

WAMLING KHARPU: A VIBRANT ANCIENT FESTIVAL*

DORJI PENJORE**

INTRODUCTION

Every year, villages along Chamkharchu in the outer kheng (kheng *phyi skor*)¹ celebrate an ancient Bon festival. In Wamling, it is known as kharpu (*mkhar 'phud*), and it is celebrated in honour of Bon Lha 'Ode Gongjan² in the ninth Bhutanese month. The festival coincides with the village's first

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** Researcher, The Centre for Bhutan Studies

¹The villages are Shingkharchu, Wamling, Khriisa, Bardoh, Khomshar, Langdurbi and Digala on right bank of Chamkharchu; Radi, Nimshong, Zangling and Thajong to its left.

² I am not sure whether there is any connection between 'Ode Gongjan འོད་དེ་རྒྱལ་པོ་ལྷ་མོ་ and 'O-lde gung rgyal འོད་ལྷ་མོ་ལྷ་མོ་. The latter is the local deity considered as one of four brothers of the first Tibetan king. 'O-lde gung rgyal is also considered as the father of all local deities on earth, including *sku bla* Yarlung Shampo - the ancestral local deity of the Tibet's royal dynasty. There is a mountain by the deity's name to the south-east of Lhasa in 'Olkha.

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

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

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

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

⁴*Sachag Namchag* means 'antiquity'.

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

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

THE VILLAGE ORAL ACCOUNTS OF THE COMING OF BON

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

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

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

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

Amai! Laso! Wa! Amai! Amai!⁷

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

THE COMMUNITY PREPARATION FOR KHARPU

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

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

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

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

MANGTING: A PRELIMINARY CEREMONY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DESCENDING NIGHT OF LHA 'ODE GONGJAN

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

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

¹⁶Rhododendron is called *jinseng* in kheng dialect

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

When he reaches 'Ode Gongjan, he sings:

ཨོ་ལྷ་ ཨོ་ལྷ་ འོད་དེ་གོང་རྒྱལ།

ཨོ་ལྷ་ འོད་དེ་གོང་རྒྱལ།

དང་སྲུ་ཕ་མའི་སྐད་ལ་ཞེ

གསེར་གྱི་ལྷ་འདྲེ་བ་ལྷ་བླ་མེ་ཚེ་ལགས།

ད་སྲུ་ཚེ་རང་གི་སྐད་ལ་ཞེ

གཡག་གི་རྩོ་བ་ལྷ་ཉ་ཚེ་ལགས།

O, Lha! O, Lha 'Ode Gongjan!
'Ode Lha 'Od Gongjan!
During the time of our forefathers

Wamling Kharpu: A Vibrant Ancient Festival

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

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

རྒྱུད་ལོ་སྐྱོད་ལྷ་མཚན་ལྷ་མཚན་གཞོན་པོ་འབྱུང་ལོ།
གཞོན་པོ་སྐྱོད་ལྷ་མཚན་ལྷ་མཚན་གཞོན་པོ་འབྱུང་ལོ།
ལ་ལ་དབང་ལྷ་མཚན་གཞོན་པོ་འབྱུང་ལོ།
གོ་ལ་རྒྱུད་ལྷ་མཚན་གཞོན་པོ་འབྱུང་ལོ།
ཟས་ལྷ་མཚན་ལྷ་མཚན་གཞོན་པོ་འབྱུང་ལོ།

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Bonpo recites the following verses:

རྗེར་ཐོག་འབྲུ་ལྷ་ལི་གང་འབྲུ་ལྷ་གང་གཏོར་མ་གནང་ལོ།
འོག་ཐོག་ལོར་གྱི་གང་ལོར་ན་རྒྱལ་ལམ་གནང་ལོ།
བར་ཐོག་མི་གི་གང་མི་ན་ལྡི་ལྷེན་ལོར་ན་ཚཱ་མ་གནང་ལོ།
ཆར་རྒྱུས་སྲུ་འབབ་ཏེ་སྤྲི་ལོ།
ལོ་ཐོག་རྟག་རྟུ་ལེགས་ཀོ་སྤྲི་ལོ།
ཆེ་བའི་གསུངས་ལའན་རྒྱུང་བའི་ཉམ་དུ་སྤྲི་ལོ།
རྒྱུང་བའི་ལྷ་ལའན་ཆེ་བའི་གསུང་དུ་སྤྲི་ལོ།
ཐོག་གི་སྲུ་བ་ན་ཐམས་ཅད་ཉམ་དུ་སྤྲི་ལོ།

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

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

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

BAPHU: THE OFFERING OF MILK

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁵ Cane containers for storing and serving *churma*.

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

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

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

NAWAN CHANGPA

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

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

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

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

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

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

དག་ར་བ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་

གཞི་བ་ར་བ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་

Close it if enemies approach;
Open if friends come.

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

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

PHYCHUNG: THE OFFERING OF RICE

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

²⁷'Full' meaning it should be full.

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

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

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

མག་པ་བསོད་ནམ་རྩེ་ལོང
ལའི་ཚང་སངས་རྒྱ་ས་ཚེས་ལྷོ་ལོ་རེང་རྩེ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་
རྒྱ་ལོ་རེང་ལོང་ཨ་ལེས་པའི་དོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་

སྐྱུག་པ་ལོང་ལ་ཚེ་རུ་མ་སྤྲི་ཡོ།
ཡུའི་དུ་ཚོད་ལ་བབས་ཏེ་སྤྲི་ཡོ།
ལོ་ཐོག་ཀ་ཅན་ལེགས་ཀོ་སྤྲི་ཡོ།
ཨོ་ཀའི་སྒོལ་ལམ་ལེ་ཨོ་ཚོའི་ཀིང་ལའོར་ལ་བཞུག་ལབ།
ལྷ་འོད་དེ་གོང་རྒྱལ་གེ་ལེན་ཅོ།
ལོ་མོང་ཅ་བའི་དུད་ཚུན།
ལ་བཚ་བཞུད་ཏེ་དོམ་ཅོ།

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

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

²⁸Khengkha swear word

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

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

LANTHAB: THE OFFERING OF WINE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FAREWELL TO LHA 'ODE GONGJAN

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

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

BONPO AND THE COMMUNITY

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

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

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

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

RELEVANCE OF KHARPU

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

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

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

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