GOSHING CHODPA*

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ABSTRACT

Most villages in the country have local customs and rituals that have been practiced over many generations. The Lou-chu of Sha valley, Kharam of Chali, Kharphu of Banjar in Mongar, Chodpa, Roop and Kharphu in the Kheng region are a few examples. However, most of them are gradually being discontinued as people who practice them die or move from the villages.

This paper attempts to study and document the celebration of Goshing Chodpa in the lower Kheng region. It discusses the history and origin of Chodpa, types of Goshing households, local invocation rites, and their influences on the local people.

INTRODUCTION

Chodpa (literally meaning offering) is an auspicious festival of the people of Goshing in the lower Kheng. It is celebrated every year from the fourteenth to sixteenth day of the tenth

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* This paper is based on my personal observation of Goshing Chodpa and interviews with the villagers of Goshing community during the proceeding of the festival from November 29 to December 2, 2001. I would like to thank Goshing Gup Pema, krongpa Apa Doto, Druba, Sangye Yidup, Konyer Sangye Lhendup, Bonpo Phub Thinley, pamö Rinchen Sudanla, Gadpupa Tshewang and many other people of Goshing for their information. I also like to thank Karma Ura for editing this paper and Kesang Tshering, Research Assistant, CBS for his assistance.

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Bhutanese month. The people of Goshing also observe two other festivals: the Buelpa is celebrated on the twentieth day of the first month, and the Derchu on the eighth day of the fifth month to propitiate local deities. Although these festivals include Buddhist rites, mask and folk dances in many parts of Kheng, the invocation and propitiation of regional and local deities and spirits by Bon priest and pamo are very common in parts of lower Kheng such as Ngangla and Goshing.

People believe that mountains, lakes, streams, cliffs and forests are abodes of spirits and deities, which can be friendly or harmful to human beings depending on one's actions. Pollution or disturbance through any human actions provoke them to cause illness and harm. Shamans (pawo/pamo) and Bonpo are known for their knowledge and skills in harmonizing relationship between humans and those spirits. During Chodpa they play an important role as intermediaries between human beings and the spirit world. They appease spirits through rituals, and subsequently promote human health and well-being. They also exorcise evil influences, carry out divinations, and suggest possible remedies.

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF CHODPA

It is not known how and when Chodpa came to be celebrated in Kheng. Invocation recitals by Bonpo and pamo make references to its existence predating Zhabdrung's arrival in 1616. The oral sources trace it to the time of sacha namcha- the formation of earth and sky. Chodpa, as celebrated in Goshing,
came from Ngangla. In the olden days the people of Goshing had to carry goods from Ngangla to Gomphu, walking for two full days each way. The settlement at Goshing began on places where porters established transit camps on their journey. It was Apa Tashi who replicated Ngangla Chodpa in Goshing, and three generations (*skyey ram*) have passed since then. Therefore, characters and significance of Bonpo, pamo and Gadpupa (a character in *Chodpa*) are similar to that of Ngangla Chodpa.

**PROCEEDINGS OF CHODPA**

On the thirteenth day of the *Chodpa*, lama, *lopen* and lay monks congregate at Goshing Krong and prepare ritual cakes. They perform Buddhist rituals from the fourteenth to sixteenth day of *Chodpa* in the lhakhang, which was built in 1916. On the fourteenth, the Bonpo from Budizhi, pamo and her assistants from Lichibi, and Gadpupa from Lingmapong meet at chorten Bumpa, which is near Goshing lhakhang, and together they perform a purification rite by offering *bangchang* and *arra*. They conduct a *Sa-kor* ritual in the evening on the same day. The next day, the Gadpupa dance is performed in the lhakhang, followed by invocation of Tsanchen Ama Ringlamo after sunset. Ama Ringlamo is the chief local deity of Goshing and Panbang. *Chodpa* concludes on the sixteenth with blessing and Namda duetshey (Tashi molem) conducted by lama, *lopen* and lay monks.

**TYPES OF GOSHING HOUSEHOLDS**

The people of Goshing are divided into three groups of *threypa* (taxpayers): *threypa cheywa* (big taxpayers), *threypa barma* (medium taxpayers) and *threypa chungwa* (small taxpayers). As the names suggest, the household division is based on the people's tax paying capacity. Population strength
and lineage also determine the division. The *threypa cheywa* has the largest tax paying capacity and rank of nobility compared to the *threypa barma*, which has the medium tax paying capacity and middle ranked people. *Threypa cheywa* includes people from Zuri, Bumtangpa, Breylha, Ngalong and Jarpa, and *threypa barma* includes Jeyragpo, Yugi and Jarpa. *Threypa chungwa* is inferior in all aspects. It includes Zurpupa, Jeyragpo, Khalingpa, Golingpa, Thrungchungpa and Montangpola. It must be noted that Jarpa and Jeyragpo also referred in other *threypa* are not of the same lineage. *Threypa cheywa, barma* and *chungwa* are also known as the Breylha, Jarpa and Lamanpa respectively. This social division is also prevalent in Ngangla.

**POST OF KRONGPA AND PAMPA**

Every *threypa* appoints its representatives, known as krongpa and pampa, on the third day of the twelfth month. Their terms last for three years. Krongpa sponsors and coordinates Chodpa, Buedpa and Derchu for three consecutive years. Krongpa is assisted by pampa who contributes in kind, labour and money for the festivals. All *threypa* have traditional houses at Goshing Krong (the festival site) built by the respective *threypa*. It is mandatory for all krongpa to stay in their respective krongpa houses at Goshing Krong for three years. But pampa can stay in their villages.

It is also customary for any individual to serve first as pampa before becoming a krongpa. The tenures of the krongpa and pampa of a particular *threypa* end on the same day. The Krongpa resigns and hands over his responsibilities to the pampa, who then is automatically promoted as a krongpa.

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2 Also known as Krongpa Apa
Eventually when every krongpa resigns, he or she would have served for six consecutive years. It is the most challenging and onerous task a person shoulders for his or her threypa. It must be noted that krongpa and pampa of all threypa are not appointed in the same year.

Every krongpa and pampa possesses one silver coin called betam karp. The face of the coin bears an inscription Դེ་རྨ་རྟེང་འགྲུབ་ཡི་སངས་སྲོང་། on one side and eight auspicious symbols (Tashi Tagye) on the other side of the coin. When a krongpa resigns from his post, he hands over his betam karp and a symbolic khadar (ceremonial scarf) to his successor. Similarly, a pampa gives his betam, along with a bottle of arra, to his predecessor to appoint a new candidate in his (pampa) place. A man would be appointed as a pampa on the basis of a mutually agreed chart drawn by threypa. The outgoing krongpa hands over the pampa's betam to a new pampa. The acceptance of betam symbolizes the occupation of the post. Oral tradition says that Zhabdrung gave these betam as a gift to his host and if any candidates refuse to assume the post of a krongpa or a pampa during their turn, ill luck and misfortune will befall both the candidate and the village to which he belongs. Although there is no historical evidence of Zhabdrung's visit in the Kheng region, it is possible that Kheng nobilities from Tama Chogpa (lower Kheng), Nangkorpa (middle Kheng) and Phikorpa (upper Kheng) would have been patrons. On the day of his appointment, a new krongpa must host a big feast to all threypa. This was a very expensive affair in the past, costing seven pigs, one bull and a several matangma\(^3\) of arra

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\(^3\) Container of arra and bangchang.
and bangchang. The quantity of meat has now limited to two pigs.

The krongpa of all three threypa have access to eleven acres of farming land registered in the name of the community lhakhang. They are exempted from local taxes and labour contribution throughout their term. But they are not free of certain disadvantages. Since they have to live in their respective krongpa houses located in Goshing Krong for three years, they have to abandon their own houses and farms in the villages. As a result, their farms often turn into bush-land, and the houses can be ruined due to lack of maintenance. It is quite difficult to farm the lands and maintain houses even after their return. It is because of these problems that some people prefer to appoint krongpa permanently, while others still favour preserving the tradition.

CONTRIBUTIONS BY KRONGPA AND PAMPA

Unlike the community sponsored festivals in other parts of Kheng, Chodpa and other festivals celebrated in a year in Goshing are organized and sponsored entirely by six people: three krongpa and three pampa. During the Buedpa festival, every krongpa and pampa contributes one phuwa of rice for dru chum, one bottle of arra for serkhem, two bre of flour for ritual cakes, one sung of butter, one cheese ball, one phuwa of sugar and one bre of maize for tshog offering. With the exception of maize, they also make equal contributions to Derchu and Chodpa. Moreover, one extra bre of flour and one sung of butter are given away for Chodpa, which is celebrated

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4 Phuta.
5 It is interesting to note how bottle has replaced traditional palang indigenously made in Goshing
6 Dre is called bre in Khengkha. I have used bre in respect for Kheng dialect.
for three days. In addition, to facilitate propitiation of Ama Ringlamo by the Bonpo and pamo on the fifteenth day, every krongpa contributes one bottle of arra, two bre of sip (beaten rice), one sung of butter, one kilogram of ginger, three bre of rice and one phuwa of sugar. Krongpa provides food and wages for lama and lay monks, while the pampa supports the Bonpo's wages, pamo and her assistants.

It is interesting to note that Bonpo, Gadpupa, Gyalwagongma (guests invited from the locality) and pamo have hierarchical standing in the society. As the Bonpo belongs to threypa cheywa, the krongpa apa of threypa cheywa looks after him and lay monks during the duration of the Chodpa. The Krongpa apa of threypa barma looks after Gadpupa and Gyalwagongma, and krongpa apa of threypa chungwa looks after the pamo and her assistants. During the festival, it is a customary that every individual stay in their respective threypa house, and the respective krongpa apa must extend his hospitality to the people belonging to his threypa.

GYALWAGONGMA

Gyalwagongma, literally meaning luminous persons, is an honorary title given to people who are invited to preside over Chodpa and its ceremonies. It was once a tradition to invite the Khoche, one of the noble families from Joka or Ngangla, as Gyalwagongma to preside over Chodpa. Three krongpa then used to offer one slaughtered pig to Gyalwagongma as a sign of respect. This tradition was discontinued four years ago and the people appointed economically well-off persons or retired krongpa from their own community as Gyalwagongma, whose main role is to receive the Bonpo, Pamo and Gadpupa, to preside over their rituals during Sa-kor and invocation of
Ama Ringlamo, and to make necessary financial contribution in various rituals.

**SA-KOR RITUAL**

*Sa* literally means land and *kor* refers to circuit or circumambulation. It is, therefore, a territorial circuit rite. The Bonpo, pamo and her assistants together conduct *sa-kor* ceremony on the fourteenth evening in all three *threypa* houses: first at *threypa chungwa* (Lamanpa), then to *threypa barma* (Jerpa) and later to *threypa cheywa* (Breyla). During the ritual, they summon *lha*, *tsen*, *dued* and *neypo* residing in the mountains, valleys, lakes, forests, streams and cliffs of Goshing, Ngangla, Pangbang, Joka, Samrang, Tamshing and areas bordering Assam. They make special references to *chosung* of Tamshing, Somrang and Samrang villages of Bumthang, because they also worship them and summon for propitiation during their annual *chosung* ritual. They make
dough imageries of three chosung, lama, yidam and khandro. The sa-kor ritual continues until dawn. People believe that if their deities and spirits are appeased, they will be rewarded by averting misfortunes, rivalry, contempt, ailments and epidemics. During the sa-kor, Pamo invokes the blessing for long life and power as evident from the text of her recital below.

No life in head. I beseech for it.
No power in speech. I beseech for it.
No warmth in body. I beseech for it.

PURIFICATION RITE
The Bonpo and pamo perform purification rites on the fourteenth day of Chodpa to cleanse the environment before they invoke and welcome deities and spirits. Bangchang, chili powder and incense are offered during the invocation ritual. There is no blood sacrifice of livestock.
Purification rite of incense burning and arra offering by Bonpo, Pamo and Gadpupa

The Bonpo makes the following recital in most occasions. Different spirits and deities are invoked in every stanza between as the text below shows.

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\begin{align*}
\text{d-s/m-`bs-mgon-Ü-sogs-bu-zii;} \\
\text{bÓn-p'ii-Ü-ÔuN-`bs-™-m-dkon-mCog-gsum;} \\
\text{bsm-rN-p;} \\
\text{tm-SiN-p;} \\
\text{yb-—ms-p-SiN-“e;} \\
\text{yum-goo-mo'i-“Kor-dN-bcs-p;} \\
\text{lo-Kor-l-b-bcu-g¤is-ìii-dus-bzN-n-bu-zii;} \\
\text{Z-K'i-’eddN-bco-bËd-ìi-dus-bzN-n-bu-zii.}
\end{align*}
\]
Today, all the protecting deities
And guardians of dharma, lama and the Triple Gem
Samrangpa, Tamshingpa
Lord Jampa Shingjey
Yum Gomo and her attendants
On auspicious twelve months of the year,
And auspicious 350 days of the year,
Do not let us down.
Do not shy away from us.
Do not be displeased and angry.
Do not feel loathing.
In today’s offering of song and incense by us,
And offering of flowers of different trees,
During our tenth month,
Within our territorial boundary,
Let there be no slander, gossip, animosity and black magic.

After the purification rite the Bonpo invokes tsen of four directions: Lingla Lingchen Tongpai Jamtso and Lamling Jaling Norbu of the east, Somro Somro of the south, Panglajungla Harinagpo and Wamla Rodongnagpo of the
west and Tajang Domjang Dimjang and Ama Dokar Gyeltshen of the north. Apart from dued, over 170 neypo are summoned for propitiation. Since each of them are identified with a particular territory like valley, cliff, strategic location of river confluence, forest, moor and so forth, special reference to their places must be mentioned when invoked.

The people of Goshing and Ngangla worship Ama Ringlamo - the patron tsen of the region. She is referred to as manmo (lake-woman). The Bonpo and pamo conduct rites to honour Ama Ringlamo in the evening of the fifteenth day of Chodpa at Lhabrang, a hundred meters from the lhakhang. It is celebrated to prevent ailments, exorcise evil influences and invoke good luck. Offerings consist of changkyed (fermented rice) and tshog (beaten rice and ginger packed in banana leaves). The offering is distributed to the participants after the ceremony. Three krongpa apa who prepare changkyed are not allowed to sleep with their wives on the twelfth night. They cook nine bre of rice on the thirteenth evening, mix yeast into it and place it on the triangular branches of Ama Ringlamoi Sang (tree of Ama Ringlamo) for fermentation. It is collected on the fifteenth morning. If it ferments well, it foretells abundance of rainfall, less epidemic and a good harvest for the following year.

Invocation of neypo begins systematically from the plain of Assam, India to the hill of Goshing. It first begins from the neypo of Bangsha Bari in Assam (place where Khengpa still trades with Assamese), neypo Mathang Garipa (Bhutan Assam border) and gradually goes up the valleys and hills. Other neypo summoned for the invocation are Kangkarey Gangpa, Ridang Gangpa, Miser Gangpa, Pangbangpa, Jindala Gangpa, Jarigangpa, Chey Nyenpa, Odigangpa, Zhaling
Toepa, Budigangpa, Sangsa Ripa, Mamungpa, Siling Bipa, Sangtipa, Dongdong Bipa, Wanglingpa, Badizhing Harinagpo, Morang Logpa, Dinjang Ngawang Lama, Meywagangpa, Gorlampa, Bilamtipa, Bangkila Harapa, Aunglingpa, Dongdong Barinagpo, Natong Choeley Reypa, Babilapa, Chortenpongpa, Phuenchungpa, Lamtangpa, Gorjeyla, Gepgeplapa, Rikampa, Zangbipa, etc.

*Rice being fermented on triangular branches of Tsanchen Ama Ringlamo's tree
Invocation Rite of Tsenchen Ama Ringlamo*
For the preparation of Ringlamo's ritual, six Peyzangpa, who are young village boys assist the Bonpo in the preparation of the ritual site and alter at Lhabrang. Every krongpa and pampa appoints one peyzangpa. The Bonpo is later joined in the invocation of Ringlamo by the pamo and her assistants, namely zomkhen and champon, along with their chorus in the late evening at Lhabrang. After the Bonpo has summoned and offered bangchang, changkyed and tshog to Ama Ringlamo, people seek lungten (prophecy). Every individual introduces his or her lo (birth year sign) and offer prayers and nyender to Ama Ringlamo. Thereafter, Bonpo pours arra and changkyed on a folded square banana leaf and throws it at the altar on behalf of a person seeking divination. It is considered a good omen if it lands fully unfolded at one throw. However, if it remains folded or semi-folded, it is construed as a bad omen. In such case, it is thrown three times.
After the ceremony is over, Ama Ringlamo's *phod* (*changkyed*) and *tshog* are distributed to all subjects. It is believed that they will be blessed and protected from all kinds of misfortunes with the usual grandness. People are also apprehensive that poor harvest, sickness and other misfortunes will befall them in the coming year if they fail to propitiate Ama Ringlamo.

**GADPUPA DANCE**

In local dialect, Gadpupa means an old man. According to the text (see appendix) he was sent by Lha Jajin (Lord Indra) to earth to bless people with longevity, prosperity and fertility. He originally came to Goshing from Ura, Bumthang as revealed in verse recitations of his encounter with Ura Nadmo (female host). Gadpupa dance is performed at the dawn of the fifteenth day of *Chodpa* inside the lhakhang. He offers prayers of longevity, wisdom, and wealth for his root lama, luminous persons and gracious parent, utters exhaustive mockery comments on the genital organs and human body, narrates about his travel from Ura to Goshing and his encounter with some local wrathful spirits and how he subdued them, and eventually tosses auspicious grains of rice. Gadmo (old woman) and Praolo (monkey boy) join him later in the courtyard. Thereafter, they go to *threypa barma, threypa cheywa* and finally to *threypa chungwa* to do the same theatrical performance. Gadpupa has a wooden phallus hung from the waist. The phallus, which is symbolic of many things, is explained exhaustively in Gadpupa's recital text.
ENGLISH TRANSLATION

The old trunk of the phallus, born long ago in Tsari,
Sits on the throne of two eggs.
Although it has no legs, it can rise
To the heroic one, I prostrate.
Although it has no eyes, it can penetrate
To the mobile one, I prostrate.
Although it has no bone, it is hard
To the ferocious one, I prostrate.

7 For more details, refer to Gadpupa's text in the annexure.
Before they exit from every krongpa house, Gadpupa uncovers his wooden phallus and blesses every one. It is believed that the act exorcise evil spirits and blesses a sterile person with fertility. Besides, when Gadpupa performs tashi melom (auspicious prayers) in the end, the family members of krongpa, Gyalwagongma and the elderly people see tagpa (prediction) by placing individual cups filled with arra. Gadpupa recites auspicious prayers and solemnly tosses grains for the good will and good fortune. The cups filled with an odd number of grains are considered auspicious for its owner.

COSTUMES AND CHASTITY
A pamo is not hereditary. In absence of any written scripture, the recitations are passed on orally. A woman who was to succeed a pamo learns it by accompanying the incumbent one.
Pamo ties a strip of cloth on her forehead and adorns her hips with fangs of wild animals. Carrying a *drilbu* (bell) in her right hand and a bamboo fan in her left hand, a pamo makes poetic recitations and eventually enters into a trance state. The sound of the bell is believed to reach the deities and spirits who are being summoned for propitiation. The Zomkhan and champon carry drums and beat them to the rhythm of a chorus singing "*omo mani pedmi hung*". The Pamo and her assistants strictly avoid meat and sex from the first to the twentieth day of the tenth month.

Although Gadpupa does not refrain from meat and sex, he remains in meditation from the first to the eleventh day of the tenth month. During that time, he rehearses and performs *tercham* (treasure dance) at his house. The role of Gadpupa is also not hereditary. He is succeeded by his close relative or someone who is good at performance required by the role. Although there is a written text for Gadpupa, on most occasions, it is transmitted orally owing to illiteracy. He wears a white *gho* and carries a small bone trumpet and a bamboo staff.

The Bonpo is hereditary. He is distinguished by his white scarf and white stripe of cloth worn over his forehead. Like the pamo, a Bonpo has no written scripture. Therefore, his knowledge and narration are transmitted orally. During *Buedpa* and *Derchu* festivities, he remains in meditation and refrains from meat and sex for one week on each occasion. However, during *Chodpa*, he remains in meditation from the thirtieth day of the ninth month and refrains from meat and sex until the eighteenth day of the following month.
CONCLUSION

It is uncertain if Chodpa will continue in the same order and style hereafter. The invocation ritual and roles of Bonpo, Pamo and Gadpupa have already diminished over the last few years, since people are discouraged by functionaries from practicing. As a result, Chodpa is not conducted with the full ritual ceremony as it used to be in the past. The dance of Pedmalingpa, which is performed to accumulate yang (fortune and prosperity) at the end of Chodpa is observed briefly. Similarly, the custom of receiving Bonpo, pamo and Gadpupa at the Kadam (meeting spot) where Gyalwagongma and elderly village people announce oral instruction of rules for Chodpa is no longer pursued. The amount of offering of arra and bangchang, which form the main component of Chodpa is also reduced. The age-old practice of offering prayers and seeking prophecy from Ama Ringlamo is similarly under pressure to be discontinued.

The present culture of Chodpa is already marginalized, and it is likely to disappear once the popular mask dances are introduced. Bonpo, pamo and Gadpupa will then lose their representations and significance in the community.

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8 The civil servants from Goshing have already contributed towards purchase of masks and dress for mask dance.
Apart from a few spelling corrections, the originality of the text is maintained as it is written in the Kheng dialect.
Wayo, Wayo - Voices from the Past
Waöö, Waöö - Voices from the Past
Wa-yo, Wa-yo - Voices from the Past
Wao, Wao - Voices from the Past