

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

No. 1

MARCH 1993

THE INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE BHUTAN SOCIETY

Over 130 guests attended the Inaugural Meeting of the Bhutan Society of the United Kingdom which was held at Dartmouth House, London, on 17th December 1992, by kind permission of the English Speaking Union.

Simon Bowes Lyon, Chairman, welcomed the guests and introduced the Officers and Members of the Executive Committee. We were particularly delighted to welcome as representatives from Bhutan the Secretary of the Ministry of Communications, Dashi Nado Rinchen, accompanied by the Director of Civil Aviation, Mr. Rinzin Gyelshen, and the Managing Director of DrukAir, Mr. Sonam Tshering. Letters of good wishes to the Society from Lyonpo Dawa Tsering, Bhutan's Foreign Minister, Lyonpo Chenkyab Dorji, Minister of Planning and Dashi Paljor Dorji, the Ambassador of Bhutan to the United Nations in Geneva were read to the Meeting.

Lord Wilson of Tillyorn, OCMG, former Governor of Hong Kong, was welcomed as President of the Society and during the National Day Reception that followed the Meeting Lord Wilson proposed the toast to H.M. The King of Bhutan. Mrs. Namgyal Om, Headmistress of Pato High School, replied, and Dashi Nado Rinchen proposed a toast to the Bhutan Society. The National Day Reception provided a splendid opportunity for many of those present to meet old friends and to exchange experiences of Bhutan.



Dashi Nado Rinchen proposes the toast to the Bhutan Society

Message from Foreign Minister

The following message was received from Lyonpo Dawa Tsering, Bhutan's Foreign Minister on the occasion of the Inauguration of the Bhutan Society

Tashichodrong, 2nd December 1992.

"I am delighted to learn that the Bhutan Society of the United Kingdom will be inaugurated in London on 17th December 1992. Please convey my warm greetings to the President of the Society, Lord Wilson of Tillyorn OCMG and all the distinguished members of the Society on the auspicious occasion of the Inaugural Meeting. With such distinguished members who are all good friends and well-wishers of Bhutan, I am confident that the Society will make a significant contribution to the strengthening of the traditionally friendly and co-operative relations between the peoples of the Kingdom of Bhutan and the United Kingdom."

(Dawa Tsering)

Forthcoming Events

Monday, 26th April

His Excellency Dashi Paljor Dorji, Ambassador of Bhutan to the UN in Geneva, and President of the Royal Society for the Protection of Nature will be talking to the Bhutan Society on Monday 26th April at 7pm about the Wildlife of Bhutan. The talk will be held at The National Liberal Club, Whitehall Place, London SW1. A cash bar will be open in the Smoking Room after the lecture (jackets and ties required).

Tuesday May 11th

The Earl of Limerick, George Band and Peter Mould will be talking about their treks and climbs in Bhutan at the Alpine Club at 7pm on Tuesday May 11th. Members of the Bhutan Society have been invited to attend this meeting. The Bar at the Alpine Club will be open from 6 pm. It would be helpful to the Alpine Club if they had some idea of how many of our

continued

Dates for your Diary - continued

...Members might be present. Though not absolutely necessary, it would therefore be helpful if you could let the Hon. Secretary know if you will be attending this function. The Alpine Club's premises are at 55 Charlotte Road, London EC2A 3QT, which is a few minutes walk from Old Street Underground Station.

Saturday 3rd July - Lakeside Choral Concert & Picnic

On Saturday 3rd July there will be an Evening Choral Concert beside the Lake in the gardens of St.Paul's Walden Bury, near Hitchin, Hertfordshire. This is the home of the Society's Chairman, Simon Bowes Lyon and his family. The garden is open in the afternoon and is a fine example of an 18th Century garden after the style of Le Notre. There are examples of Himalayan flora, some from Bhutan. The Concert will be given by a forty-strong Welsh Male Voice Choir and commences at 7pm, beside the Lake. Bring along a Picnic! There will be a section where members of the Bhutan Society may gather should they wish to do so. If the weather is bad, the concert will be held in St.Paul's Walden Church. Proceeds from the annual Lakeside Concert at St.Paul's Walden have been used in previous years to help a Bhutanese student in England. Tickets, which include admission to the Gardens, are available from Mrs. Susan Bossey, *The Ten House, 16A, High St, Whitwell, Hitchin, Herts* and cost £8.00. To get to St.Paul's Walden, take the A1 past Hatfield, then turn Left onto the A1000 through Welwyn (NOT Welwyn Garden City).

New Site for Punakha Town

The town of Punakha will be re-located five kilometres downstream from Punakha Dzong at Kuruthang, on the banks of the Mochu river. This modern development has made an old legend come true. According to legend, the 14th Century Drukpa Kargyu saint, Drubthob Nagi Rinchen, was carrying some sacred relics from the site of the Punakha Dzong to Lobesa. For mysterious reasons, the Saint did not go beyond Kuruthang, where he enshrined them in a temple. The land at Kuruthang is flat and open, and has the potential for the development of a well planned township. The first phase of the new township will cover 30 acres. The present small township beside the Dzong suffers from poor drainage and lack of space for development. Expansion of the existing town onto the hill above would cause massive erosion and ecological damage.

Druk Air Buys Second Plane

Anyone who was held up entering or leaving Bhutan last August by the single Druk Air BA 146 developing a fault will be relieved to know that now Bhutan's national airline has purchased a second BA146. The second jet touched down at Paro at the end of its maiden journey from Woodford, near Manchester, on December 24th. The new plane has an updated instrument panel, in-built steps and can fly at 31,000ft, which is 1,000ft higher than the earlier plane.

Pharmacology's Roots, Twigs and Leaves

Members interested in indigenous medicine may have seen the book review in the 9th January issue of *New Scientist*. Frank Leiser reviews a book with the rather sensational title "Murder, Magic and Mystery" by John Mans (OUP £16.95) which "seeks to reveal the links between the folk use of plant and animal extracts and their modern use as drugs". The author assures us that no previous knowledge of science or medicine is assumed. The reviewer says "Drugs from natural sources still play an important part in medicine. Unexpectedly this book's strength lies mainly in its compilation of the myths that have accumulated around them." The review in the *New Scientist* is illustrated with a photograph of the Indignous Hospital in Thimphu, with the caption "Bhutan's traditional hospital relies on medicinal plants rather than synthetic drugs."

Khuruthang:

Site of the new

Punakha town: a legend comes true.



New Field Director for VSO

A new Field Director was appointed in February for the Thimphu office of Voluntary Service Overseas. The new Director is Ms Liz Pritchard, who was previously working as director of a non-governmental charity organisation in the UK. Members who were

present at the Inaugural Meeting of the Society may have met Liz on that occasion. She is replacing Mr Steven Paul. On February 11th a reception was given for the new Director at which she was welcomed by senior Government officials, including Lyonpo T. Tshogdel, Minister of Social Services.

VSO in Bhutan: a special article by Nick Barrett.

Nick Barrett was acting Field Director in Thimphu in 1992.

He is now working at VSO Headquarters in London, responsible for returning volunteers.

In 1983 I was in the first ever group of VSO volunteers to arrive in Bhutan. In late 1992 I was back for four months as the temporary VSO Field Director, thus giving me a chance to be involved in the VSO Bhutan programme both in its infancy and as it neared its tenth anniversary.

It has been a decade of mixed fortune for Bhutan and the clarity of VSO's role there has fluctuated accordingly.

What began as a programme centred around secondary education and teacher training changed emphasis when the NAPE (New Approach to Primary Education) system was introduced. NAPE saw the recruitment of volunteers serving as teachers in remote rural primary schools, informal teacher trainers in the form of the Dronghdag Resource Teachers, site supervisors assisting in the construction of new schools and volunteers helping with the development of the new curriculum.

In the decade has also seen the rise (and also fall) in requests from the Royal Government for VSO involvement in the agriculture, health and technical training sectors. In the late 1980's there were over 40 volunteers serving in Bhutan. There are now about 15. The majority of these are in NAPE jobs, with the remainder spread around what VSO refer to as the "social and business sector" - concerned with financial systems and computer programming and working also in different capacities for the Royal Institute of Management.

This current shrinkage in the programme is viewed by VSO with a curious mixture of satisfaction and anxiety! It is entirely appropriate, as awareness of the political, cultural and social implications of development grow within the Kingdom, that volunteer placements are

more closely scrutinised so as to ensure no "easy options" are taken and that each job fits in with the manpower requirements and development priorities of the Government. If this process ensures the continuation of a high quality programme, this can only be for the best - for Bhutan, the volunteers and for VSO.

Bhutan has always provided the majority of volunteers with a very positive professional and personal experience. Figures bear this out. VSO volunteers in Bhutan on average serve longer (29 months) than in any other of the 50 countries where VSO works; the early return rate from Bhutan has always been very low; and witness the number of returned volunteers who have joined the Society.

There is tremendous good will for Bhutan among VSOs. Reports from Bhutanese employers indicate a high level of satisfaction with the volunteers' professional contribution, skills are shared, links are made and life-long friendships have grown. Inevitably, therefore, there is anxiety as the programme numbers fall and the possibility emerges that all these mutual benefits might come to an end.

As the second decade of VSO's involvement in Bhutan begins, I believe that our joint experiences in the first ten years are leading to a greater mutual understanding. With VSO, there is a sympathy for and ever growing awareness of, the complexity of the problems that Bhutan faces - and a real desire to help where it is decided we can make a contribution. Within Bhutan, there is an appreciation that whilst in the case of VSO volunteers "not every finger on the hand is of the same length", the overwhelming desire is to serve, to learn and to make friends.

Karma Ura visits UK

Known to many members of the Bhutan Society, Karma Ura paid a flying visit to England recently on his way from Copenhagen to Thimphu. Many will know Karma from his days as a student at Magdalen College Oxford and later at Edinburgh University. Karma now works in The Planning Commission in Thimphu as a Planning Officer, and he is also a member of the National Environmental Secretariat.

Karma had been in Denmark studying the Danish approach to Environmental Legislation. This is a matter of some concern now to Bhutan, and Karma's task was to appraise the whole field of environmental legislation policy and issues surrounding it.

Welcome to Bhutanese students in the United Kingdom

All Bhutanese students in the United Kingdom may apply to become honorary members of the Bhutan Society. The Society will attempt to contact all new arrivals from Bhutan, but this system may not find everybody!

If you are a Bhutanese student in the UK and you have not been contacted by the Society, or if you are a UK member and know of any Bhutanese student here, then please write to *Clare Byrne, c/o The Hon. Secretary, Friary View, Drummond Road, Guildford GU14NS (Tel: 0483 34189)*

Hospitality

Every year approximately fifteen students from Bhutan come to the United Kingdom to take up courses in higher education. Quite a high proportion are teachers, including head teachers, who may come for just nine months. Others will stay for three years or more, studying for degrees in subjects such as

agriculture, graphic design, auditing and accountancy, and education.

There are Bhutanese students living in several locations across the UK, including Edinburgh, Leeds, Sheffield, London, Brighton, Bognor Regis and Cardiff. Some students come as part of a group, while others will be the only person from Bhutan in their college or town. Particularly in the months following their arrival here, students may welcome an invitation from a member of the Society - someone with an interest in or knowledge of Bhutan. As one student said, "Many people haven't even heard of Bhutan - I usually introduce my country before I introduce myself". One of the objectives of the Society is to facilitate contact between UK and Bhutanese members living in the same area. If you would like to be contacted when a Bhutanese is living in your area, please send a brief note to *Clare Byrne, 62C, Bonham Road, London SW2 5HG*

Book Illustrator from Tashigang studies in Brighton

Mr. Jigme Lodey arrived in Brighton last year to read for a B.A.(Hons) in Illustration at Brighton University. We asked him to tell us about his background:

I am 27 and from Tashigang in the Eastern part of Bhutan. I have five sisters and one brother, but both my parents have died. I am the second youngest in our family. I have been working in the Education Department in Thimphu since 1987 as an artist and before that I was studying in Sheridze College in Kanglung. I joined the service as an artist before graduating mainly because I was interested in art and wanted to study Western art. There are not too many people in Bhutan who could draw a cat just by looking at the real cat! Bhutan is influenced by the rich traditional Tibetan art forms, but I chose to be a different sort of artist. I felt I could contribute better to the country's development because Bhutan has recently started publishing its own books and related materials for the school curriculum. Most Bhutanese clients rely on foreign artists and so there is a need for some national graphic artists and illustrators. I have illustrated about twenty books before I left for England in September 1992 and most books were published and are used in schools in Bhutan. The pictures are not very good but most students and teachers like them because they were Bhutanese. I had to struggle a lot, teaching myself because there are, of course, no art schools or art books available.



Last year I started building my portfolio and sent it to the Art College in Brighton University and finally I got a Scholarship from the British Council (ODA) to study for a B.A.(Hons) in Illustration. My course is for three years and ends in July 1995. I am really glad to be on this course, and I am hoping to learn as much as I can so that I can be of better use to our Bhutanese children in the future. At the moment I am still feeling a bit homesick, and missing my wife and my one and a half year old son back in Bhutan! Fortunately the people in England are kind and friendly, and this makes me feel at home.

Jigme Lodey

From Tongsa to Dick Whittington - A story of success!

The "Dick Whittington" at the bottom of Highgate Hill, London, is SANGA DORJI'S nearest "local" where with fellow students from the North London School of Physiotherapy he can relax over a drink. Here are Sanga's comments about his life in England:

I have been in England for four years now, which is a long time! I came here from Kaling School for the Blind in Eastern Bhutan, and spent just over two years at the Royal National Institute for the Blind's New College in Worcester studying for my GCSE and Advanced Level examinations. I had an enjoyable and worthwhile time studying there. I am now studying at the North London School of Physiotherapy (for the visually impaired) - continued.....

I have been in England for four years now, which is a long time! I came here from Laling School for the Blind in Eastern Bhutan, and spent just over two years at the Royal National Institute for the Blind's New College in Worcester studying for my GCSE and Advanced Level examinations. I had an enjoyable and worthwhile time studying there. I am now studying at the North London School of Physiotherapy (for the visually impaired) - commencing in July 1993 - and I am taking a B.Sc. Honours Degree in Physiotherapy with Human Sciences. I hope to complete my degree successfully in July 1995 and then return to Bhutan and practice the skills I have acquired during my stay in the United Kingdom.

It is always hard to be in a new place and fulfil one's targeted aims. Without the support and encouragement of the many friends I have made in this country it would not have been possible to have come this far. I have achieved beyond my wildest expectations. I am grateful to all those who have helped me in answering my dreams. I hope and pray that all other Bhutanese students studying away from their families and homes are as fortunate as I have been!

When I am lucky enough to visit new places I like to learn as much as I can about the place before I go. From my personal experience I have realised that it is very difficult to do so without having some contact with the local people. As there is no official representative of Bhutan in the UK, the Bhutan Society is an excellent idea for both countries, and for Bhutanese students in this country as well as for British people who have a love for Bhutan. I therefore want to congratulate the founding members of the Society, and I hope it will do well and enhance the relationship between our two countries.

I am delighted to learn that one of the Society's aims may be to help the handicapped people in Bhutan. With my little experience of the conditions and needs of handicapped people in Bhutan, I look forward to extending my maximum co-operation in helping to co-ordinate such projects in the future. Tashi Dele!



Sanga Dorji

(Note: Sanga Dorji recently attended an International Conference on the Handicapped held in Canada, where he delivered a speech about the handicapped in Bhutan ... we hope to print it in a future edition of the Newsletter).

Plea for Help The Society needs an Honorary Auditor!

Nicholas Rhodes has undertaken the task of Honorary Treasurer of The Bhutan Society, but eventually we shall need an Honorary Auditor, who needs to be an Accountant. If you yourself can help, or know anyone who might be prepared to help, then please get in touch with the Hon. Treasurer at 28, Napier Gardens, Hythe, Kent. CT21 6DD. It will not be a very onerous task!

Bhutan delegation to visit United Kingdom for SOAS Conference.

Dasho Jigme Thinley, Secretary to the Home Ministry, accompanied by the Editor of Kaensel, Mr Kinley Dorji, and Planning Officer Mr. Karma Ura, will be visiting London from March 16th. to March 25th. to attend the International Conference on Bhutan being held at the School of Oriental and African Studies on Monday and Tuesday, March 22nd and 23rd. Dasho Jigme Thinley has held a number of senior Government posts. Before taking up his post in the Home Ministry he was Zonal Administrator of Eastern Bhutan. He was also Bhutan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York for several years, and before that was Director of the Department of Education.

The conference, "Bhutan - A Traditional Order and the Forces of Change" - is the first ever international conference on Bhutan to be held in the United Kingdom. It is being organised by Dr Michael Hutt, of SOAS and will involve academics, journalists and officials from Bhutan, Britain, France, Japan, Hong

Kong, the Netherlands, Germany, the USA, Nepal and India. The topics addressed will range from dress, architecture, language and religion to development, diplomacy and recent political issues. If any member of the Bhutan Society wishes to attend they should write to **Dr. Michael Hutt, SOAS, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London, WC1H 0XG.** The conference fee is £25, which includes copies of the conference papers, buffet lunch, tea and coffee on both days of the conference. Cheques should be made payable to "SOAS".

Members are invited and encouraged to contribute articles and letters to the Newsletter and to make suggestions about its format and content. Newsletter edited and produced by the Hon. Secretary, Friary View, Drummond Road, Guildford, GU1 4NS, to whom any enquiries should be addressed.

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE PATTERNS OF BHUTANESE VILLAGE LIFE IN THINLAYGANG, AND THE INTERFACE OF REGIONAL AND NATIONAL HISTORY AND IDENTITY

By Ms. Sonam Chhoki
School of Oriental and Africa Studies
University of London

A Paper delivered at the Meeting of the Bhutan Society of the United Kingdom held on February 25th 1993

This is a brief survey of patterns of Bhutanese village life in Thinlaygang, *Teobesa gewog* (block), forty miles east of Thimphu. Also examined is the correlation between vital principles of social interaction - *len* (reciprocal link), *khi-sheni* (petitioning), *dar-tawi* (soliciting) - and the interface of regional and national historical consciousness and identities.

GEOGRAPHY AND LOCATION

With terraced rice-fields and a thundering gorge called *Teobe rongchu* ('gorge-waters of Teobesa'), Thinlaygang lies at roughly 5,000 ft. and covers about 12 sq. miles. The term 'gong' ('hill') aptly describes its rugged landscape. It has sixty-nine houses and about four hundred people. The place derives its name from the temple 'Drug Thinlay' built in the valley by *Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal* (1594 - 1651), the incarnate-head of the *Druggo Kargyu* tradition, who fled to Bhutan from Tibet in 1616. This was precipitated by an assassination attempt on his life, by the Tsang ruler of Tibet, who refused to endorse his claims to the *Druggo* seat at *Italing*, Tibet. The temple served as a *shensi* ('resting place') of the monastic community, as it moved between the Summer and Winter capitals of Thimphu and Parakha respectively. The monastic community still travels between the two, except today it takes a couple of hours, instead of the earlier two days.

THE 'VILLAGE' AND LOCAL ORGANISATION

The use of the term 'village' is problematic. For instance, the peoples' concept of their place of origin and birth, *ya*, can denote either a particular complex (such as the house) or the wider village. 'Village' in Thinlaygang includes either clusters or two or more houses, small, single houses/huts of single homesteads with multiple nuclear households. These homesteads surrounded by woods and fields are isolated and almost complete social-economic units. For administrative purposes, the government complex of offices, primary school and the market, and the nearby single houses are treated as one unit, called Thinlaygang.

The temple and the adjoining *Droeng* (fortress-monastery) was the religious-political centre of Teobesa. A *Teobe* pentop was appointed by the *Zhabdrung* from among the local families, as a local tax-collector and arbitrator of disputes. The temple destroyed in a fire fifteen years ago has since been rebuilt by the local people. It is still the venue of important local community ceremonies such as the annual retreat called *Ngonye* and the *Thojok* ritual which commemorates the people's participation in the establishment of the *Druggo* authority in the country.

Today Thinlaygang is still the administrative centre of *Teobesa*. But the focus has shifted from the old temple - *Droeng* complex to the government settlement. The post of the *Teobe Pentop* was abolished about two decades ago and has been replaced by the *Teobe gap*. How the local functionaries negotiate the regional aspirations and needs with the national authorities is discussed below. Here, the different functionaries and their duties are briefly examined. The *gap* is elected for three years from among and by the peoples of *Teobesa* block. Besides the *gap* there is the *chimi*, who represents the people in the national legislative body, the *Tshogdu*. The *chimi* is also elected for three years and is resident in the capital Thimphu, where the *Tshogdu* sits. As officials who voice, on the one hand the peoples' concerns and requirements on such issues as taxation and developments projects in the rural areas, and on the other hand, make known to the villagers the government's major fiscal and administrative as well as external policies, the *gap* and *chimi* are vital links between the central government and the rural areas. The *gap* is also responsible for the annual collection of taxes and census data when a census is held.

The *gap* is assisted by the *manogy qus* ('village-elders') who are elected by the different villages in the block. There are also the *chipons* or *kyonsers*, who may be described as 'messengers' as their task is to inform the people in their individual localities about the time and venue of village meetings called *zomshe* ('getting together'). They also help the *gap* and *manogy qus* to mobilise people for the annual corvée labour called *gowshe* *slag* and to collect the taxes and census details. The *chipons* are elected in rotation annually from among the different households.

None of the rural functionaries receive a fixed salary from the government, but enjoy certain privileges during their term of office, such as exemption of their households from the annual corvée labour. The *gap* and *chimi* are paid a few thousand *ngultrum*, by the government, when they present government policies to the people at the village meetings, which follow the Spring and Autumn sittings of the *Tshogdu*. The *gap* is also entitled to labour from the villagers.

THE PEOPLE AND THEIR NOTIONS OF IDENTITY

As Thimlaygang is situated in the western part of the country, most of the inhabitants are Ngalong ('Westerners'). However, there are also people from the other valleys, such as 'Bumthap' from Bumthang, 'Mangdel' (Tongsa), 'Kartip' (Kartod) and 'Sharchop' (Mongar and Takigang). Although the latter have different languages and regional identities, they are collectively perceived as 'Sharchop' are married into the local Ngalong families, while others are recent settlers, mostly ex-army personnel, who have been given some land in the area, as *amwa* ('gift') from the government.

Such varied background contributes to the complex ways in which the people of Thimlaygang perceive their identity. Firstly, as it is a Ngalong area, the Ngalong inhabitants pride themselves as the first people in the country to be converted to Buddhism. They identify with the religious-political legacy of the Drogpa theocracy which gave the country its name 'Drug-yul' (Land of the Drogpa Doctrine), this historical consciousness is also shared by the Sharchop. Both they and the Ngalong of Thimlaygang, perceive themselves to be 'Drogpa' (Inhabitants of Drug-yul). They also identify with the hereditary monarchy, established in 1907, and view it as having ended the chaos following the disintegration of the theocracy in the late 19th century.

Secondly, the inhabitants pride themselves on being the Wang people. This is particularly strong among the Ngalong group for whom Trebesa valley is their *ya* or place of origin. It is also echoed by those 'Sharchop' inhabitants, who have long been resident in the locality. The Wang region covered most of Thimphu valley and stretched up to neighbouring Panakha. Today, Thimphu and Panakha are two separate administrative districts, but the Wang peoples' links with the two, is still shown in their seasonal migration, when they drive their cattle, in summer, to the cooler environs of Thimphu valley, and to the warmer neighbourhood of Panakha, in winter. The significance of the Wang peoples lies in the fact that Trebesa was one of the eight villages, which formed a militia force called Wang Tso Che Gye ('The Eight Great Hosts of Wang'). This militia force counteracted Tibetan attacks on Bhutan, following the political refuge of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel in the country. The Wang Tso Che Gye also overcame internal opposition to the Drogpa theocracy. The people of Trebesa take pride in their historical role in the establishment of Drogpa authority. This is celebrated in the local annual *Thojab* ritual, and the Panakha *Dromched* festival is the first Bhutanese month, which commemorates the defeat of the Tibetans and the triumph of the Drogpa tradition. The *paab* (warrior) dancers from the eight Wang villages, recapture the role of the Wang Tso Che Gye, at the festival.

Thirdly, the people have a sense of belonging to the particular valley of Trebesa. Thus, they call themselves 'Trebsa' (inhabitants of Trebesa). It is this

specific identity which distinguishes them from their other immediate, Wang neighbours. This regional sensibility reflects the existence of confederal, fairly independent valleys which were subsumed by the unifying Drogpa theocracy in the 17th century. It is expressed in the invocation of local deities, particularly the *nyab* ('host' deity), in the rituals of both the monastic and the indigenous *semjoms-pow* traditions. Hence, the 'Trebsa' regional identity is linked to Ap Yash, the *nyab* of Trebesa. It is the interface of this regional consciousness denoted by the local deities and the national sense of belonging to the larger realm of Drug-yul, represented by the Drogpa theocracy and later the monarchy, which provide the 'Trebsa', their notions of their history and identity.

LANGUAGE AND RELIGION

The local patois of Thimlaygang is a version of Ngalongkha ('Language of Western peoples'), from which Dzongkha, the national language is derived, English is the medium of instruction in the local primary school and some Nepali is also spoken among the teachers and other government employees in the area.

The dominant religious tradition in THIMLAYGANG is the Drogpa branch of the Kargyu-pa school of Tibetan Buddhism, introduced from Tibet into Bhutan in the early 13th century. As noted above, it emerged in the 17th century as the religious-political core under its incarnate-head, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel. Just as the invocation of local deities of the Drogpa pantheon such as Palden Lhamo and Yeshey Gampo, at the annual monastic rituals, reflect the 'Trebsa' association with the predominant Drogpa tradition.

However, the *Nyingma* ('The Ancient') tradition, marked by a personal guru-disciple relation rather than an institutionalised monastic organization, also flourishes alongside the Drogpa tradition in Thimlaygang. The founder of this tradition Padmasambhava, popularly known as Guru Rinpoche, is revered as the second Buddha. He is said to have brought Buddhism to Bhutan from Tibet in the 8th century. For the Bhutanese he surpasses the historical Buddha in popularity. It is quite common for monks trained in the *Nyingma* tradition to perform Drogpa rituals and vice versa. Moreover, most household prayer-room altars have the statue of the Buddha in the centre, flanked by those of Padmasambhava, on the right and of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, on the left. Such fluid overlapping of traditions reflect the general non-sectarian nature of the 'Trebsa' religious experience. In addition, the local *semjoms-pow* complex also provide ritual services.

OCCUPATION

Most inhabitants are subsistence farmers, engaged in agriculture and cattle rearing. Rice is the major crop. Wheat, millet, barley and maize are also cultivated. Some seasonal vegetables including green chillies are grown. Most of the produce is for home consumption. Although the East-West highway built in the mid-sixties passes through Thimlaygang, giving

it access to markets in Thimphu, it was only in the last decade or so that the people have undertaken some commercial vegetable cultivation. It still remains modest and supplementary. Most of the dairy products are also consumed domestically.

Some villagers have a second occupation performing Buddhist household rituals. These ritual performers are *gyewey* (devoted monks and nuns). The *gyewey* (celibate monks) preside over the more important annual *Takshor* and funerary rites. All these ritual performers are called *chopsa* (religious specialists). Many households in Thimlaygang have relatives who are monks in the *Dzong* (monastery). *Tsun tsay* (monk tax) introduced at the time of the theocracy, is no longer applicable and a religious vocation is seen by many young girls and boys as a good alternative to land holding and agriculture. Lastly, some villagers are 'possessed' and become indigenous ritual performers called *nyepum* (female) and *pow* (male).

LANDHOLDING

In Thimlaygang land is the primary source of livelihood, wealth and status. It determines the *Trobr'* social, ritual, economic ties and networks and status or the lack of it and their rootedness in the area. Another correlated vital issue is the low population density and the consequent scarcity of manpower. With four hundred people scattered over its rugged 12sq. miles, Thimlaygang's sparse population is visible in the isolated houses with surrounding fields and woods. These issues underpin the different land holding practices.

Phashing (ancestral land) is commonly passed on from parents to daughters, who remain in the ancestral house or *phacin*. However, siblings whether male or female, who leave the ancestral house on marriage, forfeit their claims to the ancestral holdings. Women are generally regarded as custodians of ancestral property. Daughters are defined as 'who stay and look after *phashing*' and sons as 'who go away as *swap* (groom)'. The women perceive themselves to be tied to the land and rendered socially immobile, while their male relatives enjoy alternative means of livelihood as traders, monks, employees in government and private enterprises. Many young women talked of missed opportunities of schooling.

There are some variations where the *Phashing* is partitioned equally between a son and daughter. Another variation is the case of an only son inheriting the *Phashing*.

The second kind of landholding is *gobsha* (share-cropping). The land owner and one or more cultivators enter into a contract called *grnja* on a one-to-five yearly renewable basis. The produce, rice is shared half-and-half depending on the yield. Other crops like wheat, maize or barley and vegetables are not included in the *gobsha* arrangement. The latter belong solely to the cultivators. *Gobsha* arrangements are made in the following cases:

1. Absentee land owners - These are mostly government employees or businessmen who own or have purchased land in the area, but are based

elsewhere and have *gobsha* arrangements with the local inhabitants. The cultivators tend to be 'Shanchoy' settlers, who have no *Phashing* but have been allotted a small plot as government *soira* (gift) in the area. They enter into *gobsha* contracts to supplement their livelihood.

2. *Phashing* households lacking manpower often make *gobsha* contracts with other households on a yearly basis.

3. *Gobsha* is also made by *Phashing* holders or wealthy settlers who have purchased land in the locality, with either landless settlers or other *Phashing* households who owe them grain or money. In such cases, the cultivators are obliged to work the land of those households to whom they are in debt. The land owners will get their share of the *gobsha* harvest, while the cultivators repay their debts with their share of the harvest.

The third type of landholding is *thoja* (lease-holding) in which the land owner and one or more lease-holders enter in a contract for the latter's lifetime, in the case of monastic lands or for two or more years in other cases. The land owner gets a fourth of the rice produce irrespective of good or bad harvests. Crops other than rice are not included in the *thoja*.

MARRIAGE PRACTICES

The landholding patterns and the sparse population have important effects on marriage practices. Given the prevalence of female inheritance, uxorilocal residence is the dominant pattern but there are cases of patrilocality. Men and women who enter their spouses' ancestral households as *swap* (groom) or *naw* (bride) occupy a subsidiary position. While they have responsibility for the cultivation of the lands, the property essentially remains with their spouse. This combined with the chronic shortage of manpower provide them with impetus to leave their spouses, when the burden of labour on the land far outweighs the advantages of remaining in a union. These factors underline the dissolution of marriages in Thimlaygang.

A conspicuous feature of marriage practices in Thimlaygang is the lack of any matrimonial ceremony. In most cases, the marital status is confirmed by '*thong-lha theo-ai*' (coming out in the open). This varies. If a couple have been courting with the intentions of becoming man and wife, '*thong-lha theo-ai*' is the taking home of the chosen partner and in most cases is a fait accompli presented to the parents.

More commonly, '*thong-lha theo-ai*' is the divulging of the man's name, when the woman becomes pregnant. In some cases where the man does not deny involvement but refuses to accept the woman, then the latter's family demand compensation in cash or kind from him. The amount is negotiated between the parties.

PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL INTERACTION AND THE NEGOTIATION OF REGIONAL AND NATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND VALUES

As noted earlier, the people of Thindaygang, profess a link with both the wider realm of Drug-yul and their local valley of Teobesa. An analogy is suggested between this interface of the national and regional historical consciousness and the principles of social interaction between people of varied socio-economic status in both the local community and the larger national level. These principles are:

1. *Law* or reciprocal links by which the Teob households attend important rituals like the annual winter Tabokhor and funerary rites. *Law* also includes reciprocal labour in the fields.

2. *Kids Zhawi* (petitioning)

3. *Choom Keyei / chawre phisi* ('gift offering')

4. *Dar tsai* (offering solicitations)

All these underpin the establishing of bonds between the supplicant and the receiver in way that Mauss (1990) talks about the 'obligation to give and the obligation to receive'. The supplicant may be a neighbour, who felicitates one on the occasion of the birth of a child or one who brings a *choom* (gift not honorific) with a request for a loan. The supplicant may also be an ordinary person who approaches the King, or the administrative or monastic officials with *Kids Zhawi* (petitioning) and *chawre keyei* ('gift offering'.)

In all these cases the supplicant and the receiver enter into a bond of reciprocal obligation. The 'gift' here constitutes what Mauss calls 'a polite fiction' or 'formalism' which is required to render the making of a request viable. It ties the supplicant and the receiver in an obligatory bond. For instance, in the case of an ordinary citizen approaching the King or civil and monastic officials, the former's gesture of supplication to the latter by petitioning, gift offering, or felicitating, manifests acknowledgement of the latter's superior religious or political authority to obligatorily reciprocate. Although the authority can refuse to entertain a petition, this rarely happens, as it would reflect adversely on his/her esteemed superior status, power and generosity. This makes for a tense but dynamic mutual dependence between peoples of different socio-economic status.

A similar interplay can be seen at work between the institutionalised religious-political authority of the state and the common people of the different regions. It could be said that the state edifice negotiates its increasing presence in the lives of the ordinary people, who as pointed out, have a strong sense of local, regional identity. This sensibility is premised on the latter's historical experience of regional autonomy, which was amalgamated by the unifying religious-political core of the Drugpa theocracy and the monarchy which replaced it. The theocracy sought to increase its place in the regional sphere by uniting the country and giving it a political identity. The monarchy furthered this by assuming the role of a modernising force, which brought amenities of modern education, health, transport and

communication and hydro-electricity into the lives of the common people.

The Teobs are aware of the debt they owe to both the theocracy and the monarchy. In fact as indicated earlier they articulate pride at their participation in the establishments of these authorities in the country. However, they are also aware of the price they pay for the increasing presence of the central power in their daily lives. They do not seek to subvert this authority as its history is their history. Nonetheless they seek a distance from its structures and demands.

This is accomplished in many ways. For instance, the *gap* and *chawi* elected to represent their interests and aspirations in the national legislative body are always those 'with a good mouth' (i.e. articulate tough negotiators). These officials elected by the people negotiate the local interests with the requirements of the national government. An example here is the question of *wlog* (corvée labour). At the village meetings this issue always raises a lively debate about the balancing of the peoples' obligations to the government and the demands of their household and field responsibilities. They accept in principle that with the monarchy's much reduced land and cattle taxes, *wlog* is a not excessively unreasonable demand for government's public projects—renovations of *Droogs*, temples, chortens (stupas); constructions of roads, bridges, schools. They agree that they have to contribute something towards the general good of their country. They understand that the projects ultimately bring benefits to their lives. But they also point out that *wlog* entails absence from field and house work, sometimes precariously close to the planting season or harvest. That the chronic shortage of manpower aggravates the disruption of work in the fields. That delayed or missed planting or harvest undermines their livelihood. That people cannot physically cope with concurrent demands of *wlog* and domestic responsibilities.

The result is that although the *gap* and *chawi* make known to their people, the government's requirements and use their personal influence to mobilise people for *wlog*, yet often they come under tremendous local pressure from various households and individuals who try to negotiate their needs and aspirations with those of the government. Some postpone their *wlog* obligations for some other occasion, pleading lack of manpower at home; other pay neighbours or any villager willing to go on their behalf, still others go for part of the week of *wlog* and negotiate to fulfil the remaining *wlog* at some other more convenient time; yet others pay a 'fine' in grain or money and do not render any *wlog*.

The contradictions and tension between local aspirations and attitudes and national duties and obligations reflect the mutual dependence and interaction of the two levels of the Teob's history and identity. It is a complex on-going negotiation of the two which ultimately defines them as Drugpas and Teobs.

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The Bhutan Society of the United Kingdom was founded on 6th October 1992 as a response to the growing connections between the two countries. The Society held its Inaugural Meeting in London on Bhutan National Day, December 17th, 1992.

The Aims of the Bhutan Society are:

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