

GOLENG ROOP- A CULT OF FEAST OFFERING

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INTRODUCTION

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

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

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A SHORT BACKGROUND OF GOLENG

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



Goleng village: The Land of Wheat

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

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

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

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

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

VILLAGES CELEBRATING ROOP

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

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

ROOP CALENDAR

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

SCHEDULE OF ROOP

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

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

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



Farm tools displayed with tshog

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

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

Wayo, Wayo - Voices from the Past

Four category of offerings are as shown below:

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

Tshog are placed in three categories of offering space:

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

DAYS IN ROOP

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

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

DHAM-LAM

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

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

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



Bonpo offering tshog on the attic (10th day)

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

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

སངས་སངས།
ལྷ་གོང་རྒྱལ་ལ་བོ།
ཡབ་རྩོན་བ་ཤེན་རབས།
གོ་མིང་གདུང་ན་རྩལ་བཀོའད་ན་ཅོ།
ཤར་རྟོང་བ་ན་ལ་རི་བ་བཀོའད་ན་ཅོ།
གནའ་ལར་གདུང་ན་རྩལ་བཀོའད་ན་ཅོ།
རྟུག་མ་གདུང་ན་མི་སིམ་བཀོའད་ན་ཅོ།
རྩོ་ཀ་རང་ལ་ཁོ་ཆེན་ག་རྣང་བཀོའད་ན་ཅོ།
ཏ་ལི་བུ་ལི་དཔོན་པོ་ན་རྒྱལ་བཀོའད་ན་ཅོ།
རྒྱུད་ལར་དག་བའི་དཔོན་པོ་ན་རྩལ་བཀོའད་ན་ཅོ།
སོན་མོ་ཨ་བ་གོང་རྒྱལ་ལ།
སོན་མོ་ཨ་མ་བདེ་ལེགས་རྫོལ་མ།
སོན་ས་བཞུ་ས་རོ་ཅིའི་དེ་རའན་བ་ཅོ།
དོ་སུམ་གོ་མིང་རྩལ་མེན་ཅོ།
བསྐྱེས་བ་གནའ་ཀྱི་བསྐྱེས།
ཐེམ་བ་ས་ཡི་ཐེམ་བའི་དུས་ཚོའད་ན།
བཀོའད་བའི་གསོལ་ལ་ཕྱའི་ལོ་མེན་ཅོ།

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

English Translation

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

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

¹ Possibly the villages in upper *Kheng*.

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

Goleng Roop: A Cult of Feast Offering

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

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

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



Bonpo invoking the deities

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

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

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

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

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

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



Women stopping visitor from leaving Goleng

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

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

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

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

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

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



Women arranging tshog for Rematsan

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

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

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



Communal Offering to Rematsan

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

MANG-LAM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BOLENG-LAM

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

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

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

SON-LAM

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

BONPO'S ROLES AND POWERS

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

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

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

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