bara, Tendu, Chengmari and in the south of Yaba La range (of which Hoyung is a part). Once there was a terrible epidemic that wiped out the entire Lhop population living in these settlements, though when it happened is not known. I came upon a forty six year old man named Daw Tsering who remembers his great grand mother Tsurjemo (or Tsering Gyemo). She had been the sole survivor of the epidemic, and was found in a place called Takchena (now known as Aaley in the Dom Ti valley). A certain man named Tsang Dorje (or Tshewang Dorje) from present day Satakha village found her and brought her to the village as his new bride.

At the time Daw Tsering saw Tsurjemo he was about ten years old and she was probably a 108 year old woman with skin hanging from her bones like loose garments. He remembers seeing her making great efforts to walk with the support of a stick. Tsurjemo was twelve years when she was brought as a bride to Satakha. That puts the epidemic to some 130 years before 1997 (circa 1867) just after the Duar War between Bhutan and British.

After the epidemic, the settlement southeast of the Yaba La ranges were abandoned for a long time. Then the Haps came and grazed

their cattle and still later the Nepalese immigrants came and reused the land that was left vacant, while the Lhops remained in their present villages.

The epidemic theory explains the reduction of the Lhop population to its present size. This epidemic would have come from the plain country with which the Lhops of the foothills south of Yaba La range would have had contact. The fact that Tsang Dorje was able to bring Tsurjemo and that those in the Amo Chu valley survived the ordeal suggest that the killer disease apparently did not reach the other side of the mountains where the Lhops are found today. Places like Chengmari is still remembered as Bajor flanked by two rivers- 'Tsang Ti and Dai Ti; and two cattle barns named Chase la above Bajor and Jetang la (presently called Mandey Gaon). Please see the note on names for the meaning of 'la in Appendix A.

1. The ethno-cultural environment

The people

The Lhop people are short and sturdy in appearance. Both men and women have almost the same body stature – generally between four to five feet in height. One may say that the intra-community marriage they still continue to maintain is responsible for their comparatively lesser stature. People in the village of Satakha who the other Lhops say are not purely Lhops but born through inter-marriages with people from other villages, appear to be taller. But by no means should the other Lhops be under-estimated in their strength.

The Lhop are born climbers and daring athletes. The grasses they use as roofing materials for their houses are mainly found on the steep rocky scarps that are quite intimidating and spine chilling even to look down from the top. But the Lhops climb these precarious precipices nimbly and seemingly nonchalantly to collect needed grasses. They can easily climb tall trees to collect fodder for their animals. These illustrate the physical feat and the fortitude of the Lhops as something to reckon with. It is also an index to their ingenuity and creativity coupled with boldness. Among the Lhop

people, it is not uncommon to find people as old as over 100 years of age. A few years ago, there was a woman believed to be over 100 years and some even put her age to 120 years. Aum Zeymo, a woman of 101 years old is still active and attending to domestic chores. Of these oldest surviving people, they are predominantly women.

The Lhop community and social life:

While Lhop homes and domestic life remain largely unchanged, modernity has crept in to alter tastes in dress and dietary patterns which are explained more fully in a later section.

They live in close community and marry within it, often marrying cousins. Religious worship is oriented toward local deities called *Zhipda Neda*. The Lhops are very simple and humble by nature and quite tolerant, though to this point very few have had the opportunity to become highly educated. The highest level a Lhop has so far achieved in education is the Primary Teachers Certificate from the National Institute of Education at Samtse in 1995. Another young man is making good progress as a promising monk at the Samtse Rabdey. In 1983, Sengten Primary School was constructed and the teachers there have been encouraging the people to send their children to school, but they are far from successful. However, according to teachers, the rate of drop outs is reduced as compared to the past.

Although the Lhops and the Taba-Dromtops belong to the same group, the former consider themselves different from those of Taba-Dromtop. The Lhops call the people of Taba-Dromtop *Shar Mi* meaning people of the east, while the Taba-Dromtop on their part call the Lhops Gongkey. The primary reason for their isolation to date is a lack of social interaction, as there is no occasions in which the two communities to come together, be it socially, politically, commercially or otherwise. The Tababs and the Dromtop trade in Phuntsholing and deal with officials in the east while the Lhops deal mostly with those to the south in Samtse. This lack of interactions is perhaps the main cause of widening differences between the two communities.

There is even an air of animosity between these two groups. Matrimonial and social relationships between them were and

are a rare occasion. Only in certain cases did people dare to seek intercultural matrimonial relations and often had to be prepared to face social consequences. The Lhops are a very close-knit community and marriage outside their community both for female and male is restricted, as it is opposed to their ancestral tradition. If Lhops marry outside the community, he/she loses the relationships with the family. This reservation is even more severe if one partner involved is from Taba-Dromtop. Otherwise, the Lhops maintain a sound relationship with each other within the village. They like helping each other to maintain their strong family ties.

There is no bitterness among the Lhop people about other people coming and occupying their part of the land. A few say they had not been so clever in the past. The new settlers generally see them as a friendly and accommodating people who, like most, enjoy food, drink and the company of family and friends. An elderly Hap herdsman said that they used to visit the Lhop houses and were even given shelter for the night. However, they would not give refuge to any one from outside the community if there were only womenfolk in the house.

Due to their marriage traditions, essentially every Lhop person is somehow related to one another. It is difficult to say who are not related among the Lhops. Marriage is further taken up later in this paper, but at this stage suffice it to say that cross cousin marriages may be responsible for their short stature. The other reason may well be the lack of iodine in their diet as in other parts of the mountainous terrain of Bhutan. This last theory, although not significant, seems plausible since there are very few with goiters among the younger generation. Iodized salt is now available to the people.

Loyalty and commitment among the Lhops is very significant. They adhere to the saying *rang euka `nosam itpo*, meaning one feeling towards our land. When so motivated, some have even given up their lives for the community.

Family relationships

The maternal uncle, called *Ku* in the Lhop community, plays a very important role. He is responsible for the day-to-day affairs of the family such as work, trade transactions and ritual performances.

Even the land property is registered in the name of the Ku. During rituals, the Ku must be present. In case he cannot make it to the occasion due to other pressing needs elsewhere, he must at least pass instructions to his grown up nephew, who is the future Ku in the family. When the Ku dies or retires from active family affairs, the nephew takes up the responsibility of looking after the family of his sister's children as well as his younger brothers and sisters. The most interesting part is that even if the Ku has left his ancestral house and to live with his wife as a *makpa* (bride-groom or son-in-law) in his wife's family home, his roles and responsibilities in the family of his sisters remains unchanged.

The makpa contributes as a worker in his wife's family, but he could still be an influential person in the family of his birth. *Azha* or *Azhang*, as the maternal uncle is known in other parts of Bhutan, generally considered an important member in the family all over the country. Azhas usually offer Soonkyi and give names to their nephews and nieces. He has a considerable influence over the children of his sisters, although he may not continue to look after the family. The Lhops still primarily respect the Ku.

The Lhops also give their elders due respect. For example, they say *duika labang* (please eat food) to an elder person such as the Ku, or *Payu* (father) or *Mayu* (mother) or any one older in age. In ordinary terms they say *to tsai* (eat food). Some other examples are given below:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Where are you going? | Na henangkad yiwo? |
| 2. What is your name? | Na ning heta ho? |
| 3. Where are you coming from? | He nangna be-en? |

As it appears, elder people are given their due respect. They are involved in decisions, particularly the maternal uncle who still holds an influence in his ancestral home even after being married and settling with his own family. Although older people with wisdom do have a say in the *jomdu* (meetings), those with official responsibilities are more influential in their decisions. Much community related decisions are taken in the *jomdu*. For example, a man whose wife had

died a year ago had an affair with another woman. He was stripped of ownership of a part of his cardamom fields for violating community law. The rule is that the widow or widower must remain chaste for three years after the demise of the spouse. Younger people marry on consent from their parents even if they choose their own partners, though usually parents do not bar the marriages of their children's choice.

However, there is a sign of change in the family relationships. Nowadays, younger people are said to be consulting their adults less. Aum Tsenda Butti sums up the shift, saying, "Oh, the children nowadays do not listen to us. They are different."

The clan system:

It appears that the Lhops also have a clan system in the past (clan is the nearest word one could find to describe the type of families they have described). One elderly person gave as many as nine names of various clans, including `Nampa, `Mehtsad, `Luishtsad, Nyima Dzang, Dingtsad, Drupshok, Umtsad, Bumtsad, Kontsering. They believe that Luistsad and Kontsering clans mainly came from the Satakha village. Dingtsad, Bumtsad and Drupshok lived in Sanglung valley while Nampa and Luishtsad lived in the village now called Lhotu-kuchu. There is no information on the other clans.

Not much is remembered to explain how these clans came into being, nor what their specific roles in the community were previously. Several interviews put together provide a rough picture of how they lived. There is no hierarchy and no specific role that any particular clan is made to perform. They are all considered equal and every family does everything. However, some feel that in the past the responsibilities of the gups and chipons mainly fell upon the Drupshok clan, which only explains that this clan might have had a leadership role.

Another theory that can be proposed here is that the names of the clans probably came from the type of deities they worship. For example, the `Nampas worship sky goddesses called the Teng Lha, the Dingtsad propitiate a deity called Poktoi, while the Drupshok venerate

a certain lake deity called Tsomen. The Nima Dzang worship a certain war deity called Gyalpo-a family deity. The `Luishtsad worshipped the Domzab. Kon-tsering propitiate one Lhasa Gyalpo also called Tsumi Gyalpo. The Umtsad also pay homage to Teng Lha as well as a certain Lhab Rhang who dwelled in the area across the Amo Chu.

The different clans within Lhop culture easily mix with each other without any restrictions and are also rarely mentioned in their conversations. The Lhops are, therefore, a close community and very attached to their parents, particularly the daughters. The names of the clans are rarely mentioned. Inter clan marriage is also allowed freely. Lhops prefer their first child to be daughters, because they say 'a daughter brings a son'. The sons go to live with their wives and daughters are usually in the family, taking care of their parents during old age. They believe that daughters take good care of their parents.

With the makpa living in his wife's family, the Lhops came to observe a joint family system. Some families have as many as twenty to thirty members, that includes aging parents, daughters, husbands and their children and the Ku.

Lhop houses

Traditionally, a Lhop family lives in a simple one room house called *makim* (Dz. *ma khyim*). They make use of hardwood planks and poles called *dumpa*. The walls or *gab* are made of well woven bamboo sticks covered with mud plaster. There is only one *go* (door) and a couple of small *dachongs* (window). The attic between the roof and the *bablang* (ceiling) is used to store farming tools and preserve vegetables and meat. The *tsiblap* (roof) of the house is made of bamboo frames and *pali*, a kind of grass grown in rocky areas (Dz. *draktsa*).

To a visitor, building a Lhop house does not seem a difficult affair. They live in simple houses with no undue space wasted. Their houses are usually not very large and often have only one storey. At the entrance is the open room for guests to seat and sleep. This room is called *lebai*. From here one would enter the main hall with a

hearth at the centre but close to the wall. At the far end of the main room an entrance leads to the store, which they call *poong*. Entrance to this room is restricted.

This is also another aspect in which much seems to have been lost as a tradition. One of my hosts, Ondi (Wangdi) in the Sanglung village, was constructing a house. He consulted a Gurung lama who told him that 1997 was a good year to construct a house and that he should lay the foundation on a Thursday or a Friday. Previously, neighborhood residents would come provide the family with free labor while the family would provide food and chang. Such assistance would be available from laying of the foundation to the finishing of the house, including collecting timber and other materials from the forests.

Once a house was completed, the eldest person in the family would offer *sung* (smoke produced by burning wormwood twigs) to the deities. Neighbors would come to sing and dance for a night and a day while the host would provide them with food and chang. While this simple ceremony is observed even today, the free labour system is now becoming a tradition of the past. In the past they exchanged labour with each other. A person would be engaged to help his neighbor for a day or so and the host returned the labour another time when the other was in need of help. This system is now not widely practiced anymore, though it was in the case at hand.

The housewarming ritual for Wangdi was quite basic, fulfilling needs without excesses. A ten feet long branch with its leaves dried but not yet fallen was tied to the central pillar in the upper floor of the house. Wangdi explained that after the roof has been installed, he had to invite a *Rai Pow*, as the *Lhop Pow* was too busy, to give blessings to his house. The pow had to say some ritual words to drive away the evils from his house and offered some sang ceremony. At the same time, he had invited those relatives and neighbors who had come to help him construct the house and given them meat, rice and *chang*. People coming to the house warming ritual did not bring anything for the host. Wangdi told me that the help rendered during the construction was enough contribution.

They did not use any phallus symbols like other Bhutanese

houses. However, they keep two similar wooden objects (without the necessary shape of the phallus) in similar fashion at two ends of the poong to drive away evils. The absence of the phallus shape may reflect their conservative attitude towards open display of sexual objects, although the belief of the need to drive away evil spirits prevails in their system too.

It is obviously problematic for the daughters and their husbands to be living in the same room as their parents. But the Lhops have better alternatives. They build small units of cabins usually within the premises of the makyim. Each couple has a small cabin of their own that serve as separate rooms to permit privacy while the parents live in the makyim. Although the couples live in separate cabins, they are still a part of the family unit and eat in the makyim. These small units are also registered in the official record as one *gung* (household). Other couples live in makeshift huts built wherever they grow *jato* and *tsakto* by slash and burn methods, while others live in barns in the forests tending the cattle and moving with the animals from place to place.

In some places several cabins surrounding the main house gives the appearance of a miniature of clustered village with the makyim as a prominent feature. Otherwise, the Lhop settlement is scattered with a family living at least a hundred meters apart from another. The daughters and sons can also separate from the main family and create their own *gung*. Both sons and daughters get equal share of the family estate upon succession of property.

Water supply is most problematic. Earlier, people used to walk long distances and carry water in a bamboo container called *ti-bug*. Many families still walk the same distance to fetch water although the container they use has changed from bamboo to plastic jars. Some more economically well off families have water brought to their doorstep through polyethylene pipes. I have observed toilets built near almost every house, a result of the health campaign, although this was not so in the past.

Lhop dress

Traditionally, the Lhop males used to wear rah-em made of *pasjin* (cotton). It is a simple plain white garment wrapped around

from the back, crossed over the chest and knotted at the back of the neck. It is then tied around the waist with a belt called *padzin*. *Guibem* (female dress) has always been like any other kira worn by other Bhutanese women except that it was also made of cotton like the male dress. They used to tie the edge of their kira over the shoulder with a brooch made of bamboo called *lung*. Both males and females used to wear *pungop* (towel-gob or shirt) over their shoulder. Further, during my brief period of research, no Lhop women were seen to wear jewelry or other adornments.

The Lhops have gradually abandoned their ragmi since the beginning of the present decade (1990s). By 1997, not even an old man would be seen wearing their traditional garment. Men and women buy garments constructed of manufactured cloth from shops in Samtse. Only recently they have adapted themselves to wearing the gho. During my visits to the area, I did not see a single Lhop without a gho or a kira, showing not only the pervasiveness of Bhutanese mainstream culture, but also the willingness of the Lhop to don it. The cotton, which they used to cultivate in the past, is slowly disappearing from their fields. In the ancient days they made their dresses from the fiber of a wild nettle plant called *yodzin*, that grows in forest along the foothills between 500 and 1000 metres above sea level. This practice has been abandoned as cotton began to prevail. How the Lhops came to use cotton yarn may be an interesting topic for future research.

Food habits:

Lhops are generally non-vegetarians. Meat is probably the best source of protein for them, a supply of which generally came from hunting wild animals and fishing. But with the increase in population due to an influx of migrants, the wild animals were driven further away or hunted down to fewer numbers. The quantity of meat supply has been reduced, shifting the burden to domestic animals. Cultivation of new varieties of vegetables has also come into the villages so that they get fresh supply of vegetables from their own gardens. Further, they collect additional varieties of vegetables from the surrounding

forests. Some of them continue to indulge in fishing to supplement their short supply of meat. Appendix B presents some names of the food they eat.

There is no tradition of preserving vegetables for the lean seasons. Within the environment in which they live, it seems unnecessary to preserve as they could get varieties of vegetables as a result of their access to both low and high altitudes.

Their diet may not include rich food and variety, but the few simple items they eat are certainly not poor in nutrition. Their diets consists of *doih-ba*, dough prepared from *tsagto* (sorgum, *pcham* in Dzongkha), or *ra-am* (maize), or the *jato* (millet) and simple vegetable or meat curry. The *tsagto* grain can also be cooked and served like rice. They also bake *toleng* (pan-cake) from *jara* (buckwheat). The grains are first ground into flour in the *rangtak* (*rangthang* or stone grinder). Nowadays, *amku* or *marto* (cooked rice) has taken over as the staple food. But it is essential to grow *tsagto*, which is popular in their feast and in offers made to the deities. Like in many other parts of the Kheng areas, the Lhops also devote a considerable amount of their crops for grains used to brew chang.

The Lhops also raise cattle though not in large numbers. But due to shortage of sufficient quantities of rich fodder and the lack of ideal breeding methods, the animals are often less healthy and not very productive. They raise *pug* (pig), *nob* (cattle), *tapah* (horse) and *cha* (chicken).

The Lhops normally start the first diet of breakfast called *todza* consisting of roasted *rah-am* (maize) that is washed down by drinking *cha* or *dow* (left over liquid after extracting butter from milk). Around mid-day, they take *rishtu* (lunch) consisting of *amku/marto* (rice) accompanied by vegetable curry, or *tsagto*. As they return home, they again eat roasted *rah-am* with tea. Their last meal of the day called *lipto* (dinner), generally consisting of any flour and vegetable curry. There is no offering of the food to the deity. However, their first meal of the new harvest is offered to the deity with the appropriate ritual invocations (please see Appendix C).

Lhop entertainment

There are two games the Lhops play viz. the *ker* (archery) and

dogu (dogor or discus). The dogu is played as a past time while ker can be played as a serious match between different villages. They also enjoy the ker with songs, dance and chang drinking. A partial verbal recitation on shooting an arrow goes like this:

Dasa dogu tsisa ley
 Aulu tsemo tsisa ley
 Boto mahri, butsu mahri,
 Geyngey nyma tsosa ley...

There is yet another verse sung during archery games, given in the appendix of this book. Usually men play the games while women perform songs and dances. The entire affair is about merry making. No serious rules and competitions followed. It follows that there is a limited way the Lhops entertain themselves. At times few ladies have been sitting in the shade of trees singing their favorite melodies. Their dances are both emotionally captivating and involve use of the body, with steps and hand movements accompanying the songs.

They also play simple musical instruments like *lingbu* (flute) and *kong*. Kong is a tiny musical instrument made of small flat bamboo pieces. It makes a sound when pulled rapidly across the opened mouth. One end is held close to the corner of the mouth between the thumb and index finger while a string tied to one end is pulled rapidly by the opposite hand. It gives a sound that does not go much for tuning, but is enjoyed. I use to watch this instrument played by my cousins back home in Mangdey in the 1960s. The opening and closing of mouth controls high and low pitch. It generally does not produce a consistent melody but has its own beauty, and the local girls would dance to the tune of the kong. It is the vibration of the long thin tongue that makes the sound.

Local beliefs

Lhops are a tradition bound people who appease those deities who protect them, often with offering of sacrifices. Although their

desire to receive blessings from lamas is also strong, their day to day life is much influenced by local deities whom they call *Zhib-da* and *Ne-da*. The chief among all these deities is the *Domu* (in Samtse it is known as *Dom-zab*). While it is Domu that takes care of the general welfare of the people, other deities fulfill different functions such as looking after crops, safeguarding water sources, protecting forest resources and so on. It is believed that once there was a great flood in which many people were washed away, and only those few who sought refuge in the Domu were saved. As a result, the Lhops regularly appease local deities so that such misfortunes do not befall them again. Offering pigs and chickens for sacrifices is common, rituals similar to those found in Ha, and the Nyon-ked speaking regions of Mangde and Kheng districts. The offering of different animals to the deities has been a tradition from ancient times that perpetuates today. For example, the offering of rooster is mainly made to Genyen while pig is offered to the local deities.

Such beliefs as appeasing the forest deities and a sort of fear from these deities can be taken as a positive in these modern times. Any unnecessary destruction caused to the forest would infuriate the deity and hence cause harm to humans and crops. They also believe in the transmigration of the soul just like the Buddhist. Hence, killing animals for no reason brings trouble to the soul. If a man kills a leopard, the soul of the leopard awaits, till the man dies when his soul leaves the human body, to take revenge.

Lhop beliefs are also tangible in their death rituals. They appease the dead person's spirit by offering food and the personal belongings of the dead. While offering these things, they appeal to the recently departed person's spirit not to harm them or their kin. I have often witnessed this offering of food to the dead in other parts of Bhutan myself, and the following are said to be the reasons for offering food.

It is believed that the spirit of the dead hovers around the household- hungry, thirsty, tired and asking for food and drinks until the 21st day after passing. It is this reason that offering of food is prevalent. Then, on the 21st day, the lamas perform rituals in which the spirit of the dead person is given guidance to find a good path.

Relatives come and offer money so that the spirit has the means to make offerings to the root lama for showing him or her the right path. As in most of Bhutan, a considerable amount of our earnings is spent during death rituals.

But the Lhops do not have monks to offer rituals. They ask the spirit only not to harm them and express their helplessness in preventing the soul from leaving the body and lament that it was in his/her fate that such misfortunes befell him or her. Such practices may have prevailed in other parts of Bhutan prior to the advent of Buddhism in the eight century.

The Lhops also believe that a chief ruled them a long time ago. Not much information is available, but it is held that the spirit of the chief resides in the ruined palace at Denchukha, across the Amo Chu valley. The Lhops rarely visit this place for fear of bringing death upon themselves. Coinciding with this belief, some time ago, a man went to Denchukha and dropped dead on the way for no apparent reason, further confirming their beliefs.

Below the present Dorokha Dungkhag office there is a village called Mani Gaon (*gaon* means village in Nepali). In the middle of the village there is a choten which is called Mani choten. This choten was believed to be built by the Lhops in generations past, and is presently occupied by a powerful deity that is worshipped by all the communities in the area. It is connected with the following story:

Once there was a brave Lhop *sharop* (hunter). At the time a white boar appeared around a pond, which was considered sacred in the area. The hunter went in pursuit of the boar as it ran along the hills. Finally, both the boar and the hunter arrived back at the same pond but due to exhaustion, both dropped dead. The people of the village built a large *rombu* (graveyard) to keep the body of the hunter. The spirit of the hunter then began to live in the animals, harming their crops. The people offered sacrifices of pigs, roosters, eggs, food and drinks to entreat the spirit not to harm them. They did this to protect themselves. Gradually, people came to believe this *rombu* to be the home of the spirit and believed it to be a choten. Nowadays all sections of the community in the valley go to worship it every year.

While the Haps worship the spirit once on their way down

to south and once on their way back to the mountains, the Lhops have slowly receded from continuing this practice. They now invoke it only on their visit to Dophuchen (the old name of Dorokha) or when affected by the spirit. The Lhops live some two hours walk downstream from this *choten*.

Across the Amo Chu on the other side of the valley, opposite to this choten, there is a waterfall known to the Lhops as *Chuẓa Kapo* (white waterfall). The Lhops believe that this water is occupied by two deities known as *Gepu* and *Gemu*. Near this waterfall, there is a ruin of what is believed to have been a palace of an earlier chief. This place is now called Denchukha which to the Lhops is *dunkim* (meaning big house, although another interpretation calls it devil's house).

Rituals and festivals

The Lhops' annual festival coincides with the harvest of *tsag to* (sorgum) and *jato* (millet). It is called *Lo* and begins on the 29th of the autumn month (*dawa gyadpa*) and lasts till the 3rd of the next month (*dawa gupa*). This is mainly observed by drinking, eating and merry making and worshipping their deities. The following song echoes their merriment in the atmosphere during the *Lo*:

Oi loko lawa daw chuni wai
 Zhakhe tida chobgey le rangni loko lawa daw chuni,
 Daw-di guba tshebi tshe le wai,
 Dawdi geyba juba jobley rangni loko lawa daw chuni,
 Daw di guba chibe chi-ley wai
 Rangni teng wo gawai luse in,
 Rangni nangi la-da-yang zhin-ci-wai
 Daw-di guba tshebi ya chi-lu lo
 Rangni masehn guna mi im-bey
 Rangni loko lawa daw chuni ein.

A translation of the verse is as follows:

“In twelve months the Lo comes only once. In seventeen and a half scores of days the Lo comes only once. The end of the eighth month and the beginning of ninth month is our Lo. We must worship and give offerings to all the gods and deities of our land during Lo. We must

offer and worship our household deities and ancestors during our Lo. From the ninth month, we must worship all our deities. O! You innocent people, this is our twelfth month, the Lo.”

Another version states:

Dari loko `lawo chunyin ley oi
 Dow di gyadpo dzogpai dzokam lu
 Dow-la gupo tsepey oi yartse `ing
 Nga mazhi dida toen pe gi dzog tsam lu
 Tabu pama yoe pi kotam ni
 Dato putsa yoe pi luesoe dow...

Today from the twelve months; the ending of the eighth month; in the beginning of the ninth month; in between these two months; the wisdom of the ancestors; and the tradition of the present children and so on.

On the 29th day of the eighth month, the family joins together to drink and eat, sing and dance. The 30th day (new moon day) is a solemn occasion, with food and merriment playing a reduced role, especially the head of the family, the Ku, who should perform the ritual on behalf the family. They prepare a small shrine of bamboo or twigs on which nine *shebus* (tormas, look more like a kind of featureless effigy) made of jato are kept in a row. In front of the shebus they put fruits, milks, eggs and fish to the *yuma* (the main deity of the village) and other *zhipa* and *`neda*, respectively, the protective deities of the villages and of a particular place.

In a fireplace outside the house, they produce smoke by burning twigs and leaves of wormwood (*artemisia*) that produces fragrant, thick smoke to fill the air, called sang. The *shebu* are then offered with a certain verse, reproduced here in Appendix D.

On the 3rd day of the new month, special rituals take place. A red rooster is usually raised for this purpose, its head cut off and fixed on a long stick as an offering. It is then placed on the roof top with its face turned towards the source of Amo Chu. The *Ku* of the

family then appeases the protective deity. Some people refer this deity to Genyen (the principal deity in Thimphu valley) whom they consider as Dra Lha (deity of war) by saying the following verse:

`Neysa Tashi Chodzong,
Tsisa Puna Euka ley;
Dani Kapsa doenka
Roema Yesu chika
Roema Yoensu chika...

Saying in this way, the members fold their two palms and bow down nine times: *chin, nyi, sum jee, `ang, doo, duun, gey, gub yab!* And then with a loud whistle, they cover their mouths and leave the spot immediately. The purpose of the prayer is that they offer this sacrifice and appeal to the deity to protect them on all occasions and ask that no harm should come to them for the next twelve months. Some families offer two roosters on the same day, one on the roof top for the male deity –*kepa poto dowlha*, and another rooster inside the house called *moto ka dowlha*, or female deity. The whole affair lasts from dawn until noon.

The Lhops say that no scavengers such as the cat, the eagle or the crow should disturb the head of the rooster. It usually does not happen, but were it to be disturbed, it would be considered a bad omen. This means some misfortune is bound to take place in the household, including death.

According to Lhop belief, the Zhabdrung had instructed Genyen of Thimphu to protect them from the evils of the plain. So every year on the 7th day of the seventh month of the Bhutanese calendar, they go into the forest in groups and call upon the Genyen to protect them by chasing away the Jandrey, the evils of the plains. They chant a verse and swing long knives in the air, shouting “waikyap!” to invoke Genyen, the words of which are in Appendix E.

Birth and marriage customs

Birth

As in any Bhutanese community, the birth of a child is a auspicious occasion. In the Lhop context, it is kept at a low profile and within the family. The expectant mother is assisted either by her husband or her mother at the time of delivery. The use of sharp bamboo to cut the cord is thought to be practical as it would not infect the cord. The mother and child are kept isolated from the family for some time. Because of the bleeding it causes, the birth of a child is considered *deeb* (impure), and the house is also seen the same way until it is consecrated on the third day with some rituals along with the burning of incense.

On this third day, the new born baby is bathed and both the mother and the child are purified by the offering of sang, burning *luib-shing* (wormwood) twigs and leaves and by sprinkling water. This simple process is witnessed by their close relatives who are offered drinks. Three beads are tied around the neck of the baby who is given a name either by the father, the *Ku* or the *ta* (grandfather). They believe that if the child does not get a name in three days time the baby does not become fully human. Visitors do not bring any presents for the baby and the family of the newborn serves guests chang.

Marriage system

The late teenage years are usually considered ideal for marriage among the Lhops. Lhops have no system of arranging marriage and there is little sexual promiscuity in the community. On finding a lover, the young girl proceeds to arrange her sleeping place in a small annex called *bobchung* under the extended eaves of the main house. This is also an indication to the parents that their daughter has attained maturity and that she is engaged in a relationship. Parents do not interfere in such affairs, as their saying indicates: '*su gaka pah re gaba ya*' (Whoever I love, I marry). But they do check to ensure the visiting suitor is someone they approve of. This interference is intended to advise whether the bond is permissible by verifying the

degree of their blood relationship.

Once accepted, the boy joins the family as *makpa* (son-in-law). A simple ceremony is usually organized, marked by a feast of rice, pork and chang to welcome the makpa to the family. Makpa is a common term for a son-in-law in most parts of Bhutan. A son-in-law can come and stay in his wife's house or vice versa. In the Lhop community drinks are given to the relatives as a sign of legitimizing the marriage.

Sending daughters to live in the husband's family is not a common practice. But if the makpa's family has no daughter, a daughter-in-law can go to live with her spouse's family. A female leaving her ancestral house, called *makyim*, in order to join her husband is preceded by the gift of cash, *menta madang chunni* (twelve copper coins) which is seen to be the dowry. In return, drinks are offered to her family by the husband, followed by appeasing of the family deity, a ritual which becomes an annual feature until her death.

This long procedure is likely a contributing factor to the close ties between Lhop families. A family may consist of a few couples and their children, including the grandparents. But as the Lhops do not believe in exogamy, any female marrying an outsider is ex-communicated from the family as well as the community. They believe that marrying outside one's community angers the deities. This tradition seems to be relaxing, though, judging from a few, more recent cases of marriage outside the community.

Divorce is not very common. It happens mainly when there are no offspring from the marriage. In such a case also, a husband can bring in a new wife by the approval of the first wife or divorce the first wife. In case a mutual divorce is inevitable, the decision is made at the *jomdu* (meeting of *gups*, *chipons*, etc). In case the divorce is initiated by one party, recompense is often paid to the other party, often in the form of cattle heads. Children stay with their mother as it is their family house. Their father goes to another family as a *makpa* so there is no place for the children, though fathers are expected to support their children from the initial marriage, if any.

Although polygamy is acceptable in the community, the

obligation of the husband to look after two wives and the welfare of both families is a strong factor in making such decisions. If one is able to afford hard labour and enough support to more than one family, then maintaining two families is accepted.

As in the case of divorce, most matters of domestic and other legal disputes are brought to and discussed in the *Dzomdu* or meeting of the villagers (pronounced by Lhops as *Jomdu*). Rape cases are reported to the *gup* and to the *Drungkhag* (sub-district) court.

Death ceremonies

Death is considered a great loss, but the spirit of the dead must be appeased so that it does not cause any harm to the surviving family members. The spirit of the dead is specially feared if the death was caused by an accident-such as falling out of a tree or an encounter with wild animals. During the funerals, they chant a verse in chorus which could be translated as follows:

You are dead, what can we do?
 You are dead because it was in your fate;
 No amount of pleas to the deity worked
 It is time you have to die and the deity has taken you
 Do not curse or blame us and our property, livestock and children,
 We are giving you your share of grains, properties, livestock,
 Take those and make offerings to the deities for the safe journey of
 your soul,
 Do not trouble us any more; we are giving your share.

The Lhops also believe that the souls of the dead need companions. But since no humans can be sacrificed for such purposes, they send the soul of an ox for a man and that of a cow for a woman. The mortal remains of the animals is distributed among those who attend the funeral ceremonies.

Lack of access to religious services might have led them to the appeasing of the soul, as it is believed that the unguided and wandering spirit keep coming back to the family hoping to get food

and shelter. As remaining family members cannot see the spirit of the deceased and therefore, fail to fulfill their desires, it is believed that the frustrated spirit often resorts to harming them.

However, the Lhops are not entirely unaware of the presence of spirits of the dead and their residual attachment to material properties. After death, the relatives of the family gather as a sign of mourning. They bring offerings of chang made from jato. They offer these to the spirit and during the funeral, belongings of the dead person are kept with the coffins. Probably owing to the lack of ritual ceremony involving lamas, there is no cremation. The Lhops bury their dead in coffins, which is a comparatively unusual tradition in the region.

The corpse is kept in the front room of the house for three days during which it is offered regular meals accompanied by chanting as stated in the aforementioned verse. Some people, usually men, keep constant watch over the corpse round the clock. Not everybody touches the dead body, as the person who touches the corpse is then not allowed to leave its side. That person's head is covered by a piece of cloth and would then stay isolated from others. Other members of the house also refrain from entering other people's houses during the time of mourning. They avoid consuming salt and fried food, as is seen in some Nepali traditions. The widower or the widow, in particular, should not visit other people's houses for three years.

On the third day, the day of the burial, people of the village gather and offer food, grain and wine to the bereaved family. A type of tree called *leh-shing* (tshenden shing in Dzongkha) is cut and planks are chopped out from its trunk. The elders do not remember why this particular tree is chosen, but if this tree is not available, there must at least be a piece of its wood along with the planks of another tree which could substitute the leh-shing. Some people collect stone slabs. They prefer to select a site that lies to the north-west of the house.

The planks are then made into a coffin. The dead body is wrapped in a white cloth and folded with its knees against the chest then bound with cane ropes, before being rolled in a soft bamboo mat and put in the coffin. At the selected site, the ground is cleared

and stone slabs are laid to raise the area from the normal ground level to about six inches. The coffin is then placed on the raised ground. They paste white clay on the holes and cracks in the coffin to make it airtight. Around the coffin a round monument is built using the stone slabs.

The personal belongings of the dead person – such as knife, cups, plates, baskets, pots, pans, cloths, shoes and so on- are then kept on top of the mound. A young girl then walks around the mound and scatters seed of cereals and cotton. Outside the monument, pegs measuring 3-4 feet high are fixed to the ground in a close row to act as fencing. A temporary roof over the mound is also erected. Finally, food and drinks are then offered to the departed soul before the mourners leave the place. A white mani (Mani scripts printed on white cloth) flag is also hoisted on the roof of the hut. But this is apparently a new feature added in recent years, and is done only by a few.

In the past the Lhops used to keep expensive ornaments and valuable goods belonging to the dead person in the grave. Their strong belief in the dead spirits lingering to the material property is probably the main reason behind this tradition. For example, if the deceased used to love the flute, the instrument is played to give comfort to the departed soul. The instrument is then buried with the dead body. This also explains that very little objects of value such as gold and silver ornaments or precious stones are to be found among the Lhop population. All that belonged to older generation has probably been buried along with the corpse. But this has now changed. They simply keep a few coins or bank notes of small numeration, besides the old cloths, tools, pots and plates. For the next fifteen days they continue their mourning period when relatives come to help in cooking and also do other household chores.

Most people bury their children in a *rombu* near their house. But dead children over twelve years are offered *gewa*, the offering of an ox for young boys male and a cow in case of a girl. A few people bury them in the river-bed so that the water will take them away.

There are customs one follows after the death of their spouse. The widow or widower cannot offer any food to other people for

three years. They cannot even touch the food meant for others, nor do they enter the houses of other people. They believe they have evils and sorrows which should not be transferred to other families. Some males will not cut their hair as a sign of mourning for their dead spouse; neither do they remarry for the next three years.

Farming practices and the economy

Lhops are primarily farmers. In the past it was not very difficult for them to shift their fields to within easy reach from their villages. In these fields they sow *tsagto* (sorghum), *jato* (millet) and *ra-am* (maize). They also cultivate rice where irrigation is possible, though this crop is a recent entry into Lhop cultivation practices.

While the quantity of food produced depends upon the amount of monsoonal rain received, the Lhops also relate this to their deities. In a year, if the food crop does poorly, they request specific deities to bring rain. There are deities for different elements such as *chu-minh* for water deities, *yuhma* for land, forest and general welfare and *teng-lha* for rain, wind and overall welfare of the village.

Each household has ancestral area used for shifting cultivation spread around their settlement, though some of the fields are more than an hour's walk from the main house. Fields are also found at various altitudes so that they can sow different crops throughout the year. They systematically allow fields to lie fallow for up to six or seven years.

Their traditional tools are simple and used for all types of work. The *nahgui* is a knife with a hooked tip that is also flattened like a digging tool; a *tsabu*, which is a larger knife with a bamboo sheath, and a *kutui*, which is used to dig out tapioca (see accompanying diagrams). In ancient times, they used bows and arrows to hunt wild animals and used wormwood, which grows around in abundance, to make poisoned arrows. Some older people say that many years ago, Paro *Kuzho* (meaning Ponlop, whose name they did not remember) sent Wochu Dungpa to the Lhop country to distribute *patang* (they call it *tsabu*), and *tari* (axe), to help the Lhops grow more food by clearing the forests. They use *tsetab* (rope) to carry their loads.

Modern spades and ploughs are recent additions to their culture.

In their fields they use manure (called *lue*) to regain any lost fertility in the soil. But this is also a more recent introduction. Traditionally, Lhops gathered dried grasses and bushes, burning them in different places throughout the field to destroy insects that devour their crops and redistribute carbon in the soil. Presently, the cattle manure helps to regain the land's fertility.

Nowadays, the Lhops have started working on orange and cardamom plantations – the two commercial crops for which their part of the country is renowned. With changed farming patterns and methods, it is hoped that the Lhops will continue to increase their standard of living. However, their change in diet patterns from yams, tapiocas and tsagto and jato to rice and high use of oil could create long term health problems.

The barter system which initially predominated the area has shifted towards borrowing cash from petty money lenders in order to procure food items easily available in the market. Their traditional cotton garments have been abandoned in favor of factory made goods, leading them further from self-sufficiency and into a cycle of debt. Most of them have pre-sold their cardamom and oranges long before the harvest. Once these crops are reaped, while their old debt is cleared, new borrowing often begins almost immediately.

A journey through time

It would likely future generations of Lhops to know their ancestral traditions, offering them an understanding of their roots and recognition of its unique aspects. At present, most Lhop knowledge is oral and thus there is the risk of extinction as time changes. Already, the present generation seems to have lost a great deal of the past due to lack of significant artifacts or written documents, as well as the effects of modernity and the influence of other cultures. Their language-even people's names-has begun to take on different characteristics. As a result of their comparative isolation, the Lhops language evolved a particular accent, which, though it is essentially Dzongkha, renders their speech difficult for

Dzongkha speakers elsewhere to understand. Their pronunciation and intonation requires special attention in order to ensure proper comprehension, which often comes only when their words are written in the shared script.

It is to be noted that there has been a dramatic change in their standards of living. Many of the Lhops are reaping the benefits of Royal Government initiatives, as they have established primary schools in their settlement along with a basic health unit and agriculture extension units to help improve the overall quality of living in the valley. This small treasure of Bhutan, amongst others, is special as it has not yet been subsumed by modernism, however, as we've seen, there certainly are new trends. It is difficult to suggest protection and preservation of this small group. On the one hand, they must be allowed to enjoy the benefits of economic development and social changes. On the other hand, their contributions to Bhutanese culture encourages that this heritage be preserved.

It has been appropriately said that no society or community can forever remain rooted in its traditional practices. Sooner or later it is likely that this fast changing world will sweep this cocooned society towards a future state of affairs where it will have less control over its own destiny (Singh, 1991). It is, therefore, very important that Lhop culture is further studied and documented for posterity and in the hopes of fostering continuation of their distinct social practices. His Excellency Lyonpo Sangye Ngedup is presently collecting cultural artifacts from communities in situations similar to the Lhops, such as the Layaps and Merak-Sakteps. Such noble initiatives are to be applauded and supported, as a form of service to the future generations. Although these attempts will provide future Bhutanese scholars additional opportunities to exercise their intelligence and cultivate better understanding of the nation, I heartily encourage our teachers and scholarly individuals to not wait any longer, and to follow the accomplished example set by my friends Ugyen Pelgyen and Tenzin Rigden on Khengri Namsum.

The previously limited interactions between Lhops and people in other parts of Bhutan, let alone the rest of the world, has likely been a factor in preserving what does remain of their culture.

Although thus far much of Lhop culture has withstood the test of time, it is beginning to fade away as modernity creeps in. Ideally, through this article and future research, people in other parts of Bhutan will begin to appreciate this community that has for the most part withstood the changes of time. What they have been able to preserve till today in the form of farming, housing, living styles, likely explains something of their past. Besides, keen historians and scholars from within and outside Bhutan may be inspired to further investigate and elaborate upon the present state of knowledge. It is especially hoped that future generations of educated Lhops will correct and improve upon this work where incorrect interpretations may have occurred, for no amount of in-depth work can substitute the perspective of one embedded in a particular culture and value system.

As the verses related in the following appendices indicate, it is apparent that of the four gateways to Bhutan, Shar Dungsam Kha, Lho Pagsam Kha, Nub Daling Kha and Jang Taktse Kha, the Lhops have guarded the western gateway for generations. But indeed, theirs is presently more than a protectorship, being rather a survival, relatively unaffected by the winds of change, and though presently somewhat protected by their beliefs and practices, are increasingly more vulnerable.

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Appendix A: Place names of the past and present.

Several places bear unique names in the Lhops language. A few are mentioned here alongside their more commonly known present names:

| <u>Lhop name</u> | <u>Modern name</u> |
|------------------|---|
| Jetang`la | Mandey gaon near Chengmari |
| Jumthang`la | Sarkitar, a small plateau above the Dom-Zum (at confluence of Dam Ti and Dom Ti) |
| Dising`la | Talung gaon |
| Seka La | Seka Dara |
| Yeba La | Sanguri Dara |
| Relung | Kharpaney gaon |
| Takchena | Aaley |
| Gang Gu | Sibichang |
| Tselung | Tin Don Pan |
| Tandi Gang | Puja Dara |
| Dre ti | Jiti, near Ghumaoney |
| Bajor | Chengmari |

Note: where `la is affixed to the name in small letter it should be pronounced with stress (as in *rLa* in Dzongkha). It refers to sheds built for the herders live while tending their cattle in distant pasture land. Where *La* is written, it means 'pass' and pronounced without stress.

Appendix B: Forest vegetables in equivalent terms

| <u>Lhop Names</u> | <u>Dzongkha/ English Names</u> |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Sa-em | Naag Ked (shoots of ferns) |
| Tick-em | Damru (green leafy vegetable) |
| Lisha, Tuihmu, Bahmu | Three types of mushrooms |

| | |
|------------|--|
| Doh-em | Patsha (cane shoots) |
| Shon-shang | The delicate layer inside the banana plant used to make Honto by Dogaps |
| Nam-nah | Namnah (green leaves with spicy taste) |
| Nga-peh | A bitter plant whose flower is eaten |
| Rah-muih | A bitter flower eaten as vegetable. |
| Chamka | Tsampakai flowers (when tender). |
| Pah-em | Bamboo shoots |
| Murih | Chili |
| Tingyi | Thingie |
| Bar/Tau | Tapioca or dow; stem and roots used |

Appendix C: Ritual recitations during the offering after the harvest

Tsigmet tsari
Martsa ma pud,
Matug la pud
Wahng pupai
Toyi pupai
Tampnu loley tawai
Dula wohngmi tawai
Gon lolehmai na
Ka tsering a tawai

Their translation is essentially, “We have a good harvest, so let me live long and enjoy such a rich harvest,”

Chaka chukka noiley
Kerjem wai
Taka yatsa noiley
Dis-rei wai

Meaning, “Let the crops taste bitter to the birds and rats, but let it be sweet when we humans eat”

Appendix D: Verses chanted during the offering of sang and shebu to the deity at the lo ceremony.

Yeyley daka zardi
Yoenley gyika zardi
Pow dukduk par (raise the patang towards the east)
Oi shagyi aum goh pyi
Dachung yama so long ein
Da sa masa lo song ein,
Oi ke ha!

At this stage some discard the *shebu* at a distance, a man shoots the arrow towards it. After the *shebu* has been cast away, the people return home with a victorious song of *leybey*:

Ley so drey chi ngey pa cha
Ley sang chu dri,
Oley samchu ngeychi dipada leys bo ley
Gyenbu zangyi gowa ley,
Ley sho ley.

Another version goes like this:

Daychu hoop su thung yi la
Lay sho lay
Lay amba ya

Daysha hampa za yi la
Lay sho lay
Lay jamba ya.

Jemba da yi kho yi la
Lay sho lay
Lay jamba ya.

Appendix E: Verses chanted by Lhops to invoke Genyen.

*Zhabdrung poethley wo joentsay
Ya lay ki ka za, yen lay da kazien di,
Mengi ara zeetey aie pobi lo mindu-waikya.*

*Wai zepu yang mago tsumidi,
Mengi araa seetey aie pobi lo mundu-waikya.*

*Sha day mi naley da chi tsu.
Lho pay mi nalay pay chi tsu-waikya*

*Midha yang mi ngo mashe ne
Pow khatu zepey in
Dayda yang day ngo mashe ne
May na gi aje daje in- waikya.*

*Mi chi mi ngo mashe ne
Poeth ki tongden hyoncho in-waikya.*

*La chi lha ngo mashe ne
Poeth ki tongden duba in- waikya.*

These verses end rather abruptly at their conclusion.

Appendix F: Some folklore of the Lhops

The folk song below focuses upon the Lhop people's involvement in building the Dalim Dzong in the west. It is said that there was a formidable devil that destroyed at night whatever the humans constructed during the day. According to the verse it was a Lhop hero who finally succeeded in overcoming the devils and then helped to successfully build the dzong. The verse begins with an old father worrying about the hero's westward journey to build the Dalim Dzong:

Oi pu-chia nublu tang manda wai
Ley yenchey ngari kuzho yen wai
Le senchi nagi kuzho sey yen
Oi phado chi ni pudo chi o
Ley mado chi ni pudo chi o
Ley puchi nublu tang manda oi

Wai nozha Ya a lala endigi
Ley kuzho chalo phida gey oi
Ley mada duplu enjeygey oi
Ley kuzho chalo phidagey oi
Wai tangphu ya-a daley endegey
Ley puchi nuly tang manda wai.

Wai puchi ya loni duplo lo
Dzong dali dzong in dubi dzong wai
Ley puch nublu jugo lo
Wai puchi a kaley bombo joni mo wai
Gari o nublu jugo lo wai
Ley charu nublu jugo wai.

Ley tapu ya danglu meseo ni wai
Ley sachi lakha tam zhabchi ye
Ley nadu laley mesio ni
Ley doji draley digachey
Ley mada ya domlu miseo ni ya
Lhari ngalo to da ye-hey

Ley kaley bombu thngni mo wai
Ley puchi nublu jugo lo
Ley tocha sigi sam mo so wai
Nge puchi ngegey choro sho wai
Ley gawa chigi lenda di wai
Nge puchi ngeygi choro sho wai
Ley puch nublu jugo lo wai

Wai ngenchi senchi ngari kuzho sey
Ley ngenchi ngari thujong ngey yen wai
Ley gabi cheychey eta jama chu
Ley puchi nublu jugo ni wai

*Menda pachey lhudo chi ye
Nga puchi nublu jugo lo*

*Wai puchi ya nublu jugo lo wai
Dzong dali dzong ni dubi dzong o
Ley puchi lo ngi dugo lo ye
Wai ya josa kama pi oi
Nga puchi nublu jugo lo
Oi puch ya nublu jugo ni
Ley puchia so so tami mo oi
Pe lhari tawai lo d ache
Ley puchi gaga dami pelari tam wai
Ya se che wai.*

*Wai puchia pobi pachey gyi wai
Ley puchi nubley khokho ley oi
Wai phado chi ni pudo chi
Ley mado chi ni budo chi
Ya mengi toe lo jamba le wai
Lalu lapcha keyi lo wai
Ley puchi nubley khowa ley wai
Ley gaba mangi ye birse sida sa mabey
Puchi gnara beshey ye sache di ya ye
(Sung by Gyem Tshering of Lhotu-kuchu).*

A song sung during archery games:

*Ah Laybey Laybey wai laybey sa
Ah Laybey laybey lay so chi.*

*Wangchen poengi wai chanda dhi
Ah Laybi tendi wait se go bay*

*Ah Laybey laybey wai labey sa
Ah Laybey laybey lay sho chi.*

*Lay dawa lungi wai yaap machu
Ah tosey namlu they machu*

*Ah laybey laybey wai laybey sa
Ah laybey laybey lay sho chi*

*Ah dadhi wai salu lue machu
Ah dadhi wai trang trang baa lu zechu*

*Ah laybey laybey wai laybey sa
Ah laybey laybey lay sho chi*

*Dro wayka machu wai yangka aein
Ah droku machu wai amei threndha.*

*Ah laybey laybey wai laybey sa
Ah laybey laybey lay sho chi.*

*Dadhi machoey shumay wai yangka da
Shudhi machoey shumay wai chamay pi zhu.*

*Ah laybey laybey wai laybey sa
Ah laybey laybey lay sho chi.*

*Soori nang gi dhamoo wai baa lu zeh
Mayto di lache wai baludu
Rang gi dhamoo dhi wai balu zeh.*

*Ah laybey laybey wai laybey sa
Ah laybey laybey lay sho chi.*

Although the words are undoubtedly Dzongkha, their pronunciations have altered so much that if one does not listen carefully, they sound almost foreign. Lately, a number of Nepali words have entered the Lhop dialect that it is often hard to discern the differences.

IMPORTANCE OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM FOR BHUTANESE STUDENTS

Dr. C. T. Dorji

I. Definition

The word *museum* means a building in which objects of historical, scientific, artistic, or cultural interest are stored and exhibited. Etymologically derived from Greek word *mousetion* meaning seat of the muses or, alternately, a university building. Muses consisted of nine goddesses who preside over the arts and science in Greek and Roman mythology, the forces personified as women who served as the source of inspiration for creative individuals. The word *muse* when used as verb means to cogitate, meditate, think, dream, ponder, contemplate and deliberate. The human being, for more than thousand years, have created places where very special and valuable objects, artifacts and works of fine art provide an ideal milieu for “musing.”

Early concepts of museum essentially paralleled the dictum of archaeology, serving as a warehouse of antiquity where precious and valuable antique objects were stored and displayed to visitors. Of course, people enjoyed these collections on display in the museums. However, now the concept of museum has shifted from that of a warehouse of antiquities to an institution which seeks to document cultural heritage, history, art, science, design, and so forth. The concept is further strengthened and developed by the introductions of a “museum education programme” and “mobile museum exhibition” efforts, which have been incorporated into the rubric of museum going. Almost every museum is now equipped with trained guides and qualified lecturers who address history, culture, archaeology, art history and museology but are also well trained to guide visitors and give gallery talks. Museums may also be equipped with reference library for research and publication, reading room and other outreach initiatives. It is said that “a piece of drift wood or textile with profound background history is more precious and valuable than a piece of a gold or a diamond.” Now the museum is

a centre of learning through visual display of the art objects which attract many visitors, teachers, students and research scholars.

The International Council of Museum (ICOM) which is an agency of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines a museum as “a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development. And open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits for the purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of man and his environment.” (ICOM status, 1974)

II. Paro Ta Dzong building

The historic building of Paro Ta Dzong, which houses the National Museum of Bhutan, was built in 1649 by the first governor of Paro valley, Ponlop Tenzin Drukdra, who later became the 2nd Druk *Desi* (Temporal Head of Bhutan) and ruled the country from 1656 to 1658. It was built on a hillock as a watchtower to safeguard the main dzong, Paro Rinpung Dzong, from Tibetan military incursions. This round, seven storeyed building was constructed by Bhutanese architects using indigenous materials like stone, mud and wood, consisting of walls two and half metres thick which have stood for over 350 years. It was converted into a museum in 1968 because of its historical role, and as emblematic of the shift from a more distant military past and towards the peaceful present currently being cultivated in the nation.

III. Concept of museum in Bhutan

It is said that “Though Rome had no museums but Rome itself was a museum.” Similarly, Bhutan has no such institutions previously, but Bhutan is a repository of cultural artifacts and practices. The genesis of the Buddhist cultural movement in Bhutan can conceivably be traced to the establishment of monasteries and temples beginning with the construction of Paro Kyichu Lhakhang and Bumthang Jampa Lhakhang in the 7th century AD by the 33rd

King of Tibet, Songtsen Gampo. These temples and others serve as museums in Bhutan because all art treasures, images made of precious metals, scriptures and paintings were preserved and conserved within them for worship, study and enjoyment. Since earlier, archaeology-heavy concepts of warehousing antiquity combined with the desire to dedicate an accessible environment in which to display them, a Bhutanese word for 'museum' was coined in conjunction with the institution's establishment in 1968. Two Bhutanese words were joined together *Namsay*, referring to the god of wealth and *Bangzho*, or treasure house. The Bhutanese phrase "*Namsay Bangzho*" means the treasure of god and wealth, or museum. Thus, the full name, *Druk Gyalhng Namsay Bangzho* is equivalent to The National Museum of Bhutan.

IV. Introduction and development of museum in Bhutan

In line with the command of His Majesty, King Jigme Dorje Wangchuck (r. 1952-1972), the third hereditary monarch of Bhutan, the ancient Ta Dzong was renovated to house the National Museum. The Ministry of Development carried out all major repair works and constructed a motorable road to Ta Dzong. In 1968, some of the finest art specimens, including masterpieces of sculpture and paintings, and artifacts from various eras over three thousand years of history were acquired, displayed and revealed to the public. During the period 1974-1976, additional major repairs were carried out, improving electrification as most of the galleries were opened to the public. In course of time, showcases were further improved and re-wiring was completed in 2000 with financial assistance from the Japanese Cultural Grant and all the galleries were opened to the public. The National Museum of Bhutan was the only multipurpose museum in the country till beginning of the 21st century, when the Council of Ministers had decided to establish a museum in every Dzongkhag beginning with the Textile Museum in Thimphu which will be inaugurated on 2nd June 2001.

The museum is an important institution of public education. We may initially think of lectures or books whenever we speak of

education. It is however, clear that neither books nor lectures can bring as vividly before the public the understanding of the past glory. In a museum, history is presented before us in various media, for instance, statues of Buddhas and bodhisattvas which vividly illustrate their inherent grace as well as the artistic acumen of those who were able to channel these qualities into tangible form.

V. Galleries and displays

Paro Ta Dzong building has seven storeys, out of which six storeys have been renovated and converted into galleries to display various art objects. The average number of art objects on permanent display at Paro Ta Dzong at any given time is around 1500 items. They were displayed according to subject from 1968 through 1995, and have been re-arranged in tandem with special exhibitions initiated in 1996. The general arrangement of the space is as follows:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| 6th Floor- | Tshogshing Lhakhang Gallery of Philately of Bhutan Photographs of dzongs and monasteries |
| 5th Floor- | Special exhibitions, at present “Medieval Bhutan (Part I),” covering 11 th -15 th century Thangka paintings Gallery of Namsey Phodrang |
| 4th Floor- | Special exhibitions on “Dawn and Early History of Bhutan” and “Medieval Bhutan (Part Two),” encompassing 15 th -16 th century Ancient arms, ammunitions and armor of Bhutan |
| 3rd Floor- | Gallery of decorative arts including bronze, copper, silver, earthen tea pots and other utensils. Gallery of jewelry, costumes and decorative arts Special exhibition of photographs covering |

25 years of the Fourth His Majesty's Coronation
Special exhibition on "Zhabdrung Era" focused on
the 17th Century

- 2nd Floor-** Religious artifacts, objects, and costumes
Natural history of Bhutan including wild
animals, birds, reptiles and butterflies
Lacquer-ware and wooden utensils of daily use
- 1st Floor-** Bamboo and cane products
Metal urns and other implements

The National Museum of Bhutan has a good collection of thangkas which are displayed in the thangka gallery on the fifth floor, divided into three sections. The first group of thangka are arranged in chronological order to depict the origin of Buddhism. The thangkas in the second section are arranged to describe the development of Buddhism in India, especially by the eight Buddhist Masters (Zamling Gyendrung Chongyi). The third section of thangkas explains the introduction and development of Buddhism in Bhutan from the 8th century CE onwards

VI. Special exhibitions

The treasured art objects of the National Museum have been reviewed and rearranged to more clearly project and present the cultural heritage of Bhutan since 1996, with the view that through such exercises the significance of Bhutanese history and culture and Buddhism could be presented to the audience with greater clarity. It would not only show artifacts as they developed throughout our history but also reflect changes that have occurred as part of the changing needs of society.

The first re-arranged special exhibition on "Dawn and Early History of Bhutan" covering period up to 10th century was opened in 1996. The re-arranged special exhibitions on "Medieval Bhutan (Parts I and II)" covering period from the 15th to 16th century was

opened in 1998. These three re-arranged special exhibitions displayed on the 4th floor are mostly artifacts from the museum's collection. The 4th special exhibition of 1999 was a photography exhibition as part of the Silver Jubilee celebration of the Fourth King on 2nd June 1999. The 5th re-arranged special exhibition on "Zhabdrung Era" covered significant deeds of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal was opened in 2000. The 4th and 5th special exhibitions are on permanent display on the 3rd floor. The last re-arranged special exhibition on 18 to 19th century will be opened in May 2001, and which will remain on permanent display on the ground floor of Ta Dzong. These exhibitions which remain as a part of the permanent display in the National Museum of Bhutan at Paro Ta Dzong are expected to share our past glory vividly with the present and future generations.

VII. Benefit of the national museum for Bhutanese students

Museums have shifted from displays of artifacts to become an educational institution, encompassing cultural heritage, history, arts, science, design and more. This focus is further reflected by the growth worldwide museum education programmes and mobile museum exhibitions, which have been incorporated into the various activities of these institutions. Most museums retain knowledgeable guides, researchers and lecturers who are not only qualified in the subjects like history, archaeology, art history and museology but also well trained to guide visitors and offer gallery talks. Now the museum is a vibrant center of learning, where display and explanation of the objects attracts visitors, teachers, students, tourists and research scholars alike. The young mind should be saturated with the ideas and works born of our human world, and the nuances which pervade them.

In line with the concept of museum as a primarily educational edifice, the National Museum of Bhutan made a modest effort to invite students and teachers from different parts of the country to see the displays of art objects and attend gallery talks on relevant topics. The National Museum of Bhutan has become quite popular, especially after the introduction of special exhibitions and increased gallery talks as the numbers of visiting students and teachers

maintains a steady annual increase.

Table of Bhutanese Students Visiting the National Museum of Bhutan between 1996-2000

| Year | No. Students | No. Teachers |
|--------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1996 | 72 | 4 |
| 1997 | 120 | 6 |
| 1998 | 200 | 9 |
| 1999 | 334 | 15 |
| 2000 | 903 | 25 |
| TOTAL | 1692 | 59 |

Table of Bhutanese Students Visiting the National Museum of Bhutan during 1999 by school of origin

| School | No. Students | No. Teachers |
|-------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Shaba School, Paro | 112 | 2 |
| PTC, Paro | 98 | 4 |
| Paro Jr. High School | 3 | 0 |
| Lango Pry. School | 90 | 3 |
| School of Arts & Crafts | 0 | 3 |
| TOTAL | 334 | 12 |

Bhutanese Students Visiting the National Museum of Bhutan during 2000 by school of origin

| School | No. Students | No. Teachers |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Rinpung Pry. School | 130 | 6 |
| Bhutan Forest Institute, Taba | 36 | 0 |
| Paro Jr. High School | 523 | 6 |
| Drukgyel High School | 25 | 1 |

| | | |
|--|------------|-------------|
| Shaba High School | 75 | 1 |
| Institute of Language & Culture Studies | 23 | 2 |
| Samtse Jr. High School | 16 | 2 |
| NIE, Paro | 27 | 1 |
| SUBTOTAL | 885 | 24 |
| RBP Training Centre Gelephug | 48 | 1 (Officer) |
| GRAND TOTAL | 903 | 25 |

**Indian Students Who Visited the National Museum of Bhutan
during 2000**

| School | No. Students | No. Teachers |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|
| Sarvajana Naidu Govt. Girls College, Bhopal | 78 | 9 |
| Mahadevi Birla Girls` Higher Secondary School Calcutta | 78 | 5 |
| St. Thomas Boys' School, Calcutta | 16 | 5 |
| Robert Money Technical High School & Junior College, Bombay | 47 | 3 |
| Visvabharati, Santiniketan | 9 | 2 |
| TOTAL | 220 | 24 |

As Bhutanese, it is vitally important to know about history

and culture of our country as well as historical perspective of Mahayana Buddhism. The students can encounter these and other concepts through visual displays presented in Paro Ta Dzong. Some of the most important works on view include:

1. **Tshogshing Lhakhang:** The Temple of Refuge Tree, the *sui generis* of Bhutan, presents the history of Buddhism and its propagation. This tshogshing is based on Drukpa Kagyupa tradition with Vajradhara (Dorje Chang) in the center, with the hierarchs Tilopa and Naropa of India and Marpa and Milarepa of Kagyupa lineage. Some of the main Tantric deities such as Cakrasamvara (Khorlo Dampa), Hevajra (Kye Dorje), Kalachakra (Dukhor), Guhyasamaja (Sangwa Dupa), along with goddesses and protective deities are shown on the east side. The main images are Dagpo Lhaje on the southern side, Guru Padmasambhava on the western side and Atisha Dipankara on the northern side. The three main purposes of installing the Tshogshing Lhakhang in top floor of the National Museum of Bhutan at Paro Ta Dzong are to provide a place of worship on the highest available level of the structure, provide a clear presentation of Buddhist iconography, and offer a visualization tool for initiates.

2. **The Sixteen Arhats** of Buddhism are of great importance in Bhutanese Buddhism. It is said that for the welfare of the sangha, Buddha selected sixteen of the most advanced practitioners from amongst his disciples and entrusted them with the duties of preserving, protecting and propagating the Dharma. As is often the case, the Sixteen Arhats are shown with the guardian deities of four directions and the additional figures of Dharmatala and Hvasang.

3. **Zamling Gyadrung Chognyi** or the Six Ornaments and Two Most Excellent Ones: Nagarjuna (Ludrub) and Asanga (Thogme) are traditionally known as the Two Most Excellent Ones while Arya Deva (Phagpalha), Vasubandhu (Chignyen), Dignaga (Chog lang), Dharmakirti (Chodrag), Gunaprabha (Yonten Od) and Shakyaprabha (Shakya Od) together constitute the Six Ornaments

of the Buddhist world. However, in some traditions they refer to Gunaprabha and Shakyaprabha as the Two Most Excellent Ones. The writings by these eight great scholars are found in the Tanjur (commentarial cannon) and are accepted by the majority of Mahayana Buddhist sects.

4. **Guru Padmasambhava** is normally depicted with eight manifestations (Guru Tsengye) and his two consorts. Guru Padmasambhava was the Indian saint of the 8th century, considered as the second Buddha due to his introduction of Tantric Buddhism in the Himalayas, including Tibet and Bhutan. Well-known and almost ubiquitously revered, in Bhutan there are many places associated with him including Kurje in Bumthang, Gon Tsephug in Gasa and Taktshang in Paro.

5. **Marpa Chokyi Lodro** (1012-1097) was one of the chief Kagyu Lamas as well as a great translator (*lotsawa*). He was the main disciple of a renowned Indian saint, Naropa (1016-1100). Marpa translated many Buddhist texts from Indian languages into Chokey (classical language) including texts on Guhyasamaja and Cakrasamvara before passing on his teachings to his capable student, Jetsun Milarepa.

6. **Jetsun Milarepa** (1040-1123) was also one of the chief Kagyu Lamas. The aforementioned disciple of Marpa Chokyi Lodro, Milarepa was also a great poet, and attained full enlightenment in his lifetime. Therefore, he is often presented as an example for perseverance and determination in the quest for spiritual accomplishment. He was very famous for the composition of poems and songs which are still used. Before his departure, his teachings were transmitted to Gampopa (1079-1153) and Rechungpa (1084-1161), who then went on to systematize the schools of Kagyu Buddhism. One system, the Drukpa Kagyu, is the state religion of Bhutan, initially entrenched by Phajo Drugom Zhigpo circa 1220.

7. **Lama Phajo Drugom Zhigpo** (1208-1276) arrived in

Bhutan in the early 13th century. A member of the Drukpa School, which was founded by Drogon Tsangpa Gyare Yeshe Dorje (1161-1211), Phajo came to Bhutan following the prophecy of Drogon Tshangpa Gyare. It was the founder's prophecy, presented to Phajo by Sangye Onray, which sent him southward to what is now Bhutan. Soon after his arrival, Phajo Drugom Zhigpo was confronted with the Lhapa School which was already firmly established in western Bhutan. However, Phajo Drugom Zhigpo was eventually victorious over the Lhapa and married a woman from Thimphu valley, before founding some of the earliest Drukpa monasteries at Phajoding and Tango near Thimphu.

8. **Longchen Rabjampa Drime Odzer** (1308-1364), the great philosopher of the Nyingmapa school came to Bumthang and built eight temples across the country, known as eight lings, including Tharpaling in Bumthang, Kunzangling in Kurto, Dechenling in Shingkhari and Samtenling in Paro. Longchen Rabjampa was one of the greatest thinkers in the Nyingma tradition. Among his many works, "The Seven Treasures" (*dzog dun*) is highly regarded as a monumental treatise by this great scholar.

9. **Drubthob Thangtong Gyalpo**, popularly known as Lama Chagzampa (1385-1464), entered Bhutan circa 1433 and played a vital role in early political affairs in Bhutan. He was a great builder of iron bridges and ferryboats, and also is the alleged composer of occupational songs and a series of dance-dramas known as Ache Lhamo (Lady Goddess). Chagzampa was also a *terton*, or text discoverer, and is said to have constructed eight iron chain bridges and founded several monasteries and temples. There are many temples and sites associated with him in Bhutan, including Duntse Lhakhang and Tachogang Lhakhang in Paro, said to be built by his own hand. Remains of some original iron chain links from the bridge over Paro river below his temple Tachogang are on display in exhibition. The bridge remained in use until 1968.

10. **Terton Pema Lingpa** (1450-1521) was a great 15th century Bhutanese Nyingmapa who discovered many valuable and sacred

treasures (*ter*) in Bhutan, mainly in Bumthang valley. Pema Lingpa also founded many pilgrimage places (*nyay*) in Bhutan and taught in the Nyingma tradition. He was also an important figure in the political history of Bhutan. Tertön Pema Lingpa, as one of the five major revealers of textual doctrine in the Nyingma tradition, was the discoverer *par excellence* of Bhutan. The tradition of religious rituals and dances he introduced known as “Peling Chogyu” introduced by Pema Lingpa are still followed by many monasteries in Bhutan and in other locales as well.

11. **Drukpa Kuenley**, the ‘Divine Madman’ (1455-1529) arrived in western Bhutan in the 15th century. Without a doubt, he became one of the most popular religious teachers in Bhutanese history, with his anecdotes pervading society. A holder of the Drukpa doctrine, he was born to the princely family of Gya, which provided successive abbots of Ralung Monastery in Tibet, one of the major Drukpa seats. His wandering life style, his extravagant and shocking behavior ensured him a special place in the history of Tantric Buddhism. Some of his descendants also became famous in Bhutan, especially Tenzin Rabgye (1638-1696) who occupied the post of regent (*gyaltshab*) and the 4th temporal ruler (Desi/Deb) of Bhutan.

12. **Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal** (1594-1651): The Thangka of Zhabdrung Phunsum Tshogpa or Ngawang Namgyal, the first religious head of Bhutan seen in the center, surrounded by his predecessors the lineage. This thangka also shows the first Je Khenpo Pekar Jungney as well as the first Desi Tenzin Drukgye, the first two most important posts created by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in 1651 to oversee religious and temporal affairs, respectively.

13. Visual material regarding those who have held the positions of **Druk Desi** and **Je Khenpo** throughout history.

14. The students can also learn about **four hereditary monarchs** of Bhutan.

In addition to the above, the students can learn about following

artifacts:

- Bhutanese Philatetics
 - Architectural traditions
 - Military history and munitions
 - Decorative arts including bronze, copper, silver, earthen tea pots and other utensils
 - Jewelry and costumes
 - Religious artifacts, objects & costumes
 - Natural history including wild animals, birds, reptiles and butterflies endemic to Bhutan
 - Lacquer ware and wooden utensils of daily use
 - Bamboo and cane products
 - Urns of different metals and other utensils used in the olden days
- Bhutanese way of life through different stages of socio-economic development.

VIII. Conclusion

The museum as an educational institution of cultural heritage, history, arts, science, design, etc., plays a vital role not only for school education but also for the general public. Neither books nor lectures can bring as vividly before us the understanding of past achievements than as in a museum, where history is revealed before us through stone, pigment, paper, clay and canvas. This concept is further strengthened and developed worldwide by inclusion of museum education programmes and mobile museum exhibitions, which have been incorporated in the various activities of a museum.

Staffed with specialists, lectures and guides thoroughly trained in history, culture, archaeology, art history and museology, these experts are well trained to guide the visitors and offer gallery talks. The museum is an institution of learning and engagement through visual display attracts visitors, teachers, students, tourists, research scholars and aficionados alike. Visual displays can often augment and further solidify the learning and recollection processes, and provide a variety in addition to reading books and listening to classroom lectures. The young mind should be saturated with different stimuli that attempt to impart meaningful realizations of the significance of

human life, history and artistic, creative expression.

Finally, it would not be out of place to note here that conservation and preservation of cultural property is crucial for the benefit of future generations but further, to thwart potential degradation of cultural values over time, lending even more importance to the museum as an institution of cultivation, exploration and explication. These and other values and traditions will have a greater impact the earlier they are embedded in the minds remain as permanent impression throughout their lives. Therefore, we must inculcate cultural and moral lessons in the minds of young Bhutanese, encouraging their appreciation of those artifacts preserved and conserved by our forefathers and presented within the museum. One way of realizing this goal is to utilize museum programming and further, encouragement of the students to visit the museum often to cultivate the visions and goals of the Tsa-Wa-Sum.

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ARCHEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AT BATPLATHANG

Singye Dorji

Background

The 4th December 1998 is taken to be an auspicious day for archaeologists and historians of the Kingdom, as it was the day the RNR-RC's excavator struck and revealed a number of man-made, chiseled flat stones under the sediment which lies 1.5 m below the present surface. This type of stone was quite unusual, and fortunately, curiosity compelled the site engineer Mr. Bhim Pradhan, the contractor Mr. Lhendup Tshering and the excavator driver to more carefully investigate the spot. After clearing the sediment, they found a hole which was quite deep, and further debris removal exposed around the hole an underground, dome shaped stone structure of approximately 9th century CE. Shortly after this first accidental discovery, another area was uncovered at the southeastern part of the complex in the course of terracing work. The shovel of the excavator struck a bunch of bigger flat stones which again, were covering a hollow underground chamber, which later on was named site B-3. These incidents will go a long way in archaeological studies of Bhutanese history.

On 5th December 1998, the site was inspected by DASHO Jigme Zangpo, the Dzongda of Bumthang, Mr. Sherab Gyaltsen, Director of REID, Dr. Walter Roder, co-manager, Aum Kunzang Choden and Mr. Lhendup Tshering, the contractor. Accordingly, the RNR-RC, Jakar had further informed the Chairman of National Commission for Cultural Affairs, Lyonpo Thinley Gyatsho through the Ministry of Agriculture. As per the instruction of the Hon'ble Chairman of National Commission for Cultural Affairs, I visited the site on 11th December, 1998 and submitted a preliminary report proposing the following:

- Demarcate the site and put up fence around it.
- The dome shaped structure needed to be roofed for protection from rain and snow.
- A joint team of the National Commission for Cultural Affairs, Bumthang Dzongkhag and RNR-RC should clear the sediments from the site and document each and every artifact with photographs.
- Find financial assistance and experts to excavate the sites.

The accidental revelation of an archeological site at the construction site was very exciting news for the cultural sector, but for others RNR-RC, Jakar was a disturbing factor. Due to the presence of this ancient structure, the proposed administrative building's plan had to be shifted by 5 meters, creating great inconvenience for the RNR-RC as well as the construction contractor. Consequently, the Ministry of Agriculture, Swiss Development Cooperation-HELVETAS – the donor agency for the construction of RNR-RC building in close consultation with the National Commission for Cultural Affairs had elected to field an archeologist for the excavation.

Through the good office of Mr. Peter Konig, the former Resident Coordinator of Helvetas and the SLFA Secretary General Dr. Eberhard Fischer, they mandated SLFA Archeologist Mr. Reto Blumer and his colleague Ms. Frederique Vial for a rapid archeological excavation in order to establish the importance of structures.

Operation

With logistic support from RNR-RC project and additional expertise, equipment support from the SLFA (Swiss Liechtenstein Foundation for Archeological Research Abroad), an excavation team consist of Mr. Reto Blumer, an archeologist, Ms. Frederique Vial, an ethnologist, and myself as representative from National Commission for Cultural Affairs, we, along with six local workers began the excavation work at Batpalathang on the afternoon of 5th April 1999. We had worked total of 19 days with daily amount of eighty one by two (81/2) hours. The second campaign was undertaken from 6th

April 2000. The Swiss team included one geologist and a botanist working for a period of twenty days.

Since Bhutanese workers are not familiar with an archeological excavation work, Mr. Blumer chose to start the field work on the simplest structure-square stone layer B-3. Mr. Blumer explained the methods of handing, digging hand shovels and pickaxe, methods of pinpointing the location of findings, proper handing and packing of samples, and accurately measuring the altitude with the help of optic leveling instrument.

Under the supervision of Mr. Blumer we excavated the square stone layer in such a way to understand the extension of the structures, integration of the structures in the sedimentary deposits, to determine eventual relationship between the structures, sampling artefactual or anthropic evidences which could indicate the time settings and functionality of the structures.

Site B-1 (Dome shaped underground structure)

Site B-1 is located immediately under the northwestern corner of the administrative building. Since it appeared deep and partially hollow, RNR-RC had decided to shift the building location by about 140 cm from the outer wall limit of the underground structure. The location enabled the RNR-RC team to go ahead with the building work while preserving the site proper for further investigation. After careful inspection of the site indicated that an important part of the structure had been lost due to the excavator's activities, a significant number of stones were subsequently taken out while making entry into the structure. The inner volume is circular with a rounded vertical wall made of tightly arranged angular stones of smaller to medium sizes. The surface of the bottom is about 5.25m and the largest perimeter around 8.1m. At the time we accessed the structure for the first time, this inner vertical wall had an overall height of about 100 cm. before it curved to a dome shaped roof. This upper part seemed to be made of bigger stone slabs than the wall, arranged in horizontal to sub-horizontal positions.

Information received from the construction in-charge and

workers that the inner volume of the structure was filled almost to the top with sediments, though a hollow space somehow appeared at the summit below the stone slab roofings.

Digging took place soon after discovery to get rid of the inner material and have better view of the structure itself. The workers took out the silt clay sediment mixed with stones which were kept for further screening. We observed the arrangement of stones at B-1, finding that there is a clear partition between the angular and rounded stones. The river bed rounded stones are very rarely used in construction material for the inner wall and never for roofing. The angular stones are not of local origin, at least as general survey in the vicinity could confirm. (Reto Blumer's report of 1998)

From the removed fillings, the workers have found certain number of charcoal pieces, well preserved wood fragment, rim fragment of clayware and one and half piece of grinding stones. During the second excavation phase we could get small pieces of turquoise, four pieces of silver buckles, human hair, cinder, and wooden fragments.

It was a mistake on the part of the construction in-charge to disturb the structure by digging out the inner fillings. If an archeologist had a chance to study or observe the structure in intact or minimum disturbance could possibly contribute some clues in understanding that the structure was purposely filled in so that cannot be reused easily. The exact purpose of the structure is still unknown but some indications of lime kiln (oven), or possibly a defense purpose are the likeliest possibilities.

Dating of B-1

Among the eight charcoal and cinder samples collected during the excavation of B-1, two samples selected represented a clear event relating to the use of the structure. We sent these two samples for dating to a laboratory in Miami (Bet Analytic, Inc. Miami, Florida, USA), both of which revealed the burning of fire, probably inside of the underground structure, but eventually also in its immediate vicinity by bringing the charcoal fragments during the filling. (Reto Blumer's report of 1998)

The radiocarbon dating results are as follows:

1.665-980 years Cal. (95% probability)

2.700-890 years Cal. (68% probability)

Site B-2

The structure B-2 is recognized as a ruined dry stone wall. At first the remains appeared on the fringe of a sub-terrace riser and measured about 10m in length. The location of B-2 about 10m from the centre of B-1, possibly indicating that this wall is in relationship with the underground structures. To get a better overview of the remains, we started to uncover and clean them. After digging the surrounding soil about 50cm, the bottom level on which the wall was built was revealed. We discovered that the wall was dismantled in its height but was extended further in both northwestern and southeastern directions. After five days digging, we discovered a wall corner at the northwestern end of the excavated area. Collapsed stones found inside as well as outside the wall, precisely showed that the initial wall was running at an approximate right angle in the north eastern direction under the thick layer of sediments. We ultimately tried to find corresponding corner near this location but failed.

The length of the uncovered remains is about 26.5m from south to the northwestern corner about 3m from this corner in northeastern direction. Its width averages 120cm and its maximum height is about 60cm. Archeological material was almost absent along the excavated area of the wall, save a clay potsherd of light brown clay. No sufficient datable material could be sampled to provide a specific dating of the wall remains, though it is likely that its location adjacent to site B-1 enables us to speculate that both structures were built together as a compound site. During the second campaign about 100 pieces of clay potsherds were discovered at site B-2.

Site B-3

The site B-3 is located about 80m to the southeast of the

complex B-1 & B-2. It was also discovered by chance during terracing work. The RNR-RC team had recognized the site and cleaned the flat area of stones arranged roughly in square about 4m x 4m in size. Mr. Baumgartner, the architect consultant of the construction who led this cleaning, thought that this arrangement of stones could represent a foundation of some housing structure.

Landscape

The initial shape of the landscape in the immediate vicinity of site B-3 is not well documented. According to informants like Mr. Baumgartner, Mr. Bhim Pradhan and local people, and the photographs of Mr. Baumgartner, indicate the existence of a mound on the site. Vegetation covering the mound is identical to that of the surroundings, consisting mainly of grass. At least two blue pine trees were growing on the mound surface, the roots of the tree were located to the western side of the mound during the excavation.

Excavation

After cleaning the stone surfaces, we started digging sediment around the structure beginning the northeastern edge. The silt deposit was compact, containing almost no stones at all. Few boulders near the edge of the structure were seen probably having fallen down from the edge. Later, we extended the excavation surface along the both northwestern and southeastern sides of the structure, which ultimately gave us view of the vertical development of the sides of the structure.

During the second excavation project at site B-3, we discovered that the stone structure was not limited to the platform unearthed in 1999. The stones found in the mound filling to the south of the platform were never intended to accelerate the building but were rather the remains of the peripheral wall surrounding the central platform at variable distances from it. The monument as it can be observed today are much bigger due its peripheral wall which is also of trapezoid shape. The overall surface encompassed by the

wall remains is 15.5 by 10.8 meters.

The discussion about the initial function of the monuments is still not settled, though it is speculated to be a base of a choten, defensive site, or ritual performance platform. The inner chamber of the monument was filled with stones containing about 500 stones of variable sizes. Following artifacts were found in the filling of the chamber:

- 100 fragments of handmade pottery
- 2 fragments of iron tool
- 1 animal vertebral bone and numerous cattle teeth
- 1 polished black pearl stone
- 1 copper Tibetan coin
- Many charcoal pieces

Although the materials recovered were very limited, it strongly suggests activities such as cooking, boiling, manipulation of animal carcass, paintings, offerings, etc.

Dating of B-3

The calibration result as delivered by the laboratory is as follows:

1. 1445-1665 years (95% probability)
2. 1480-1650 years (68% probability)

The 2 Sigma result means that there is a 95% probability of the real calendar age of the charred wood being within the range 1445-1665.

Prior to our excavation and cleaning work at B-3, a worker of the RNR-RC had found a Tibetan bronze coin near the stone surface. Mr. Reto Blumer sought the services of Mr. Loten Dartshang, a Tibetan scholar in Switzerland who deciphered the inscriptions on the coin as follows:

1. On the head side of the symbol of the sun is in the centre, accompanying the snow lion which being the symbol of Tibetan

Government.

2. Around the centre the four words are pleasure, palace, direction, and victory, meaning ‘victorious over all directions.’
3. The reverse side shows a gem symbol in the central part along with the words 1 *zbo*, which is the value of coin. The periphery five lotus flower symbols, between which are five words indicating *rabzang* [*rabjung*] 21 year. Meaning the coin was made in *rabzang* 21.
4. According to Loten, this coin was minted in the foundry of *Gra-bshi-dngul-par-khang* [*bkra shis dngul par khang*] in Tibet in 1932. This does not indicate that the structure was of recent era, because such coins could have been used by some local people in the later years.

We concluded the excavation exercise on 19th July 2000. All three sites are documented and some soil samples were taken to Europe for further analysis. On 22nd July 2000, Mr. Reto Blumer presented his findings at the conference hall of NCCA, and we are now waiting his final technical report. After the excavation, the sites were visited by many dignitaries including His Majesty the King who commanded to preserve the site B-1 & B-2 and dismantle the site B-3 which has become a subject of debate between the Ministry of Agriculture and NCCA.

Note: *The technical details of the structures and artifacts are extracted from Mr. Reto Blumer’s report of 1998 and preliminary report of 2000.*

TRONGSA DZONG

Phuntsok

An introduction

The dzong system in Bhutan was primarily constructed to serve two purposes, serving as both temporal and spiritual seats at the national level and conduits of the central authority at the provincial and regional levels. As the temporal seat, it housed the bureaucracy responsible for administration, defence, judiciary, collection of taxes, development activities, communication from one region to another and internal security. To ensure food and water supply at the time of crisis such as famine and wars, the dzongs also served as store-house for food and water supplies. It is an interesting feature of most dzongs to conceal secret, well-protected drinking water sources.

As the spiritual seat, a dzong is a place of worship which houses the representative of the triple gem, the Buddha by way of the images, the dharma through its library of Buddhist texts and the Sangha as embodied by resident monks. It is the seat of learning for liturgy, grammar, literature, performing and fine arts, music and language, particularly Dzongkha (language that is spoken in the dzongs) which has now become the national language of Bhutan. Dzongs have also served as cultural centres such as public festivals such as annual drubchens and tshechus were performed in the courtyards of the dzongs, which continue to be attended by people from all walks of life. The dzongs are, very importantly, the sacred abodes of guardian deities whose divine interventions are sought particularly during wars for victory against enemy forces.

Trongsa Dzong: Historical background

Pal Nagi Wangchuck, also reverentially referred to as Yongdzin Nagi Wangchuck, was the founder of Trongsa Dzong. Born in 1517, he was the son of Lam Ngawang Choje. In the course of his meditative vision, he was guided by Palden Lhamo, a guardian deity of the Dragon Kingdom, to go to a place in central Bhutan which resembled a bow and which was abundant in food grains (*Mang dru*). The name Mangdue has its origin in this word.

Accordingly, Pal Nagi Wangchuck arrived at Trongsa in 1541, where he took residence in the village of Yuli which was located on a hilly slope to the north, overlooking the then rocky hillock upon which the dzong is presently located.

One night while Pal Nagi Wangchuck was meditating at the spot in Yuli where the village temple is now, his attention was drawn to a flicker of light, one resembling a butter-lamp burning in the open air in the hillock. This is the spot where the present day gonkhang in the Trongsa Dzong is located. Upon visiting the spot, he was deeply overwhelmed as he discovered Lhamoi Latsho (sacred lake of Palden Lhamo) and the foot prints of Palden Lhamo's steed.

In the year 1543, Pal Nagi Wangchuck established a small *tsamkhang* (meditation quarter) in the sacred spot brought to light by the auspicious signs and named it *Mon Drubde* (the meditation centre in Mon). He soon attracted a number of disciples who built their own quarters around the main tshamkhang. The cluster of newly built meditation quarters appeared to the people of Yueli like a new village and they called it *Krong-sar* (pron. Trongsar), which in their dialect means "new village" and that which remains today.

Construction of Trongsa Dzong

By the time Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal was fifty two years of age (1646), he had succeeded in bringing the whole of western Bhutan under the Drukpa rule he established there. He then turned his attention towards what is now eastern Bhutan with the idea of consolidating the whole region into a united country. In order to achieve his goal, the Zhabdrung wanted to establish a seat of authority in Trongsa which would, considering its strategic location between east and west, play a crucial role in his endeavours.

The Zhabdrung identified Chogyal Migyur Tenpa – a close confidante and a person of unquestionable loyalty and integrity – as the most suitable candidate for the daunting task of unifying and consolidating the whole of Eastern Bhutan. As instructed by the Zhabdrung, Chogyal Migyur Tenpa built the Trongsa Dzong in 1644 at the sacred site earlier founded by Pal Nagi Wangchuck about a hundred years before him and called it *Druk Migyur Rabten Tse Dzong*, which may be translated as follows:

| | | |
|---------|---|-------------------------|
| Druk | : | Dragon Country |
| Migyur | : | Changeless/Interminable |
| Chokhor | : | Wheel of law |
| Rabten | : | Secure foundation |
| Tse | : | Apex/summit |
| Dzong | : | Monastery fortress |

or, more fully, “The interminable fortress securely built at the apex of the wheel of law in the Dragon Country”.

As determined by the Zhabdrung, with the construction of six additional dzongs in eastern Bhutan after the completion of Trongsa Dzong viz. Zhemgang Dzong, Jakar Dzong, Zhongar Dzong, Lhuntse Dzong, Trashigang Dzong and Trashi Yangtse Dzong, the whole of eastern region (Sharchog Khorlo Tsibgye) became consolidated into the Drukpa Country or Drukyl.

Appointment of Chogyal Migyur Tenpa as the first Trongsa Ponlop

Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal was fully aware that unless the unified Bhutan was divided into administrative zones, it would not be possible to govern efficiently, nor to sustain the national unity he had so carefully established. Three important administrative zones were established, with headquarters at Darkarna for the southern zone, Trongsa for eastern zone and Paro for the western zone. Choje La Ngonpa Tenzin Drugdra was appointed as Paro Ponlop, Tenpa Thrinley as Darkar Ponlop and Chogyal Migyur Tenpa as Trongsa Ponlop in 1647. The Ponlops were direct representatives of the Zhabdrung bestowed with authority to make independent decisions on his behalf and govern according to the administrative and judicial code he had promulgated.

Expansion of Trongsa Dzong

The dedicated effort of Chogyal Migyur Tenpa and subsequent ponlops of Trongsa gradually led to the expansion of the dzong. The Choten Lhakhang, which still exists, is believed to be the only

structure that predates Migyur Tenpa's reign and which was retained and incorporated into the main dzong during later expansions. In 1652 Chogyal Migyur Tenpa constructed the Migyur Lhakhang. Trongsa Ponlop Sherab Lhundrup built the gonkhang in 1667 that was consecrated by Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye. Trongsa Ponlop Pekar built the lhakhangs of Gyalwa Jampa, Drolma and Namgyalma in 1770. In 1715, Trongsa Ponlop Druk Dhendup built the temple of Chenrezig which was later renovated in 1972 by the second King. The golden pinnacle on Lam Lhakhang and Tshepagmed Lhakhang were installed by Trongsa Ponlop Druk Phuntsho and consecrated by Penchen Tenzin Chogyal. In 1853, Trongsa Ponlop Jigme Namgyal built the Dechog Lhakhang. The second king His Majesty Jigme Wangchuck built Zinchung Wogma and Jigje Lhakhang in 1972.

Trongsa Ponlops

Since the appointments of Chogyal Migyur Tenpa as the first Trongsa Ponlop in 1647, a succession of Ponlops have held the reign of authority in the eastern region as in the following order:

1. Chogyal Migyur Tenpa
2. Sherab Lhundrup
3. Zhidhar
4. Dorje Namgyal
5. Sonam Drugyel
6. Jangchub Gyaltsen
7. Kochog Tenzin
8. Ugye Phuntsho
9. Wangchen/Tsokey Dorje
10. Jigme Namgyal
11. Dungkar Gyaltsen
12. Pema Tenzin
13. Ugyen Wangchuck

Note: later ponlops are not reflected here

Lhakhang (temples) inside Trongsa Dzong

The Trongsa Dzong has fifteen important lhakhangs, as follows:

1. Drolma Lhakang
2. Jampa Lhakang
3. Tshenyi Lhakang
4. Jigjey Lhakang
5. Thubwang Lhakang
6. Ke-dor Lhakang (Kyilkhor?)
7. Dechog Lhakang
8. Chenrezig Lhakang
9. Utse Lhakang
10. Gonkhang
11. Lhamoi Neykhang
12. Chagdzo Lhakang
13. Palace of the second king His Majesty Jigme Wangchuck
14. Choten Lhakang
15. Neykhang of Garab Wangchug

Conclusion

In the year 1853, Ponlop Tsokey Dorje resigned paving way to the installation of Jigme Namgyal as the next Trongsa Ponlop. Twenty-nine years later, in the year 1882, his son Ugyen Wangchuck became Trongsa Ponlop. Since Ugyen Wangchuck was eventually installed as the first hereditary king of Bhutan on December 17, 1907, the title of Trongsa Ponlop was given only to the crown prince prior to his ascending the throne.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

DASHO SANGAY DORJI is an advisor to the Dzongkha Development Commission. One of Bhutan's most noted scholars, Dasho has worked continuously for the wellbeing of the country.

KHENPO PHUNTSOK TASHI is Director of the National Museum of Bhutan, Paro. He holds a post-graduate degree in Buddhist Philosophy from Sanskrit University, Varanasi. He also earned a Diploma in English for International Communication (DEIC) from City University, London. He studied Comparative Religion at Mar Ivanios College in Kerala. The author of multiple books and scholarly articles, he speaks seven languages and has particular interest in Buddhist philosophy, culture and natural environment.

DR. YONTEN DARGYE received his doctoral degree from the University of Delhi for his thesis entitled "History of the Drukpa Kagyud School in Bhutan (12th to 17th century AD)." He is currently the Senior Research Officer at the National Library of Bhutan. His publications include *Guide towards Enlightenment: The Preliminary Practice of the Drukpa Kagyud* (translation), *Bhutanese Etiquette (Driglam Namzha) - A Manual* and a translation of the biography of Phajo Drugom Zhigpo. In addition, he has written numerous scholarly papers on Bhutanese history and culture.

LOPON KUNZANG TENGYE is the former coordinator of the Division for Cultural Properties, Department of Culture. He is a professional researcher and has particular interest in comparative research methodologies.

DUNGTSO PEMA DORJI was the director of National Institute of Traditional Medicine, Ministry of Health, where his primary goal has been to promote and raise the profile of Bhutanese traditional medicine.

DR. JAGAR DORJI received his PhD from the University of New England, Australia. The former principal of Sherubtse College, he

is currently working for the National Council of Bhutan. He has authored a number of scholarly articles regarding education.

DR. CHENCHO TSHERING DORJI received his doctorate from Magadh University. The former chief research officer of the National Museum of Bhutan, he has written extensively on Bhutanese history and culture.

SINGYE DORJI is presently Director of the Textile Museum in Thimphu. He has published multiple works that focus on the traditions and culture of Bhutan.

PHUNTSHO formerly served as head of the Planning and Policy Division of the Department of Culture. Also a noted scholar and experienced researcher, at present he is working as the Chief Planning Officer for the office of the Prime Minister.