A HISTORY OF BHUTAN

COURSE BOOK FOR CLASS IX
A HISTORY OF BHUTAN

CLASSES IX

Royal Education Council
Royal Government of Bhutan
Paro
FOREWORD

Our education system is making all endeavours in fulfilling the directives issued by the Royal Government to make education meaningful to our children and outline the roles they are expected to play as future subjects of His Majesty the King and citizens of the Country. In the course of our children’s education, particularly while in the schools, our country’s history plays the most significant role of inculcating in them our rich cultural heritage and traditions, developed and passed down from generation to generation. A good knowledge of our history amounts to knowing our own identity, religious leaders, rulers and important events in history. They have, in the course of time, built great monuments and institutions, developed and preserved the rich art, architecture, literature, culture and traditions and protected our sovereignty to this day. Bhutan history should then teach us and our children to be responsible citizens of our Tsawasum.

The Education Division has therefore, for the past few years have been developing course contents and writing course books on subjects relating to social studies based on Bhutanese contents. As a result, contents on Bhutanese history along with geography and other social studies are already being taught in all our schools from pre-primary to class VIII. This is indeed a commendable effort considering the fact that the contents on these subjects are being developed for the first time. We would like to express our deep appreciations to all those involved in the exercise over the past few years. We are proud that these endeavours should now culminate with the introduction of Bhutan history along with Bhutan geography and civics at class IX and X. The introduction of these 3 subjects on Bhutan at these levels of our schooling system commensurate with the adoption of the joint BBE/ICSE syllabus with effect from 1994 and the subsequent joint certificate and examination system at Class X with effect from March 1995, is a major step being undertaken by our education system in pursuance of the above mentioned Government directives.

The history of Bhutan is herein to be discussed in four periods, each with a chain of events. The first is the ancient period that dates from the beginning till the 8th century AD. We have been able to out together the various available information mainly from the religious texts, historical documents and artefacts, folk stories, etc. The ancient period is marked by rural settlements, domestication of animals, agriculture, the first advent of Buddhism and subsequent building of Buddhist temples.

The second period is medieval in character and lasted well over a thousand years. During this period Buddhism had expended into all parts of the country. The visit of Guru Padma Sambhava and the various other Buddhist saints and scholars from both India and Tibet, the emergence of ruling clans in various parts of the country, and the development of art and architecture are some of the important events of the medieval period. The later parts of the period were highlighted by the emergence of the first great native Buddhist teacher, Tertoen Pema Lingpa, and the gradual integration of different religious sects of similar affinities thus paving the way for the ultimate creation of today’s religious identity in the country.

The third period begins with the arrival of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in 1616 AD. It was a period of consolidation and expansion of Drukpa Kagyud. Bhutan was no longer divided among the petty ruling clans. The Zhabdrung in fact changed the course of Bhutan’s history by bringing the entire country under one umbrella, established a unique social, cultural and religious identity and a systematic and efficient dual administration. Much of the characteristics of the Bhutanese socio-cultural aspects of those days are prevailing even to this day.
For the next few decades after the death of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the administration of the country continued under the able leadership of the desis or debs, particularly the first four debs – Tenzin Drugyal, Tenzin Drugda, Minjur Tenpa and Tenzin Rabgye. But as the 17th century ended, there began a struggle for the post of desi among the leaders of the different factions. The establishment of a hereditary monarchy in 1907 marked the end of this troubled situation and the beginning of the glorious modern period in the history of Bhutan. It was under the leadership of the successive kings that Bhutan has been able to maintain peace, unity and independence as well as embark upon the challenge of modernisation which in turn brought about economic prosperity and social justice to its people.

It may be noted that the course book on Bhutan history for classes IX and X is being published at this stage only as a provisional edition. The Education Division would welcome suggestions and comments from all the readers of the book to be appropriately incorporated in its final edition.

Finally, we wish our teachers and students to learn from the book. We wish them to learn from the examples of our great historical leaders on their love, concern and dedication to their country and people so that our students of today may grow up not only to be educated and productive citizens possessing the highest Bhutanese virtues of love, loyalty and dedication toward our Tsawa Sum but also that they, individually and collectively, are able to contribute towards fulfilling His Majesty’s visions of a strong, prosperous and sovereign independent Bhutan for all times to come.

_Tashi Delek_

Thinley Gyamtsho
Secretary of Education
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The original written records of our country can be found in many of the dzongs, monasteries and private homes. The most useful records are:

- **Choejung (ཆོས་འབྱུང)**: The history of religion which tells about the propagation of Buddhism in general or the history of one particular religious school.
- **Logyu (ལོ་རྒྱུས)**: History chronicles
- **Debther (དེབ་ཐེར)**: Annals, i.e. year by year reports of events.
- **Gyalrab/Dungrab (བོ་རྒྱན་བདུན་གྲབ་)**: Genealogies of dynasties or other important families.
- **Neyig (གནས་ཡིག)**: Guides for pilgrimage to holy places which tell the story of these places.
- **Thrungrab (ཐྲུལ་བསྒྲབ)**: The history of a lineage of reincarnations.
- **Denrab (གདན་རབ)**: History of a monastery or a temple.
- **Namthar (རྣམ་ཐར)**: Biographies or stories of lives of important religious persons or saints.
- **Tentsi (བསྟན་ཚི་ས་)**: Works relating to important events since Buddha’s mahaparinirvana in chronological order.
- **Pema Thangyig (པོ་མ་ཐང་ཡིག)**: Biography of Guru Rinpoche.
- **Kathang Duep (ཀ་ཐང་བསྡུས་པ་)**: Biography of Guru Rinpoche.
- **Soeldeb Barched Lamsel (སྟེལ་དཔེ་བར་ཆད་ལམ་སེལ)**: Prayer paying homage to Guru Rinpoche.
- **Terma (ཏེར་མ་)**: Religious texts which are said to have been hidden mostly by Guru Rinpoche to be rediscovered by a tertoonpa at an auspicious time many years later.
- **Mani Kabum (མ་ཎི་བཀའ་མུུ་)**: Describes the sacred works of kings and saints of early days.
- **Peling Kabum (པད་གིང་བཀའ་མུུ་)**: Describes works of Tertoen Pema Lingpa

The Education Division would like to pay its courtesy to the authors of the following sources for having used some of their information and illustrations:

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Chapter 1

ANCIENT HISTORY

PART I

OGIRINS OF EARLY INHABITANTS, THEIR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC LIFE, AND NAMES FOR THE COUNTRY

We begin the study of the history of our country with the **ancient period**. It is important to remember that the beginning of life on earth is indeed the beginning of our history. In the first lesson on Bhutan Geography you may have learnt that the last major uplift in the Himalayan Mountain Building Movement took place some 10 million years ago. Probably the ancient period of our history is also as long as that. Life began on earth as early as 25 million years ago and the Himalayas, including Bhutan, would have been inhabited sooner or later as the tectonic movement slowed down less than 10 million years ago.

Much of the ancient history is learnt through the discovery of artefacts from very ancient periods. There are some very old artefacts and monoliths discovered in several parts of the country such as the **namchag** and **doring** which indicates the presence of human civilisation in this country during the Stone Age, which lasted approximately from 8000 to 3000 BC. **Namchag** means ‘iron from the sky’ and **namchags** are often unearthed by farmers while ploughing their fields. There are beliefs that these are weapons of gods which fell to the earth during their battles against the demigods. Farmers who find such tools keep them in their houses and treasure them as they consider them as good luck talismans. From the historical point of view, these tools serve as important evidences since archaeologists could study them in order to learn about the ancient period of our country. As for the monoliths, **dorings**, they have been found in several parts of the country. **Dorings** were most probably used for border demarcations as well as for religious rituals (Figure 1-1).

![Doring](photograph taken in Bumthang)

**Figure 1-1**  *Doring* (photograph taken in Bumthang)

**KEY TERMS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>tectonic movement</th>
<th>monoliths</th>
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<tr>
<td>artefacts</td>
<td>nomadics herders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>talisman</td>
<td>agriculturists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>archaeologist</td>
<td>barter system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tseri</td>
<td>herbal plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flora and fauna</td>
<td>folklores</td>
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</table>

![Stone axe](2000-1500 B.C.)

**Figure 1-2**  Stone axe from (2000-1500 B.C.)
From these few discoveries we know for certain that people lived in Bhutan from a very early period. The study of one stone axe (like the one in Figure 1-2) suggests that it was made in the period between 2000 – 1500 B.C.

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**Early Inhabitants**

When we analyse the history of early civilisation we find that during the Neolithic or the Stone Age Period (8000 to 3000 BC), early human beings had dispersed and settled at different places on the different continents. We also know that the fertile lands such as the valleys of the Indus, Nile, Euphrates and Hwang Ho were the cradles of early civilisations.

The fertile river valleys of Bhutan were also inhabited during these early periods. Available records date back the early settlements in Bhutan to as early as the Rig-Vedic era in India.

Some hundreds of years before the birth of Buddha Shakyamuni, an Indian prince called Drimed Kuenden¹ (skt. Vesantara) was exiled to the wild mountains of northern Bhutan accompanied by his wife and two children. On their journey through the Jowo Durshing range commonly known as Ri-Nag (Black Mountains) they met people living in different places. On reaching the Changra area of Mangde, the prince was said to have given away one of his eyes as an alm to a blind old man. Changra was initially known as Chen Rey (སྤྱ་ན་རས་- clear vision) after this incidence based on prince Drimed Kunduen’s compassion and generosity. Similarly, on reaching present day Bubja village under Trongsa Dzongkhag, the family came across three people who asked for their children. The kind hearted prince felt sorry for the people and gave away the children. Bubja village was therefore earlier known as Bu Drel (བུ་བྲལ- separated from child). Drimed Kuenden and his wife continued their journey to Duri Hashang which is still the name of the place located near the source of Mangde Chhu.

**Social Organization**

No matter where and when civilization began in different parts of the world, there were certain features that they all had in common – people raised children, created economies, organised governments and developed religions. There were variations in the processes in different countries because they were greatly influenced by natural factors.

The geographical and climatic features of our country greatly influenced the social organization of our early inhabitants. The high mountain ranges, steep cliffs and torrential rivers prevented regular contacts among groups living in different valleys.

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¹ According to Drukji Gyalrab (2008) Drimed Kuenden was exiled for being very generous in giving the precious stone (Nob Gadhey Pungjom)
Each valley was isolated from the others by these natural barriers. The settlers, therefore, evolved into different clans, each made up of several families. The person who founded the clan was perhaps the chief who exercised special authority over the other members. In the course of time, there developed different dialectic groups each occupying a certain region, such as Chalipas in Mongar, Monpas in Trongsa and Lhops in Samtse.

**Economic Life**

The early inhabitants of Bhutan were nomadic herders who moved with their animals from high land pastures to the warm valleys in winter in search of fresh grass and water and back to the high mountain pastures during the hot summer seasons. This practise of seasonal migration from place to place with domestic animals still prevails in many parts of the country. It is probably much later that they became agriculturalists and started cultivating lands and living in permanent settlements. New knowledge and ideas in farming developed through experiences as well as from the migrants who probably brought new seeds and ideas from different lands.

The rich fertile lands of this country provided its inhabitants with almost everything that were needed for human survival. Even today, people collect many varieties of mushrooms and other plants from the forests. Still the Khyeng people of Mangde, Zhemgang and Mongar areas also collect many varieties of wild yams from the forests. This aspect of the culture is an inheritance of the very old system practised by people when agriculture was little known.

As discussed earlier, the main occupation of the early inhabitants was farming and animal husbandry. The tools they used for farming were made of stones and wood, followed by iron tools later. They cleared forests to grow crops and shaped their environment to their own needs. They were pre-occupied with the overwhelming need for food to survive. The land they cleared was used for a few years and then left to revert to nature while they took over a new piece of land from the forests. This is perhaps the initial practice of *tseri* (*རྩེ་རི* - shifting cultivation) which still prevails in some parts of the country.

The ancient people of Bhutan were largely self sufficient in food, shelter and clothing. Men and women worked together in the fields and produced their own food. Women learned to spin the fleece from sheep into thread and use it to weave woollen cloth. They collected fibres from cotton and wild nettles to make cloths and bags. It was also discovered that raw materials like wood, bamboo, mud and later even metals like iron were available and could be used for craftwork. Yak hair was perhaps one of the oldest fibres used by the pastoralists of high altitude settlements.

![Figure 1-4. Products of Yak hair](image-url)

The coarse outer hair called *tsidpa* (*ཙིད་པ*) was used to make *drawa* (*སྒྲ་བ* - tents) and ropes and the soft hair beneath called *khuloo* (*ཁུ་ལུ* ) was used for making caps and other dresses. Depending on the availability of materials, each region thus picked up a particular trade which gradually became hereditary and unique to their own regions.

At a later stage contacts were established between our country and its neighbours, mainly Tibet and India. This led to a kind of trading business with these countries whereby herbal medicines, spices, cereals, dried fruits and crafts products were exchanged for other things that were not available here. This was the beginning of international trade for Bhutan through mainly the barter system. Travellers and pilgrims from India, Tibet and other countries used the several passes in Bhutan as their transit routes over the Great Himalayas.

For example, as back as 125 BC, the Indian Prince, Nyathri Tshenpo (of Lichchavi family) used the Manas River valley to migrate to Tibet where he
established the Chogyal Dynasty that lasted until 842 AD in Tibet with heretic Langdarma as its last king. The legendary Songtsen Gampo of Tibet also belonged to this dynasty.

**Names of the country**

Through the ages our country assumed different names which kept on changing over the period. The oldest name assumed by the country is believed to be *Ri Drag Gi Yul* (རིབྲག་གི་ཡུལ་ - the country of mountainous terrain) and the people were called *Ri Dragpa* (རིབྲག་པ་). It was mainly this Mon Country of Ri Drag that Buddha Shakyamuni meant when he prophesied that his doctrine would flourish in future (See Chapter 2).

Sometime during the 10th century AD, a Sakyapa Lama who was an expert on herbal medicine while on search for herbal plants growing around the *Gangri Chhenpo* (ཀངས་རི་ཆེན་པོ་ - Greater Himalayas) brought him to Bhutan. He found the people in the country not only rich and happy but also kind and hospitable. The country was also found to be endowed with abundance of medicinal plants which was greatly used by the local people. The country came to be known by the name *Menjong Norbui Ling* ([ཨྲན་ལོངས་ནོར་བུའི་གིང་] - precious land of medicinal herbs).

The cypress tree, *tsenden shing* ([ཙན་དན་ཤིང་] - land of cypress) was also found abundance growing all over the country and is infact the national tree of the country even to this day. From this too, our country derived the name of *Tsenden Jong* ([ཙན་དན་ལོངས་] - land of cypress). For many years the name *Tsenden Mengyi Jong* was used to combine the two different names based on the two unique floras found in the country.

During the 17th century, the country came to be called *Lho Mon Kha Zhi* ([ལོ་མོན་ཁ་བཞི་] indicating the territorial extent of the country. It extended from Dungsam Kha, which included present day, Samdrup Jongkhar and Pema Gatshel in the east to Daling Kha near Kalimpong in the west; and from Tagtse Kha near Lingzhi in the north to Pagsam Kha (Buxa in Cooch Bihar) in the south. (Look at the map in Figure 1-4 which shows the location of these four extremities of the country). They were

![Figure 1-5 Map showing Bhutan and its neighbours during the ancient periods and the four gateways (Kha Zhi) into the country](image)
perhaps used as the gateways to Bhutan and beyond by the ancient traders.

To us, the people of Bhutan, the country has been known as Druk Yul (འདྲུག་ཡུལ་ - land of the Thunder Dragon) since the 13th century. This had emerged from the fact that the Drukpa Kagyud School of Mahayana Buddhism has been the country’s state religion. The people are, therefore, called the Drukpas, the followers of Drukpa Kargyud and the native people of Druk Yul.

Our country is today known to the outside world as Bhutan. This name was derived from Sanskrit words and has two different possible origins. Firstly, the name is derived from the word ‘Bhuttan’, meaning high land. From the Indian point of view this is very appropriate as Bhutan is a raised land compared to the plains of India (the home of the Sanskrit). Secondly, the name would mean ‘Bhot-sthan’. “Bhot” is short for Bhotey, the people, and “sthan” means place or land, or the land of the Bhotheys. To most Indians, living across the border from Bhutan, Bhutanese people are invariably known as “Bhotheys”. Bhot-sthan later became Bhotan and then Bhootan, as called by British in the 19th century, and gradually evolved into Bhutan. Today, the name, Bhutan, is widely used in the world maps and its people are known as Bhutanese.

**Conclusion**

The account of the ancient period of our history is based on various available information, such as, the monoliths, oral traditions, and records found in religious texts. Although it was not a part of the major civilisation that took place in the well known river valleys of the world such as the Nile, Indus, Euphrates, Hwang Ho and so on, isolated settlements did occur in Bhutan as far back as these ancient times as was the case in many places of the world.

Agriculture and animal husbandry were in practice since then as a prelude to much of what is still prevailing in Bhutan.

Names of the country have evolved, just as languages and other forms of culture do, through ages of civilisation. Today, Bhutan is a more popular name especially to the outside world while to its own people it is Druk Yul. Other names are mentioned here because they are important sources of our history.
Student Activities

1. 
   a) Explain the main difference between recorded history and pre-history?
   b) Describe the work of an archaeologist.
   c) Name two types of ancient artefacts found in Bhutan. Suggest how they may have been used by ancient people.
   d) What are the possible factors that affected the social organization of our country?

2. Find out if there is anyone in the class whose parents or grandparents have discovered namchag and kept it in their houses. Tell the class about it. Draw it on the chalkboard. Tell your friends when it was discovered and how; what your people say about it; where it is kept; what you think it may be. Let your friends give their opinion of what they think the diagram on the chalkboard looks like. Ask your teacher also to voice his/her opinion.

3. 
   a) Distinguish between pastoralists and agriculturalists. You could summarize your ideas in VENN diagram.

   ![Pastoralists and Agriculturalists VENN Diagram]

   b) Suggest whether it would have been easier to be a pastoralist or an agriculturalist during the ancient period in Bhutan. Make sure to explain your reasons.
   c) Choose 5 artefacts to place in a “time capsule” to teach people 1000 years from now about what Bhutan is like today.

4. Divide the Class into 4-5 groups. Invite elderly persons or visit a nearby village, which have elderly people. You request them to share their experiences in terms of economic, religious and social life of the village.
   In groups, record all the responses of the elder persons and what you have found should be presented to the Class.
   With the help of the teacher, the findings should be synthesized and summarised. What have been the major changes in village life in recent years?
Chapter 2
ANCIENT HISTORY
PART II
RELIGION OF EARLY INHABITANTS AND
THE FIRST ADVENT OF BUDDHISM

Long before the birth of Buddha Shakyamuni, some men of this country, then known as Mon Kha Thra, are said to have become the followers of Yeshey Goenpo (ཡེ་ཤེས་མགེན་པོ - Mahakala) who in turn was a disciple of Buddha Kasyapa. Yeshey Goenpo was earlier a powerful heretic spirit who dwelled in the eastern parts of the Himalayas and invaded the minds and bodies of human beings often bringing them much harm, including deaths and other disasters. He was soon to come under the influence of Sangay Yoesung (སངས་རྒྱས་འོད་སྲུངས - Buddha Kasyapa or one of the thousand Buddhas). Buddha Kasyapa converted the Mahakala to the doctrine (ཆོད - dharma) and was to become the principal guardian deity of the doctrine in Bhutan since then.

Bonism, however, was the main religion practised by the early inhabitants of the country and remained so for many centuries before the advent of the doctrines of Buddha Shakyamuni. Bonism, which perhaps stemmed from the Rig-vedic practice of the Indo Aryans from North India was, before the advent of Buddhism, the main religion throughout the Himalayas, including Bhutan. Infact, every civilization in the world seems to have undergone a stage when the early people worshipped nature and its different elements, although different names were given to the same practice in different countries. Animal sacrifices were often made to please the deities that people worshipped. Similarly, according to the Bon faith, people in Bhutan worshipped deities that were believed to be dwelling in the different elements of nature, such as the mountains, lakes, rivers, trees and rocks.

Figure 2-1 Yeshey Goenpo (Mahakala in Sanskrit), one of the oldest guardian deities of Buddhism, and now the principal guardian deity of Bhutan since the first advent of Buddhism in this country.)
One may pause and wonder whether some of the superstitions of today were Bon beliefs of ancient times. Probably, what was believed in the early days was passed down orally through generations and today we look at these as superstitions because we have other new beliefs that make the ancient ones outdated.

**The first advent of Buddhism**

Before his mahaparinirvana, Lord Buddha had said to his disciples that sometime after his death his doctrine would flourish in the land of the Monpas in the eastern part of the Himalayas, south of Tibet and some hundred miles north of Bodh Gaya. True to the prophecy, Buddhism has been the principal religion of most parts of the eastern Himalayas, particularly Bhutan. During the reign of Emperor Ashoka, the most famous of the Mauryan kings in India (273-232 BC) and for several hundred years thereafter Buddhism spread to all parts of the Indian sub-continent as well as to China, Japan, and the South East Asia. Bhutan had been very close to the Mauryan Empire of Maghada (322-185 BC), the first major empire in the history of India which extended as far east as the Brahmaputra valley. The developments and changes that were taking place in the surrounding lands, particularly the Brahmaputra valley, did have some influence on this country. The cool and serene mountain sides of Bhutan always provided absolute peace and the right climate for the meditators of Buddhist sages and other pilgrims. Buddhist saints and sages visited Bhutan and mediated here especially during the time of Emperor Ashoka.

The first advent of Buddhism in this country therefore dates back much earlier than it is believed hitherto. Many historians connect the coming of Buddhism in Bhutan only with the arrival of Guru Padma Samdhava in the 8th century A.D. Buddhism, however, was already in practice in several parts of Bhutan as early as the 5th century AD and perhaps even earlier. The doctrines of Lord Buddha reached the soils of Bhutan long before they reached Tibet. The arrival of Guru Rinpoche gave it a new flourish throughout the country from Kurtoe and Tashi Yangtse valleys in the east to Haa and Paro valleys in the west. The Buddhism that prevailed then in Bhutan would be however, some form of **Hinayana** (ཐེག་དམག་ - the Lesser Vehicle) tradition or also often known as **Theravada** tradition in contrast to the **Mahayana** (ཐེག་ཆེན་ - the Greater Vehicle) tradition that was introduced during the later centuries.

There are records that refer to a Bhutanese monk called **Toenpa** (Stonpa) who was a royal preceptor sometime during the 5th century AD in the palace of Pragjyotisa, the capital of the Kingdom of Kamrup (Present day Assam). He later accompanied princess Amrtaprabha of Kamrup to Kashmir when the princes married prince Meghavahana of Kashmir. Toenpa, upon reaching Kashmir, built a Buddhist stupa which the local people named Stonpa after the

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**Figure 2-2.** Some of the early temples of Jowo Jampa believed to be built in the 6th century A.D. Lhakhang Karpo in Haa and Gayney Lhakhang in Bumthang
The building of temples

If today one travels around Drukyul one would come across several lhakhangs (ལྷ་ཁང - temples and monasteries) that were built several centuries earlier, some of them as early as 5th and 6th century A.D. or before.

There is a marked difference between temples built before the Guru’s visit and those that were built after. The temples built before and during the visit of Guru Rinpoche have Maitriya Buddha or Jowo Jampa (ཇོ་བོ་བྱམས་པ་ - the future Buddha) or Buddha Vairochana (བོ་རོ་ཙ་ན་ - Nampar Nangzey or Gyelwa Rig Nga) as the main statues. The temples built after his visit were all devoted to his works and the new light of Buddhism he had brought to this country. Guru’s images are, therefore, given a central position in these temples. A similar trend may be observed in the temples built in honour of Zhabdrung Rinpoche after 1616 A.D.

It is generally believed that Jampa Lhakhang in Bumthang and Kyichu Lhakhang in Paro were built around the time when Songtse Gampo (617-698 A.D.) was ruling in Tibet. Songtse Gampo was the first ruler in Tibet who introduced Buddhism in that country. According to mythology, Kyichu and Jampa lhakhangs were part of his scheme of constructing the 108 thadul-yangdul (ཕ་རིམ་འབྲུག་འབྲུག་) temples in order to subdue a demoness. The story of completing the construction of 108 temples in a single day, which included Jampa Lhakhang and Kyichu Lhakhang, is of course merely a myth. It is now believed that the two temples were in fact built by the local devotees much earlier. Some records also show that several other lhakhangs, including Lhakhang Karpo and Nagpo in Haa, and Koenchog – Sum Lhakhang and Gayney Lhakhang in Bumthang were constructed around the 6th or 7th century AD, and perhaps even earlier than Kyichu and Jampa Lhakhangs. All these lhakhangs have Jowo Jampa as the principal statue.
was already flourishing in Bhutan much earlier than believed hitherto. It was flourishing in several parts of the country by the time of Guru Rinpoche’s first visit to Bhutan on 746 A.D.

**Conclusion**

Bhutan’s guardian deity Mahakala or popularly known to the Bhutanese as **Yeshey Goenpo** has been associated with the country since the ancient times of Mon Kha Thra. Bonism was the principal religion of our early inhabitants and many of its elements are still found in our today’s social and religious beliefs. Additional information, including those on our ancient lhakhangs, now available, proves that the first advent of Buddhism in the country took place at least by the early 5th century A.D. rather than 746 A.D. as believed hitherto.

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**Student Activities**

1. Visit a **Goenkhang** (ཐོང་ཁང་ - house of Yeshey Goenpo) in a nearby Dzong. Request the **Lopon Kangjub** (སློབ་དཔོན་བསྐང་རྒྱུན་པ་ - caretaker of Goenkhang) to explain about its significance and how YesheyGoenpo helps oversee the doctrine as well as in protecting Bhutan repeatedly over the centuries from foreign invasions and natural calamities.

2. Every valley has, in addition to the national guardian deity, Yeshey Goenpo, also a local guardian deity, such as, App Chhundu of Haa, Jowo Drake of Paro, Genyen Jagpa of Thimphu, Selging Karpo of Bumthang, Gara Wangchuck of Tashigang etc. Try to trace their origins and how they became the local guardian deities in the respective regions.

3. Find out the basic differences in the doctrines of **Hinayana** (Lesser Vehicle) and **Mahayana** (Greater Vehicle) sects of Buddhism.

4. Visit a nearby lhakhang and find out:
   a) When was it constructed and by whom?
   b) Any other history about it
   c) Describe its statues and which one of them occupies the dominant position.
Chapter 3

GURU PADMA SAMBHAVA
THE SECOND ADVENT OF BUDDHISM

During the 8th century, the great Buddhist Saint, Guru Rinpoche originally known by the name Padma Sambhava (Pema Jungney) made visits to our country beginning with the year 746 A.D. Following these visits of Guru Rinpoche Buddhism flourished throughout the country.

Guru Rinpoche, meaning “the Precious Master”, is an extraordinary historical figure whose life story has taken on the dimensions of an epic. As a Buddhist tantric master he brought the Vajrayana teachings to Bhutan and the other Himalayan countries. To his followers he is the second Buddha. He is said to have been born by virtue of the Buddha’s prophecy made to his weeping disciples during his mahaparinirvana:

Guru’s early life

The birth, discovery and adoption

Guru Padma Sambhava was born miraculously in Oddiyana, present day Swat valley in Pakistan. King Indrabodhi found him holding a lotus flower in his right hand, a holy-water pot in his left hand and a tiny trident (three-pronged staff) in the folds of his left arm, on a lotus in the middle of Lake Dhanakosha. Indrabodhi was grief stricken at this time due to the loss of his only son and heir. It was by virtue of the prophecy that he found and adopted Padma Sambhava who can be depicted as ‘the Miraculously Born’, without father, mother or genealogy.

When the boy grew older, the King entrusted him with the government of the kingdom. The people were happy and contented and the Kingdom prospered under his benevolent rule. He established a new set of laws based upon the Buddhist Moral Codes.

He became renowned for his excellence in poetry and philosophy, arts, music and meditation. A few years later he married a beautiful princess called Bhasadhara (Woechangma), the daughter of King Chandra Kumar of a nearby country in India. He soon realized there was no real meaning to life based on the exercise of political power and other worldly pleasures and happiness. So he renounced the kingdom, just as Buddha Shakyamuni had done some twelve hundred years earlier.

He undertook a period of extended meditation and learnt the teachings from numerous masters, the most famous of whom was Prabhahasti who was an
incarnate emanation of Adi-Buddha (ཀུན་ཏུ་བཟང་པོ་- Buddha Kuentu Zangpo). He soon mastered, besides all the Buddhist doctrines, astrology, medicine, languages, arts and crafts and came to be known as Guru Rinpoche (གུ་རུ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་- the Precious Master).

The supernatural power

One of his greatest qualities was the supernatural power of transforming and multiplying his bodily form. In a lower class you read about Guru Tshengye (གུ་རུ་མཚན་བརྒྱད་- eight manifestations) which was one of
Chapter 3: Guru Padma Sambhava

In his mission to subdue unrighteousness and establish the Buddhist doctrine, Guru Rinpoche travelled widely learning as well as practising religion. One time he came to the city of Zahor, in the present Himachal Pradesh state in India, where he met Princess Mandarava, the daughter of Ashwadhara, the King of Zahor. She chose to become his disciple and this infuriated her father. He ordered the capture of his daughter’s Guru and commanded that his daughter be punished and her Guru be burnt alive. Accordingly, Princess Mandarava was punished and the Guru was bound to a stake and set on fire. Guru Rinpoche, however, turned the fire into water, creating a lake, and appeared in the middle of the lake seated on a lotus flower. This lake at Rewalsar (known to us as Tsho Pema - མཚོ་པརྨ་) in the Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh is still an important place of pilgrimage to all the devotees of Guru Rinpoche.

King Ashwadhara then realized that the Guru was indeed a supernatural being. He made humble repentance and converted himself to Buddhism. He commanded all his subjects to be converted as well. Accompanied by Mandarava, Guru Rinpoche then returned to Oddiyana where his consort, Bhasadhara, out of jealousy also tried to burn him and Mandarava alive. Once more, he displayed his supernatural power by turning the blazing fire into a lake and appearing in the centre of the lake on an enormous lotus flower with Mandarava. Consequently the whole kingdom was converted to Buddhism.

Guru’s visits to Bhutan

The first visit

His first visit to Bhutan took place in 746 A.D. When he was meditating in Nepal in a cave at Yangleshae (ཡང་ལེ་ཤོད་) he was invited to Bhutan to recover the sog (སོག་ - life force) of Sendha Gyab, also known to the Bhutanese as Kunjom, the ruler of Bumthang. The Guru travelled to Bumthang via Nabji and Korphu in the Mangde regions. Sendha Gyab was cured and was converted to Buddhism. (See the story in the box on Guru Rinpoche and Sendha Gyab).

Guru Rinpoche then returned to India along the same route in the Khyeng and Mangde regions after bringing about a truce between Sendha Gyab and Noachhe (Nabudara). He promised to return to Bhutan and further consolidate the doctrine in the country. He then proceeded onwards to Serkhya (present day Kapilvastu in Southern Nepal) and mediated with its King to make peace with Sendha Gyab. After some years Sendha Gyab or Kunjom was thus able to return to his home country in Serkhya after living for many years in exile in Bhutan.

The second visit

Besides visiting Bhutan, Nepal and India subduing unrighteousnes and establishing Buddhist doctrine, Guru Rinpoche also visited several other countries such as Persia, China, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Sikkim and Tibet. A year after his first visit to Bhutan Padma Sambhava was invited by the then King of Tibet,
GURU RINPOCHHE AND THE SENDHA GYAB

Sendha Gyab was one of the seven sons born to King Singala of Serkhya (present-day Kapilavastu in Southern Nepal). Sendha Gyab lost in one of the family feuds and was forced to go into exile. He, along with a retinue of some 80 people, including his four wives, found his way into Bhutan and took refuge in Bumthang where he proclaimed himself as the king and came to be known as Sendha Gyab or Kunjom. He took over the Chagkhar Go Med (ལྕགངས་ཁར་སྡོད་དཀྱིལ་ད་ - the iron castle without door) in Bumthang Choekhor.

For a long time, Sendha had been at war with Naochhe (སྣ་བོ་ཆེ་ - Big Nose) or Nabudara, the king of a region south of Bumthang (most probably in the Duars). At one stage his son, Taglamebar, was killed by King Naoche and Sendha was so upset that he desecrated all the abodes of the local tutelary deity, Shelging Karpo (ཤེལ་གིང་དཀར་པོ་), who was the chief of all the local deities Lhadre (འབྲྲ་འདི་) of Bumthang. Shelging Karpo took offence and as an act of revenge he decided to steal the king’s ‘life-force’. The king fell seriously ill and was on the point of dying. There seemed no way that he could be cured. One of his officials had heard about a great tantric master, called Padma Sambhava, who was known for his supernatural powers. A mission was sent to Nepal to invite him to Bumthang.

On arriving in Bumthang, the Guru was promised by the King that he would fulfil all his wishes if he was cured. Guru Rinpochhe chose one of the daughters of the King, Monmo Tashi Khye’uden (also known as Bumden Tshomo), as a tantric partner (mystic consort) and went to meditate on a rock, called Dragmar Dorji Tsegpa (བྲག་དམར་རྡོ་རྗེ་བརྗེགས་པ་) where he knew Shelging Karpo was hiding. Guru Rinpochhe was compelled to scheme a trick on Shelging Karpo.

One morning the Guru, through magical powers, made a spring appear at some distance from the rock and sent Tashi Khye’uden there to fetch water in a golden vase. In the meantime, Guru Rinpochhe emanated himself in his eight manifestations and performed a dance. All the local deities, except Shelging Karpo, came to watch the dance and were wonderstruck. When Tashi came back, Guru Rinpochhe transformed her into five different consorts, each carrying a golden vase. Sunbeams fell on the vases and their reflections in turn fell on the rock. Shelging Karpo was puzzled by these reflections and became curious. He transformed himself into a white lion and peeped out from a crack in the rock. He saw the dance and, as he was intrigued, he continued to watch. This was the opportunity the Guru had been waiting for. He transformed himself into a Jachung (བྱ་ཁྱུང་ - a mythical bird or the Garuda) and pounced upon the lion, gripping him in his claws. Shelging Karpo was thus subdued and bound by an oath to protect Buddhism. The King’s ‘life-force’ was recovered and offered back to the King. Thus, the Sendha Gyab was cured and, as promised, he converted himself to Buddhism and from then onwards he led a virtuous life.

On the rock where the Guru meditated was left an impression of his body and, therefore, it was called Kuje (སྐུར་). Later, on this site a temple was built which is known as Kuje Lhakhang. The body impression can still be seen. The spring that was created by the Guru is considered as Drupchu (གྲུབ་ཆུ་ - holy water). The cypress tree that is seen near the temple is believed to have grown from the Guru’s
Chapter 3: Guru Padma Sambhava

Guru Rinpoche was determined to make peace between the two kings, Sendha Gyab and Naochhe. He made an appointment to meet them at a place, in the Khyeng region. Here, the two kings were made to take a solemn oath that their respective troops would not create any cause of fighting again. If they broke their promise the two kingdoms would find themselves swimming in disaster. A black stone pillar bearing the handprints of the two kings on the sides and the Guru on the top commemorated this oath. The pillar was called Na do (མནའ་རྡོ - the Stone of Oath) and the place was named Nabji (མནའ་སྦིས - the Place of Oath).

The pillar with the handprints can still be seen inside the Nabji temple (See fig. 3-2). Beside the temple stands a cypress tree believed to have grown out of the Guru’s staff. The stone pillar inside the temple is about 1.40 m and black in colour. On one side of the pillar there is an inscription of the Dayig (བརྒྱུད་ཀྱིས་ - Script of the Khandromas) which could be the secret code of the Guru holding a message for a tertoen.

Figure 3-3  Gomkora Lhakhang and the rock with Guru’s body impressions

Thrisong Detsen, to help him build the first Buddhist monastery at Samye in the south east of Lhasa. The king had in fact already started constructing the monastery under the guidance of the Buddhist master Shantarashita (called Zhiwatsho by the Tibetans). However, the construction made very little progress because what was being built during the day was being destroyed at night by demonic forces. Padma Sambhava, having accepted the invitation, set out for Tibet and using his tantric powers, he subdued the local demons and the monastery was thus successfully completed.

Padma Sambhava’s mission in Tibet did not end with this accomplishment alone. He took on the responsibility of taming all the other anti-Buddhist deities both in Tibet and Bhutan, and bound them by oath to protect the Buddhist doctrine. To this extent, the Soeldeb Barched Lamsel (གསོལ་འདེབས་བར་ཆད་ལམ་སེལ་) and Lhandey Kathang (ལྷ་འདེབས་ཀུན་གྲགས) are full of epic stories on Guru Rinpoche subduing the numerous demons and evil spirits throughout the Himalayas, and converting them under solemn oath as perpetual guardians of the doctrine.

It was during this stay in Tibet that Guru Rinpoche decided to visit Bhutan, “the land of demons and powerful local gods” a second time, as promised during his first visit. This time he stayed in the country for a considerable period and travelled extensively. While in Bumthang he preached the doctrine to the inhabitants in particular the Dzog Chen Selwai Melong (clear mirror of mysticism), constructed several temples and meditated at Remochen and Thowadra. The Guru also visited and blessed Kunzangdra, Zhabjethang, Choejedra, Mebartscho and other places in Bumthang. He then proceeded onwards to eastern Bhutan and blessed Ajaney valleys, on the borders of the present day Mongar and Lhuntse districts, into Beyuls (སྦས་ཡུལ་ - Hidden Lands) which are believed to be the secret entrances to the Guru’s Paradise. While in eastern Bhutan he also meditated at Gomkora and subdued the local deity. Like at Kuje in Bumthang, body impressions of the Guru, including that of his head with the hat, can be seen on a huge rock at Gomkora (See fig. 3-3).

2 “Dzog Chen is a state, the primordial state, the state of total awakening that is the heart essence of all the Buddhas and all spiritual paths, the summit of an individual beings spiritual evolution.”
Figure 3-4 Kuje Lhakhang in Bumthang, Courtesy: tumblr.com

Figure 3-5 Singye Dzong in Lhuentse, Courtesy: DIT
From Singye Dzong in Lhuentse Guru Rinpoche reached Paro Taktshang (གཙུག་མངོན་ - Tiger’s nest). He meditated at Taktshang for three months and then visited Drag Karpo, Namthog Karpo, Chumophu and Tshalungdra in Paro valley. He also visited Haa which he blessed into another Beyul. He finally visited Beylangdra (སྦས་གང་བྲག་) in Shar and Goen Tshephu in the Gasa region, and most probably returned from there to Tibet.

The third visit

Guru Rinpoche also made a brief visit to Bhutan during the reign of Muthri Tsenpo who succeeded his father Thrisong Detsun as the King of Tibet. His third visit to our country took place while helping Muthri Tsenpo to overcome Khykharathoe, the step son of King Thrisong Detsen, who was planning to lead an army against Tibet and destroy Samye Monastery. (See the story of Guru Rinpoche and Khykharathoe in the box). The Guru banished Khykharathoe beyond the Tibetan border and in fact beyond Khenpajong in Bhutan and returned to Tibet after sealing Khenpajong as a Beyul.

Major legacies of Guru Rinpoche

The tradition of esoteric teachings

As mentioned above, Guru Rinpoche possessed many supernatural powers to subdue the numerous demons and spirits worshipped in Bonism and those who opposed the doctrine of Buddhism. These demons and spirits in the form of both humans as well as ferocious apparitions either took away vital life forces of the humans and often caused death or simply consumed them alive. The Guru meditated in places where such evil spirits were believed to be residing. He tempted, coaxed and tricked them and finally using his supernatural powers subdued them. He subsequently converted them under solemn oath to be the protectors of the doctrine for all times to come. This tradition, called esoteric teachings, is an essential part of Tantric Buddhism (Vajrayana) and was adopted by the drupthobs (དྲུགས་ཕོབ་ - maha siddhas).

The tradition continued to follow by the later religious leaders like Phajo Drugom Zhigpo, Thangtong Gyalpo, Drukpa Kuenley and Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal for the good of the doctrine in Bhutan.

Texts on Guru’s Teachings

Just like the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni, Mahayana Buddhism is blessed with very rich literature based on the biography of Guru Rinpoche, his teachings and numerous prayers paying homage to him. Khando Yeshey Tshogyal who was one of his two principal consorts is largely attributed for these literatures.

While in Tibet constructing the Samye monastery Guru Rinpoche chose Yeshey Tshogyal to be his spiritual consort. Yeshey Tshogyal who accompanied the Guru to Bhutan was said to possess supernatural wisdom, intelligence, memory and scholarly skills and was thus in position to receive most of Guru’s teachings. She wrote down the teachings as well as the biography of Guru Rinpoche such as the Pema Thangyig (ཕྲེལ་མ་ཐང་ཡིག་), Kathang Duep (ཀཐང་བསོ་དུས་པོ) and Kathang De-nga (ཀཐང་གཞིས་དེ་ང་) as dictated by him. Khando Yeshey Tshogyal is also believed to have composed the various soeldebs (prayers) in Guru’s honour, such as Barched Lamsel, Samba Lhendub (བསམ་ལུན་གྲུབ་), Zangdog Pelri Moenlam (བཟང་དམོག་སྤྲིི་མོ་དོན་ལམ་) and Khando Yeshey Tshogyal’s biographies like Pema Thangyig (ཕྲེལ་མ་ཐང་ཡིག་), Kathang Duep (ཀཐང་བསོ་དུས་པོ) and Kathang De-nga (ཀཐང་གཞིས་དེ་ང་). These texts are today recited widely by all his devotees while praying and paying homage to Guru Rinpoche.

According to Guru Rinpoche’s biography, Khando Yeshey Tshogyal while in Bhutan with Guru was directed by the Guru to meditate in a cave in Singye Dzong. During the meditation the Khando had the vision of Dorje Phurpa (རྡོ་རྗེ་ཕུར་པ་ - Vajra Kila) in his full glory. Singye Dzong area is, therefore, even to this day recognized as the only place where the unique meditation in honour of Dorje Phurpa is possible.
GURU RINPOCHHE AND KHYKHARATHOE

Margyen, one of the non-Buddhist queens of the Tibetan King, Thrisong Detsen, had relations with a dog and a goat and as a result a boy with the mouth of a dog and the skull of a goat was born. These features got him the name, Khykharathoe (dog’s mouth, goat’s skull). When, after some years, the King heard of him, he was furious and he banished the young man to the border area. Khykharathoe went to Lhodra but from there too he was expelled further south beyond the Tibetan border, to the valley of Khenpajong, in the northern part of Bhutan. He settled there in exile and practised the Bon faith. After a few years, King Thrisong Detsen dies and Khykharathoe, not having forgotten the ill-treatment of the King, managed to raise a small army with the help of the local rulers and decided to lead against Tibet and destroy Samye Monastery. The new King of Tibet, Muthri Tsenpo, appealed to Guru Rinpochhe to help him repel Khykharathoe and expel him from the bordering area of Bhutan which was threateningly too close to Tibet.

Guru Rinpochhe disguised himself as a priest and went to Khykharathoe to offer his services. At first, Khykharathoe had correctly guessed it was a trick and he attempted to kill the visitor, but the Guru used magical means to convince him that he was mistaken. Having succeeded, Khykharathoe agreed to do whatever the priest wished him to do. He was asked to build a huge wooden bird in the form of Jachung, large enough to hold Khykharathoe and his attendants. When it was completed, Khykharathoe and his attendants were made to enter it. Once they were inside, Guru Rinpochhe with his magical powers made the wooden Jachung fly across valleys and mountains and land at a place called Khitsum in the Tang valley of Bumthang. Khykharathoe lived in this region in exile for many years. Guru Rinpochhe then sealed Khenpajong and called it Beyul.

The Tertoens

Guru Rinpochhe travelled widely in all the countries he visited. He not only subdued the demons but also blessed these places and preached the doctrine to the inhabitants. The places the great Guru visited are today designated as Guru’s Ney (སྒྲུབ་བདེ་ - sacred places of Guru) and are important places of pilgrimage, worship and meditation. Wherever he visited Guru Rinpochhe was said to have hidden treasures (ནང་) mostly statues, religious texts and other sacred religious objects. Guru had prophesied that these treasures would be rediscovered later at auspicious times by his spiritual heirs called Tertoens (ཏེར་བཏོན་ - treasure discoverers).

The chapter 16 of Guru’s biography Kathang Duep prophesying the comings of the different tertoens in the future reads as follows:

“The eight emanations of Boddhisattava (tertoens) will come and they will be Ugyen Lingpa in the Centre, Dorji Lingpa in the East, Rinchen Lingpa in the South, Pema Lingpa in the West and Karma Lingpa in the North. Others like Samten Lingpa, Zhigpo Lingpa and Terdag Lingpa will come. These will be the eight great tertoens, the true emanation of I, Ugyen”.

As prophesied by Guru Rinpochhe in the Kathang Duep different tertoens were born as follows: Ugyen Lingpa (1323-?), Dorji Lingpa (1346-1405), Rinchen or Ratna Lingpa (1403-1478), Pema Lingpa (1450-1521), Terdag Lingpa (1646-1714), Zhigpo Lingpa Garkyi Wangchuck (1524-1583), Karma Lingpa (14th century), Samten Lingpa (14th century) etc.
Only one of the great tertons amongst the five, mentioned in the Kathang Duep, Pema Lingpa was the only native Bhutanese. He was born in Bumthang and we will learn about him in later chapters.

The tertons took the form of multiplying through repeated reincarnations and often in form of Ku, Sung, Thug (སྐུ་གསུང་ཐུགས་) - Body, Speech and Mind). It is believed that 5 great tertons, 108 other major tertons and 1,002 minor tertons are destined to come. Many of them have already come while others will continue to come at auspicious time in the future. Longchen Rabjam (1308-1363), Thangthong Gyalpo (1385-1509), Kunkhyen Pema Karpo (1527-1592), Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682), at least two reincarnations of Karmapa, Jamyang Khyentse (1820-1892), Dudjom Jigdrel Yeshey Dorji (1904-1987), Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche (1910-1991), etc. are listed amongst the tertons who have been already born.

In addition to Pema Lingpa, several other tertons visited Bhutan and discovered treasures from caves, rocks, lakes, etc. located in various places in Bhutan. We will learn about them also in the later chapters. Many of the events of treasure discovery by the tertons are recorded in texts or are integral parts of our folkllores. The numerous lhakhangs throughout Bhutan today house the treasures discovered by the different tertons.

The significance of the different tertons in rediscovering treasures is that Guru had prophesied that after his departure from this world the doctrine would undergo varying fates, including many difficulties, at different points of time. Besides, all parts of the Himalayas were not ready to receive the doctrine during Guru’s own presence in the region. The different tertons were, therefore, destined to rediscover these treasures, consisting of mostly religious texts, relics and according to Kuenkhyen Jigmed Lingpa in Throthig Wangchog:

“(The Termas are) concealed with four intentions, namely that the doctrine shall not disappear, the instructions not be adulterated, the blessings not fade, and that the increase of the transmission be shortened.”

In summary, the continuity of the doctrine as preached by Guru Rinpoche was thus ensured through the many troubled centuries. Whenever it seems to be fading or threatened a terton or group of tertons would be born to revive or reinforce the doctrine.

Prophecies of Guru Rinpoche

Similar to those pertaining to the future comings of the tertons, the different biographies of Guru Rinpoche and the various prayers paying homage to him are full of prophecies about the events which would take place over the centuries after his departure. They refer to the fate of the doctrine as well as events that would affect his devotees, the places and the countries he had visited. Many of these prophecies have already come true while others were expected to take place in the years to follow. Several of these prophecies, especially those pertaining to his devotees in Bhutan, are quoted in the later chapters.

Conclusion

Both the beginning and the end of Guru Rinpoche are shrouded in mystery. He came to the world to help the humans and all the other sentient beings transcend from darkness to light. He ensured the continuity of the doctrine over the many troubled centuries through the various legacies left behind, such as, written texts including his own biography as well as teachings by the various tertons who were born as his spiritual heirs.

In Bhutan the doctrine of Guru Rinpoche had prospered unbroken since his first visit to the country in 746 A.D. Devotion to Guru Rinpoche amongst the Bhutanese people can be today witnessed everywhere, practically in every walk of their lives.

To his devotees Guru Rinpoche rides on the sunbeams and daily visits and blesses all the sentient beings wherever the sun shines. He ceaselessly watches over them with ever lasting kindness and benevolence and inspires his followers, both present and future, to practice the Dharma. He waits for his devotees to enter his celestial abode at Zangdog Pelri.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Work in groups. Each group will draw an imaginary scene of the Guru subduing Shelging Karpo. Display the best drawing either on the classroom wall or the school notice board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Trace the journeys Guru made through Bhutan and its neighbouring countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Your school prayer books consist of many chapters devoted in paying homage to Guru Rinpoche. Read through one of them and make a list of his other accomplishments made for the benefit of the doctrine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Most of the <em>chhams</em> and <em>tsechus</em> have direct or indirect origins going back to Guru Rinpoche. Elaborate with necessary examples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Imagine that you are about to meet Guru Rinpoche. Compose three questions that you would like to ask him.</td>
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Chapter 4
THE EMERGENCE OF RULING CLANS
(9TH – 17TH CENTURIES)

We shall now study about the medieval period of our country. The period, which had begun with the second advent of Buddhism following the visits of Guru Rinpoche to the country with effect from 746 A.D., was to last for almost the next one thousand years. It lasted till the year 1616 A.D. when Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal arrived in the country and brought about the complete unification of the country.

The medieval period of our country is marked by the virtual absence of any political figure of national stature. The country was divided into many clans or political entities, each ruled by one or more chieftains. The geographical features of the country largely contributed towards such a political system and, to a lesser extent, social, cultural and economic organizations throughout the medieval period. The high ridges of the mighty Himalayas running north-south of the country accompanied by steep cliffs and torrential rivers prevented regular contacts among the people living in the different valleys of the country. Each valley was, therefore, isolated from the others by these natural barriers. Each valley formed one or more separate clans often with a different dialect, and ruled by one or more chieftains.

The earliest of the ruling clans date back to the 9th century and emerged directly through a few followers of Guru Rinpoche and their immediate descendants. While the clan system was a predominant feature almost all over the country throughout the medieval period some of the earliest recorded clans emerged in the eastern and central parts of the country. We shall in this chapter, therefore, study mostly some of these clans or families of the ancient period in our history. The other clans who emerged and ruled in the different parts of the country during the later part of the medieval period will be discussed in the later chapters.

The clans of Trashigang, Trashi Yangtse, Pema Gatshel and Mongar

The central figure in the early history of eastern Bhutan is a nobleman by the name of Tsangma. At least six major clans who had prevailed in eastern region of Bhutan beginning with the ancient times and extending over almost the entire medieval period of our history claimed descent from Prince Tsangma.

Like Sendha Gyab from India and Khykharathoe from Tibet earlier before him, Prince Tsangma came to Bhutan as a royal refugee. Tsangma was the second eldest of the grandsons of King Thrisong Detsen. Langdarma, who was the youngest of the brothers, soon deposed the eldest brother King Ralpachen and took over the throne and banished the other brother Tsangma into exile. He then started the persecution of the Buddhists.

Tsangma said to have arrived via the Phari (Tibet) route in Paro in the year of the Iron Monkey (836 A.D.). While in Namthong Karpo (Paro) he met a local girl by whom a son was born later. It is believed that Tsangma’s descendants through this son were the later Gyalung of Paro and Dung Drogrue Chewa of Thimphu which were later integrated into the different Drukpa families.
Tsangma’s destiny was however meant for eastern Bhutan and travelling through Wang, Shar, Mangde, Khyeng and Zhongar regions he ultimately reached the present day Trashigang and Trashiyangtse regions.

Tsangma was a devout Buddhist and he is believed to have lived for the rest of his life at Tsenkhar (present day Jangphu) where he built a castle for himself sometime during the first half of the 9th century. The ruins of the castle at Tsenkharla, which still exists, only a few minutes walk away from the present day Rangthangwoong Pry. School, are believed to be those built by Tsangma (See Figure 4-1). He married a local lady from a good lineage called Sonam Pelkyid and had two sons whose names were Thrimi Lhayi Wangchuck and Chebu Thonglegtshen. As the sons were of noble blood, the inhabitants from the nearby regions invited them to become their chieftains. The elder son went to Laog Yulsum in the region of Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh where he settled and founded the Jowo clan. From this clan came the later chieftains of Laog Yulsum and Paodung in the Tawang region.

Tsangma had three grandsons from his younger son. His own properties at Tsenkhar were inherited by the younger son who in turn passed on to his own eldest grandson, called Thri Tenpel, who started the Je clan which was to become one of the most important clans in eastern Bhutan. One branch of the Je clan became the chieftains of Kanglung, Tsenkhar, Bikhar, Rangsinkhar, Bengkhar, Thragom and Khaling in the Trashiagang region, and Drongtoe and Drongmey in the Trashiyangtse region. Another branch became the chieftains of Dungsam (present day Pemagatshel and Samdrum Jongkhar regions). The two last branches became the chieftains of Ngatshang and Pchitshang in the Mongar region.

The two younger grandsons of Tsangma were born as twins (Gongkar Gyal and Pelkidar) and, therefore, the clan that they began was named Bjar (joined). While Pelkidar appears to have had no descendant, the other twin had four sons from four wives. The son of the senior most wives extended the Bjar clan while the sons of the other wives started the clans, Yeyde, Tungdey and Wangma. It is said that out of jealousy the senior wife one day tried to hide the sons of the junior wives in three different vessels – a yey (wooden bucket), a tung (big cane basket), and a wang (earth pit). From these came the names of their respective clans.

Some of the members of the Bjar clan became chieftains of regions across the border in Domkha and Murshing in the south of Arunachal Pradesh (India). Some spread in the Dungsam region of Dagor, Pchimung, Khamga, Yurung, Tshatse and Wamrong while others ruled the areas of Udzarong and Tormazhong.

The members of the Yeyde clan settled in the Bidung-Radi region, particularly at Saling, Galing, Ramagengra (Ramjar) and Phongmey as well as in some parts of Merak and Dungsam.

The Tungdey clan ruled a large region south and east of Trashiyangtse extending up to the borders of Tawang.

The Wangma clan became chieftains of Dirang Dzong across the border in Arunachal Pradesh and does not have any direct importance to our history.

The listing of these chieftains and places may today appear overwhelming and some of these places may have changed their names at a later period. It nevertheless reflects the incredible division of the
region of eastern Bhutan into a large number of small independent units which were ruled by no less than six different clans descended from a common ancestor, Tsangma.

**The noble Dung families of Bumthang, Khyeng and Zhongar**

In our history, *Dung* (བདུན་) is generally applied to the first noble families of Bumthang and Khyeng, whose origins are detailed in the *Gyelrig*. The history of these noble families is complicated because the *Gyelrig* gives two different versions (Ura and Zhongar) of their origin which in turn probably is based on different ancient texts.

**The Ura tradition**

For some time after the departure of Guru Rinpoche from the country there was no one to rule over the Bumthang region. The people, without the guidance of a ruler, became prone to constant quarrels and fights. They then decided to search for a ruler. They prayed for one and in answer to their prayers a boy was born to a local woman (Sonam Pelden) with proper auspicious signs believed to have been sent down from heaven. When the child was born, he was called Lhagoen Pelchen and after some years he became the chief ruler of the region. From him descended a son (Lha Zhang Gyel) and a grandson (Drakpa Wangchuk) who provided for sometimes the continuity of rule in the region. The grandson had no heir, but he was reborn. The incarnate was named Lhawang Dragpa and was made the ruler. He married a lady (Ashi Droenzom) from Cheokhor and from their offspring descended the *Dung* families of Bumthang, Khyeng and Zhongar.

**The Zhongar tradition**

A young girl was on her way to Dungsamkha to marry the chieftain of that region. While on the way one night she slept on the shore of a lake called *Mukulung Tsho* (མ་ཀུལུང་མཚོ). In her sleep, the chief of the local deities crawled on her in the form of a white snake. When she arrived at Dungsamkha, (present day in Pema Gathsel) she gave birth to a son known by *Bar Kyed* (བར་སྐྱེ) who, some years later, was killed by a *Lu* (ཀླུ་- water-snake) who was the chief deity’s enemy. His brain was eaten by a fish and as a consequence he became a fish. It so happened that one day the fish was caught in the net of a fisherman who, discovering that the fish could speak, decided to spare his life and keep him in his house. When the man went out to work, the fish would change into a child and do the house chores for him. One day the man found out the secret and threw the empty fish skin into the fire. The skin was burnt to ashes and the child thereafter lived the life of a normal human being. As he was the son of a deity, he proved to be stronger than any other man of the locality. He was, therefore, made the chieftain of the region and soon he won control over the regions of Ura and Zhongar as well.

Once he made his subjects remove the summit of a mountain so that his palace would have earlier sunrise. The people suffered and were unhappy and, therefore, decided to kill their chieftain. Before he died he, however, predicted that he would be reborn. He told his people that they would have to seek him with pear shells. They would have to drop the shells on the ground where a huge crowd of children would be playing and the child who picked up the most shells would be his reincarnation and their new ruler. The people did as instructed by him and the child was found. He was named Lhawang Dragpa.

The last part of both versions concludes that Lhawang Dragpa was the ancestor of the *Dung* families who lived and ruled in Bumthang, Khyeng and Zhongar regions for a considerable period in our history.

- in Khyeng: the Tunglabi, Goshing, Phangkhar, Kalamti, Nyakhar, Tama and Shingkhar.
- in Zhongar: Limithang and the Yonglam Je.

[Note that here the family was called *Je* and not *Dung*.]

Some of the descendants of these families can still be found in the different parts of the Kingdom.
History of Bhutan

The Zhelngo families of Bumthang, Kurtoe and Zhongar

Besides the Dungs, there were other ruling families in these areas called by the honorific title Zhelngo (ཞལ་ངོ་). These Zhelngo families were established by the brothers3 of Pelgyi Dorji of Lhalung, who was one of the disciples of Guru Rinpoche. They ruled during the same period in certain parts of Bumthang, Kurtoe, Zhongar and Trashigang.

The most famous amongst the Zhelngo families was the Choekhor Poenpos or Debs (ཆོས་འཁོར་པོ་དེབས) of Bumthang. The Choekhor Debs ruled over the Choekhor valley of Bumthang for almost seven hundred years beginning in the middle of the 9th century till the time of Pema Lingpa and his descendants in the 15th and 16th century. Similarly, a family of Zhelngo closely related to the Choekhor Debs through marriages over the centuries ruled in Tshampa, a region lying north of Choekhor near the Tibetan border.

Kurilung Poenchen Zhelngo (ཀུ་རི་ལུང་པོ་ཐེ་ལོང་བཞིང་) was the most prominent in Kurtoe and Trashigang region. During the ninth and tenth century A.D. they gained considerable power in Kurtoe region. While they were trying to extend their influences further south east of the country the family came up against the then chieftain of Trashigang region. The latter was defeated in a battle and the Kurilung Poenchen Zhelgno took over control over a large region of Trashigang.

Similarly the Khenpo Zhelngo was prominent in Zhongar area. The founder of the Zhelngo was believed to be a khenpo (མཁན་པོ་ - a highly learned teacher), and his descendants came to be known as the Khenpo Zhelngo (མཁན་པོ་ཞལ་ངོ་). They appear to have ruled the area until the 17th century as the Logyu mentions a ruler, called Karpodung of the Khenpo clan, surrendering his region to the then advancing Drukpa army.

The Chhoeje (ཆོས་རྩེ་ - religious nobility)

At a later stage, a new class emerged. They were known as the chhoeje because they were of prestigious religious descent. Till the turn of the 17th century, they belonged exclusively to the Nyingmapa School.

The Nyingmapa Chhoeje

One of the first chhoeje families in eastern Bhutan was the Yonphula Chhoeje whose exact origin is still disputed. However, it is generally understood that they followed the religious traditions of Tertoen Pema Lingpa.

Most of the other chhoejes in eastern Bhutan came from Tertoen Pema Lingpa’s descendants. Among the most important of these families were the descendants of sons of Tertoen Pema Lingpa’s grandsons, Kuenga Wangpo and Sangdag. Kuenga Wangpo was in fact the ancestor of our present Royal Family.

The Drukpa Chhoeje

At the beginning of the 17th century, three Drukpa Chhoeje families appeared in eastern Bhutan. They were the descendants of Tenpai Nyima, the father of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, who had travelled extensively through eastern Bhutan. One was the chhoeje of the Dungsam Dungkhar (Khar) where a monastery was later established by a descendant of Pema Lingpa who founded his own noble lineage. The other two chhoejes were the Chungkhar (Khardung) Chhoeje and the Sharli Dzong Chhoeje. Tenzin Drukdra, who later became the 2nd Desi of the united country, was the son of Tenpai Nyima and thus from the Dungsam Dungkhar (Khar) Chhoeje.

Conclusion

It may be concluded that during this period a large part of our country was divided into a great number of independent clans. One or more such clans occupied a valley and each clan was under the control of a

3 Khatsang Leki Dorji, Photshar Dragpa Dorji, Mrakhey Changrig Dorji, Tobden Lawa Dorji, Garwa Khew Dorji and Yangtsel Triu Dorji
Student Activities

1. Identify the Medieval Period of our country.
2. Draw a family tree of the ruling clans descended from Tsangma.
3. Visit a nearby village and get the family line of as many households as you can. Are any two or three or more households related in some way or the other? Who were their ancestors? Where did they come from? Did any of them play any important political role? If so, give a short description. Get any other historical information you wish to know if time permits. When your visit is over, share your findings in the class. Choose a few interesting ones and draw family trees. Other extra information can be compiled and preserved for reference.

   OR

4. Trace your family line covering all aspects given above.
5. On an outline map of Bhutan, identify the regions ruled by the major families between the 9th and the 17th centuries.
6. Identify the main families of Bhutan during the Medieval period and specify where they lived.
7. Summarise the stories concerning the origins of the Dung families.
Chapter 5

ORIGINS OF A DISTINCT RELIGIOUS IDENTITY IN BHUTAN

RELIGIOUS TURMOIL IN TIBET AND INTEGRATION OF DIFFERENT SCHOOLS IN BHUTAN

According to the Kathang Duepa Guru Rinpoche, just before his departure for the celestial abode of Zangdopelri, is said to have prophesied, amongst others.

“There will be a power struggles amongst Tibetan kings; sometimes good kings will come and sometimes bad kings will come; good kings will bring propagation to the doctrine while bad kings will bring destruction to the doctrine. There will be ups and downs in people’s fate. People will indulge in evil deeds (for which) they will put blame on the time. It is not the time that changes but only the people who change.”

As prophesied by the great Guru himself the doctrine he brought into Tibet was to pass through many turbulent centuries. In Bhutan the doctrine was, however, to flourish virtually unbroken during this entire period. In fact it was devotees from Bhutan who made vital contributions not only in its continuity in their own country but also towards the subsequent revival of the doctrine in Tibet and the other countries.

Religious turmoil in Tibet

In 836 A.D. Langdarma, the youngest of the three grandsons of king Thrisong Detsen, succeeded in his plot to assassinate his elder brother king Relpachen, exile the other brother Tsangma to Bhutan and ascend himself to the Tibetan throne. He immediately reinstated Bonism as the state religion of Tibet, banned the practise of Buddhism, and outlawed all its organizations. Buddhist religious books were burnt and temples, statues, chhoetens, and other religious relics were desecrated and destroyed. Buddhist monks and their followers were severely persecuted. Many of the ordained monks were forced to marry and even work as butchers while many others sought refuge in Bhutan and the other neighbouring countries.

Langdarma’s inglorious reign was however to be short lived for only 6 years. In 842 A.D. he was assassinated by a Buddhist monk by the name of Pelgyi Dorji (one of the twenty-five disciples of Guru Rinpoche) of Lhalung.

Revival of the doctrine and emergence of different schools in Tibet

It is said that during the religious persecution of Langdarma three monks managed to escape with the Vinaya texts (Buddhist Canon) to the remote areas of Kham in Tibet. They remained hidden secretly practising the religious rituals for many years and ordained several new monks. When the
peace was later restored in Central Tibet some of these new monks returned and began restoring the doctrine by establishing new monasteries and giving sermons to the inhabitants. It is believed that some of the disciples of the monks taking refuge in the Himalayan countries, such as, Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal, Ladakh and Tawang also joined them in Tibet and contributed to the revival of the doctrine. Finally, several Indian Buddhist scholars started to visit the region and began the translation of Buddhist texts into chhoeke (རྩོམ་རྒྱུ་) and gave sermons based on these texts. One of the most important among these teachers was the great Indian scholar, Atisha Dipankara of Vikramashila and Nalanda Buddhist universities in India. His visit to Tibet at the beginning of the 11th century started off a new wave of diffusion of Buddhism throughout the region. He travelled extensively, wrote many Buddhist texts, educated the people in the ways of Buddhism and established monastic rules.

Tibet was, however, to remain in political turmoil for a long period even after the assassination of Langdarma. The country had in fact disintegrated into several small states each with a different ruler and often with different religious beliefs. It may be noted that after his mahaparinirvana the doctrine of Buddha Shakyamuni were also subject to different interpretations which ultimately led to the convening of the 4th Buddhist Council in Kashmir (India) sometime during the reign of king Kanishka in the 1st century A.D. In the absence of a central authority to guide the religious teachers in the process of revival of Buddhism in Tibet, there was a repetition of the events that took place in India over a thousand years earlier. The process which had begun in 9th century A.D. was to last for the next several hundred years ultimately leading to the emergence of several different religious schools. Most of these schools like Nyingmapa, Kadampa, Sakyapa, Kargyupa, Shangpa Kargyu, Zhi-Jodpa, Bodong, etc. were initially devotees of Guru Rinpoche and followers of his doctrine. Many of them were to be further subdivided based on choices of texts and their interpretations and commentaries developed by the different religious leaders and scholars. Sometime during the early 15th century there however emerged the reformists, the Gelugpas.

### Arrival of different schools in Bhutan

#### Nyingmapa (བོད་ཁྲིམས་པ་)

Upon the revival of Buddhism and the emergence of several schools with diverse interpretations of both the dogma and mode of worship, the followers of the original teachings of Guru Rinpoche were the called the Nyingmapas (བོད་ཁྲིམས་པ་ - the Ancients). Nyingmapa teachings had been already brought to our country in the 8th century A.D. by the Guru himself. Since then these teachings prevailed in Bhutan unbroken throughout the many centuries. In fact Nyingmapa teachings in the country were reinforced time and again through the works of the various tertoens.

During the 14th and 15th centuries, two sub-schools (offshoots of the Nyingmapa schools) were established in western Bhutan – the Dzogchenpa (རྩོམ་རྒྱུས་) and the Kathogpa (ཀོ་ཐོག་). The teachings of Longchen Nyingthig, a sub sect of the Dzogchenpa School, were organized by Longchen Rabjampa Drimey Oezer (ལོང་ཆེན་རབ་འབྲམ་པ་འདོད་ཟེར།), a great scholar and a tertoen, in the 14th century.

During his ten years stay in self exile in Bhutan, he wrote some of his finest treatises as well as founded a number of temples. The most famous of these temples are Kunzangling, Drechagling and Kotang Rinchenling in Shar, Samtenling in Paro, and Tharpaling in Bumthang. His chief disciple, Peljor Gyaltshen, started the famous lineage of the Datong Truelku which is considered to be the oldest incarnation lineage in western Bhutan.

The Kathogpa school, founded by Sherab Sengyel (1122-1192), got its name from the monastery of Kathog. Lama Yeshey Bum (བླ་མ་ཡེ་ཤེས་འབུམ་), who lived in the 15th century, visited Taktshang where he intended to build a temple. His wish remained unfulfilled until the year 1508 when his nephew and disciple, Sonam Gyaltshen, built the monastery of Ugyen Tsemo above Taktshang. The Kathogpa school became fairly important in Shar Khothang and the Paro valley. In the 17th century when
the Kathogpas were integrated with the Drukpa Kagyud, the Taktshang monastery was handed over to Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal.

The Chagzampa (ལྕགས་ཟམ་པ་)

The founder of this school of teachings was Thangtong Gyelpo (1385-1464). He is well known for his famous iron bridges which got him the nickname Chagzampa (ལྕགས་ཟམ་པ་ - the Iron-bridge Builder). He was also known as a drubthob and a tertoen.

Thangtong Gyelpo came to Bhutan in 1433. The local deities in western Bhutan, Jumolha, Jowodrake and Chundu were supposed to have helped him build his bridges with the iron from their mountains. He first stayed at Taktshang where he meditated and discovered important hidden manuscripts. Then he built his first temple, Dumtseg Lhakhang (དུམ་ཏེས་ལྷ་ཁང་), in the shape of a chhoeten to pin down and subdue a demoness who was creating trouble in the Paro valley.

He was helped by eighteen blacksmith families of Paro to collect iron and make iron links for his bridge. While this was being done, he made a tour of the other parts of western Bhutan and built several iron bridges, two of which were at Changzamdong (Changzamtog) in Thimphu and Bardong in Wangdiphodrang.

Thangtong Gyelpo also built four temples in the Paro valley. The most important was the Tachogang Lhakhang which is located a few kilometres upstream from the confluence of the Thimphu and Paro rivers. It became the seat of the Tachog Chhoeje (ཙོག་ཆོས་རྒྱ་པོ་), the lineage which headed the Chagzampa school. The lhakhang was built on one side of the Paro river and linked to the other side by an iron bridge which is now replaced by an ordinary suspension bridge. The iron links of the bridge are retained at the entrance of the National Museum in the Ta Dzong in Paro as well as in the Tachogang lhakhang itself.

Thangtong Gyelpo also visited central and eastern (Doksum in Tashiyangtse) Bhutan and there too he built iron bridges. The Chagzampas were not interested in any political power in the country. They were later integrated with the Drukpas by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal.

The Lhapa Kagyupa (ལྷ་པ་བཀའ་བརྒྱུད་པ་)

This school, a sub-sect of the Kagyupa, was founded by Gyalwa Lhanangpa (གྱེལ་བ་ལྷ་སྣང་པ་ - 1164-1224). He was the great great grandson of Yonten Dragpa who travelled to India with Marpa, the founder of the Kagyupa. Gyalwa Lhanangpa is credited for introducing the Dzong system in the country which was to play over the centuries very important roles both for its defence and administration.

He built the dzong of Chelkha in the upper Paro valley which became the main seat of his school. He also built many other dzongs and temples, most of which are in ruins today, including the Jathel dzong in the upper Thimphu valley, Bjemithangka Dzong in the Gidakom valley, and the Don Ngoen Dzong in the Thimphu valley where Dechen Phodrang stands today.
Gyelwa Lhanangpa became known for his teaching and he eventually had considerable followers in many parts of western Bhutan. The local chieftains, who had been ruling the area, became his followers and pledged with their power and wealth to him. The Lhapa Kagyupa School was to offer the strongest resistance later to both Phajo Drugom Zhigpo and Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in establishing the Drukpa Kagyupa as the state religion in Bhutan. The Zhabdrung ultimately succeeded in overcoming the Lhapas.

**The Sakyapa (་ས་སྐྱ་པ་)***

The Sakya school was founded by Khon Konchok Gyalpo in 1073 A.D in Tibet. He built the great monastery in the Tsang region of central Tibet and this area had lots of gray earth, for which reason this seat was known as the Sakya “Gray Earth”.

Although its introduction in the country dates back to the year 1305, it was only in the second half of the 15th century that the Sakyapa school established its own monasteries in western Bhutan, namely in the Wang, Chapcha, Goen and Shar regions. Among these, the monasteries of Pchising and Pagar situated between Thimphu and Chapcha later became very important.

The Sakyapa was the last school to arrive in Bhutan. Apart from the Nyingmapa, it was the only other order permitted to exist alongside the ruling Drukpa School. The Sakyapa supported the Zhabdrung during Bhutan’s wars with Tibet. The Sakyapa school still never established any strong foothold in the Bhutanese society and was eventually merged with the Drukpa School.
The Drukpa Kagyu

The Drukpa Kagyud, was founded by Tsangpa Gyarey Yeshey Dorje (1161-1211) It was introduced in our country by Phajo Drugom Zhigpo (13th century A.D.). Through the effort of Phajo and his sons, the Drukpas became the most dominant sect in Bhutan starting with the western parts of the country. It was later strengthened by the visits of other learned Drukpa teachers and in the 17th century, when Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal unified the country, this school was adopted as the state religion. The Drukpa Kagyud school is discussed in greater details in the later chapters.

The Barawa

The Barawa school, an offshoot of the Drukpa Kagyud, also known as Toedruk (The Upper Drukpa), took its name from Barawa Gyaltsen Pelzang who lived in the 14th century. Barawa came to Paro several times on the invitation of two patrons i.e Lopon Kuenga and Sakhar Dorji. His patrons built for him a monastery which was named Drang-gyekha. Barawa gathered many followers and gained prestige especially by settling disputed among them. He himself also built monasteries in Paro, the Goen region of Upper Mochu and in Haa.

The Karmapa

Duesum Khenpo (1110-1193) was the founder of the Karma Kagyud School or popularly known as Karmapa. The Truelku (tradition in the Buddhist world was first introduced by the school when its next lineage holder was recognised as Duesum Khyenpo’s incarnation.

During the 15th century, the later Karmapas, tried in vain to establish their school in Bumthang. The 4th Zhamar Rinpoche (Choekyi Drakpa) (1453-1524), came to Bumthang on a pilgrimage. He is said to have met Pema Lingpa during his stay in the area. He took a liking for the place and built a temple at Thangbi in the upper valley of Choekhor. He soon had to fight a war with the inhabitants of Ura which he lost. He then left Bumthang for Tibet thus ending the only influence of the Karmapas in Bhutan. The temple of Thangbi was later taken over by Pema Lingpa.

The Nenyingpas

The Nenyingpa school was founded by Gyo Chhang Gotsel. Nenyingpa was one of the important centres of the Kadam school. Lama Nenyingpa Chimi Rabye, disciple of Tshongkhapa, introduced the Geleupa tradition in Bhutan in 1361 AD. After that a series of Nenyingpa lamas came to Bhutan to propagate this tradition. They founded many monasteries at Gepte Lyangmanna, Chhang Pelri, Chhang Zamtokha and Dzong Dakha in Paro, Kabji Jasay Dzong, Samarzingka Lhakhang, Tshali Goenpa, Babi Lhakhang and Lamalung in Thimphu; Jangmarpo monastery in Punakha and Bajo Jimi Dzong in Wangduephodrang.

The Gelugpa

The Gelugpa order of Tibetan Buddhism was founded by Je Tsongkhapa Lobzang Drakpa (1357-1419). He was also known as Tsongkhapa after the name of the place of his birth. He was ordained in the Kadam school founded by Atisa Dipankara. In 1408, Tsongkhapa established a monastery in the mountainous area of Riwo Gaden, on account of which his followers came to be known as the Riwo Gadenpas or the new Kadamapas.

The lineage holder of the Gelugpa School is known to the world as the Dalai Lama whom the Tibetans also refer to as Gyalwa Rinpoche. It was during the period of the 5th Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobzang Gyatsho (1617-1682), which the post of Dalai Lama became the spiritual as well as political head of Tibet. Geluggpas, under the leaderships of the successive Dalai Lamas, had been since then the most dominant school in Tibet. The present Dalai Lama, His Holiness Gyalwa Tenzin Gyatsho (b.6.9 1935), is the 14th reincarnations in succession.
The Kagyupas and Nyingmapas follow the tradition of the old school brought by Guru Padma Sambhava, while the Gelugpas follow the traditions of Kadam school of Tibetan Buddhism founded by Atisa Dipankara. The terms Yellow Hats for the Gelugpas and Red Hats for the followers of Guru Rinpoche (Kagyudpas and Nyingmapas) are rather western perceptions of these two major religious groupings.

The Kagyupas and Nyingmapas (Red Hats) school see Guru Rinpoche as the Second Buddha and thus the principal figure of all their worships while the Gelugpas (Yellow Hats) recognise him only as a great drubthob and scholar. The Gelugpas stress on learning and debate while the other schools stress on learning and meditation equally. These basic differences were to result over the centuries into major differences between the two religious groups in the choices of texts, interpretations, commentaries and commensurate ritual systems.

**Affinity and integration of the different schools in Bhutan**

The differences and rivalries amongst the different religious schools in Tibet and their leaders often resulted in the persecutions of each other. Many of the victims of the persecutions were compelled to seek refuge in the remote areas in Tibet as well as in other countries, particularly Bhutan where Guru Rinpoche was still deeply revered and worshipped and where his doctrines had prevailed unbroken since 746 A.D.

In 1616 A.D. when Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal arrived, there were several different religious schools and their sub-sects prevailing in the country exercising varying degrees of spiritual and political influences in the different parts of the country. All the schools had, however, the common affinity of being the devotees of Guru Rinpoche, suffering persecution in Tibet as well as being influenced by the local political, social and cultural traditions, including the teachings of Tertoen Pema Lingpa.

It was, therefore, only natural that with the arrival of Zhabdrung almost all the schools should be integrated into the Drukpa Kagyudpa School. The Drukpa school in close affinity with the Nyingmapa school has evolved over the centuries into a Buddhist school very unique only to Bhutan. Therefore, today in the Druk Yul, the Drukpa Kagyud sect and its *gelongs* (*དགེ་སྙིང* - ordained monks) residing in the various dzongs and lhakhangs is Bhutan’s state religion. At the same time the various *gomchens* (*སོམ་ཆེན* - lay tantric monks) of the Nyingmapa tradition supplement in meeting the spiritual needs of the different communities.

**Conclusion**

The doctrine brought to our country by Guru Rinpoche in 746 A.D. continued to flourish unbroken ever since. The different religious schools which emerged in the different parts of the country had the strongest affinity in their belief and devotion to Guru Rinpoche and his teachings. They eventually integrated into one common school, giving Bhutan a distinct religious identity in the Buddhist world.
Chapter 5: Origins Of A Distinct Religious Identity In Bhutan

Student Activities

1. Suggest some reasons why the Bhutanese people have been over the centuries so receptive to Buddhist teachings.

2. Suggest how the history of Bhutan might have been different if Buddhism had not been adopted throughout the country.

3. In your Gewog or Dzongkhag are there any dzongs, lhakhangs, chhoetens etc. founded by some of the different sects listed in the text? Visit them and request the caretaker to explain their history in details. Write them down and send them to the Education Headquarters with request to include them in its future school textbooks.

4. Why do you think that the Europeans call the Gelugpa sect the “Yellow Hat” and the Kagyudpas and Nyingmapas the “Red Hats”? What are the major differences in the principles between these two religious groups?

5. Work in a group. Discuss amongst yourself on what makes the Bhutanese Buddhism so distinct in the Buddhist world. Make notes on the findings of each group and read them out one by one to the whole class. Request your teacher to give his comments on which group’s findings seem most impressive.

6. Complete the following table, using the information given in the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. no</th>
<th>Name of the religious school</th>
<th>Founder</th>
<th>Date/period/century</th>
<th>Offshoots/branches</th>
<th>Temples/monasteries/lhakhangs established</th>
<th>Lineage/Choejes started</th>
<th>Tick if the school has integrated with Drukpa Kagyu</th>
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Genealogical chart of Kagyupa and establishment of the Drukpa Kagyupa

Buddha Vajradhara (Dorje Chhang)

Tilopa (975) (received initiation through supernatural means)

Naropa (d. 1038)
(“Siddha” - “Drubthob”)

Marpa (1012-1097)
(“The Translator” owing to his proficiency in Sanskrit; Founder of the Kagyupa)

Milarepa (1040-1123 A.D)

(Dagpo Lhaje) Gampopa (1079-1153)

Phagmodrupa (1110-1170)

Jigten Goenpo (1143-1217)
(Founder of the Drigungpa, a sub- sect of the Kagyupa - founded end of 12th century)

Nyoe Gyelwa Lhanangpa (1164-1224)
(Founder of the Lhapa Kagyupa, an offshoot of the Drigungpa)

Bardruk
(the middle Drukpa) - founded by Sangay Oenrey, desciple cum nephew of Tsangpa Gyarey

Phojo Drugom Zhigpo
(introduce the Drukpa Kagyupa teaching in Bhutan in the 13th century A.D.)

Lingrepa Pema Dorje (1128-1198)

Tsangpa Gyarey Yeshey Dorji (1161-1121)
(Founder of the Drukpa, sub- sect of the Kagyupa)

Toedruk
(upper Drukpa)

Meydruk
(the lower Drukpa)

[appeared after the death of Tsangpa Gyarey Yeshey Dorje]

The arrow mark ( ) mean “teacher of” or “master of”.

The plain line ( ) indicates that a religious sect developed offshoots.

Figure 6.1
Chapter 6

DRUKPA KAGYUPA: IT’S PROPAGATION IN BHUTAN

Genealogy

*Kagyupa* (བཀའ་བརྒྱུད་པ་) means the thread or line of the word, namely, the oral tradition of the words of Buddha which are to have delivered through a continued chain of teachers and disciples, apart from the written scriptures. Figure 6.1 depicts the genealogy chart of Kagyupa and the ultimate establishment of Drukpa Kagyupa. According to *Kagyu Ser Threng* (བཀའ་བརྒྱུད་གསེར་འཕྲེང) a golden rosary of lives of eminent Gurus) *Dorje Chhang* (རྡོ་རྨའང) - Buddha Vajradhara) provides the ultimate inspiration of Kagyupa and its various sub-sects. The transmission or succession of the dogmatic principles were to have passed through many eminent saints namely, Tilopa (c 975) to Naropa (died 1038) to Marpa (1012-1097) to Milarepa (1040-1123) to Gampopa (1079-1153) and ultimately to Tsangpa Gyarey Yeshey Dorje (1161-1211), the founder of the Drukpa Kagyupa.

Tsangpa Gyarey Yeshey Dorji was a tertoen who discovered a number of texts on esoteric doctrines. These texts formed the particular teachings of his school which came to be named after the monastery “Druk” at Ralung, founded by him in 1189. The monastery in turn took its name from the *Druk* (འབྲུག་ - thunder dragon) which is said to have resounded through the skies on the occasion of its consecration. After the death of Tsangpa Gyarey in 1211 Drukpa Kagyupa (འབྲུག་པ་དཀར་བརྒྱུད) proliferated into three distinct branches through his three disciples viz: *Bardruk* (བར་འབྲུག་ - Middle Drukpa), *Toedruk* (སྡོད་འབྲུག་ - Upper Drukpa) and *Mey Druk* (སྨད་འབྲུག་ - Lower Drukpa. The chief monastery of Tsangpa Gyarey at Ralung was inherited by his nephew and chief disciple, Sangye Oenrey, who headed the Bardruk. It was a student of Sangye Oenrey, Phajo Drugom Zhigpo, who first introduced the teachings of Tsangpa Gyarey into Bhutan. In the lower classes you may have studied about the prophecies associated with Phajo’s travel to Bhutan and his visits to the different places within the country.

**Phajo Drugom Zhigpo**

Phajo arrived in Bhutan at a time when there was a number of religious schools none of which enjoyed any dominant spiritual or political influence. A single religious influence was essential in order to provide stability to a country divided amongst the petty factions.

The Lhapas, having gained considerable influence in western Bhutan, felt greatly threatened by Phajo’s arrival in the country. They sent Phajo a letter from Chelkha Dzong admonishing Phajo to abide by their rule or leave the country altogether as they considered themselves as the lords of the area. Phajo, in his reply, dismissed the order and justified his presence on the grounds of the prophecy given by Tsangpa Gyarey, namely that he, Phajo, should bring the Drukpa order to Bhutan. The reply angered the Lhapas who decided to kill Phajo by magical means. However, their attempt proved unsuccessful. According to legend, Phajo is said to have rebounded Lhapa’s magical devices against them, as a result of which, the Lhapa magicians vomited blood, a thunderbolt fell on the Jathel Dzong, the walls of the Do-ngoen Dzong collapsed and the Chelkha Dzong was destroyed.

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**KEY TERMS**

- thunderbolt
- yogi (neljorpa)
- *Palden Lhamo*
- thunder dragons
- circumambulating
- permeating
- Hayagriva or Tamdrin
- Divine Madman
- Drong Gintsey
- consecration
- mantra
- Pure Buddha Land

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by fire. These miraculous incidents demonstrated the greater power of Phajo and the Drukpas over the Lhapas. The people lost faith in the Lhapas and transferred their loyalty to Phajo. The Lhapas were, therefore, left with no alternative but to leave Paro and settled at Bjemithangka Dzong in the Gidakom valley. Their influence in western Bhutan gradually withered away. However, their antagonism toward the Drukpas lasted until the 17th century when they were again defeated after having led a coalition of opponents against the Zhabdrung.

Phajo established several temples and monasteries throughout western Bhutan. Amongst them the Tango monastery at the head of the Thimphu valley became the main seat of his school. It was called Tango (རྟ་མགོ - Horsehead) after the saint’s associations with the deity Hayagriva (རྟ་མགྲིན - Tamdrin or horsehead). By then Phajo has gained considerable influence not only in western Bhutan but also in other parts of the country as well as the neighbouring countries, namely Tibet and the bordering areas across India. When he was at Tango, King Bhrananla of the kingdom of Kamarta in India, is said to have sent him presents which included a talking parrot, “grapevine” and other goods. Similar presents were also received from the Tshangla chieftains of eastern Bhutan.

When his eldest son, Dampa (དམ་པ་), was 15 years old, Phajo passed on to him all the Drukpa teachings. Dampa also inherited the Tango monastery while he built on his own a small temple at Dechenphug. He later went to Paro and built Namkhey Lhakhang. His descendants became the Drukpa nobility of Paro, among whom Drungdrung Gyelchog was the most famous.

As and when his other sons grew up, Phajo sent them to the different regions of the country to preach the Drukpa teachings. His son, Gartoen, was sent to Shar where he constructed the temple of Shar Khothang and Wachen Dzong. His descendants came to be known as the Wachen Zhelngo (ཝ་ཆེན་ཞལ་ངོ). Wangchuk was sent to Punakha and Goen (Upper Mochu valley). His youngest son, Lama, however, inherited the Dodeyna Temple and settled in Thimphu area. Nyima also settled in the Thimphu valley where he began the Changangkha Zhelngo (ལྕང་སྒང་ཁ་ཞལ་ངོ). Phajo is said to have eventually died at the age of 68 in 1276 A.D. from the poison believed to have been served by the Lhapas. By then the dominant religious school established in western Bhutan was the Drukpa Kagyue, which also had considerable influences in the rest of the country. The school also gained immense political power with the emergence of religious nobilities (Zhelngo) later. Since they carried out both temporal
and spiritual duties, the Drukpas emerged as the most important and powerful families in these parts of Bhutan.

**Phajo’s descendants and visits of other Drukpa saints**

During the 14th – 16th centuries, several prince-abbots of Ralung monastery and other prestigious lamas were invited to Bhutan by the descendants of Phajo to preach and further consolidate the Drukpa teachings and build monasteries. The first notable visitor amongst them was the 7th prince-abbot, Kuenga Sengye (མཁུན་དགའ་སེང་གེ་) who came to the country during the first half of the 14th century. While in Dechenphug, Thimphu, he subdued the famous local deity, Genyen Jagpa Melen (ཤེས་ཏུ་བསྙན་པ་མེ་ལེན་), and made him into one of the main guardian deities of the Drukpas. Kuenga Sengye also visited Paro where he founded the Dechending monastery at Goenkha.

In the 15th century, the well-known scholar and 13th abbot of Ralung, Gyelwang Je Kuenga Peljor (1428-1476) visited Bhutan three times and founded several monasteries. He travelled as far as Bumthang. His chief disciple was Drungdrung Gyelchog who, as may be recalled was through Dampa, was a descendant of the great Phajo and the founder of the noble lineage of Hungrel. Gyelchog and his brother, Gyelzom, were popularly known as the “Drungdrung brothers”. Gyelzom chose to live a sedentary life and settled at Gangtekha in Paro. Gyelchog went to Ralung in Tibet and studied the Drukpa teachings under the guidance of Gyelwang Je Kuenga Peljor. On his return he settled at Hungrelkha where the local deity, the Hungrel Goenpo, resided. There he built a small Dzong which came to be known as the Hungrel Dzong (later Rinpung Dzong) and his lineage took the title Hungrel Zhelngo (ཧུ་རལ་ཞལ་ངོ་).

Even today one can see the place behind Ta Dzong (the National Museum in Paro) where Drungdrung Gyelchog had meditated and built a small temple. The people of Hungrelkha perform a grand ritual in this temple every year in devotion to the Hungrel Goenpo and Gyelchog.
The next important person to visit Bhutan was Ngawang Choegyal, the nephew and successor of Gyelwang Je Kuenga Peljor. He made several visits to Bhutan on the invitation of his main patron Drungdrung Gyelchog. He was during some of these visits accompanied by his two sons, Ngawang Tenpey Gyaltsen (1506-1538) and Chung Rinpoche Ngagi Wangchuk (1517-1554), the great grandfather of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. The foundation of more than twenty monasteries not only in western Bhutan but also in central and eastern Bhutan is attributed to these two brothers. Ngawang Choegyal himself built the temples of Druk Choeding in Paro, Pangri Zampa and Hongtsho in Thimphu, Chime Lhakhang and Thinleygang in Punakha. The first Trongsa, Jakar and Lhuntse Dzongs were built by Ngagi Wangchuk.

Other Drukpa Families. There were also other important families in western Bhutan that represented the Drukpas. Among these the Hobtsho Chhoeje of Gasa and the lineage founded by the Drukpa Kuenley were the most important. These lineages played important roles in the history of our country.

The Hobtsho Chhoeje

The establishment of the Hobtsho Chhoeje dates back to the 13th century (probably at about the same time as Phajo’s arrival in Bhutan) when Terkhungpa, a disciple of Tsangpa Gyarey, came to Bhutan on the invitation of the people of Laya and Gasa. After his arrival in Bhutan, he built a monastery at Hobtsho and it became the main seat of the Drukpa in the region. His descendants came to be known as the Hobtsho Chhoeje (ཧོ་བོ་ཐོ་ཤོ་ཆོས་རླེ་). It can perhaps be concluded that Terkhungpa’s family was in fact the oldest Drukpa family in Bhutan. They however did not have the same impact as Phajo’s family in the country’s history, probably because they were too far away from its fertile valleys. Tenzin Drugay, one of the chief disciples of the Zhabdrung and the first Desi of Bhutan belonged to the Hobtsho Chhoeje.

Lam Drukpa Kuenley (1455 - 1529)

Drukpa Kuenley is popularly known to the western world as the “Divine Madman”. His full name was Kuenga Legpai Zangpo which has been contracted to Kuenga Legpa or simply Kuenley. The title “Drukpa” attached to his name indicates that he belonged to the Drukpa Kagyue school and was associated with Bhutan. We can read about him in the text compiled in 1966 by Geshey Geduen Rinchen, the late 69th Je Khenpo of Bhutan. There are many famous stories about Drukpa Kuenley (such as those in the box) which give us the picture of the kind of monk he was and the unique ways through which he taught the Drukpa doctrine. His ways of teaching religion were unorthodox but very simple. He did not care for conventional social behaviour. He did not believe in establishing monasteries. He wandered freely in Tibet and Bhutan as a neljorpa (རྣ་འབྲོད་པ་- yogi), preaching religion through songs, humour and often through outrageous behaviour. His main religious endeavours were, in fact, reactions against the stiffness of the clergy and the social conventions which, in his view, were screens preventing people from grasping the true essence of the dharma. His teachings were designed in such a way that they could be understood even by the common people.

Drukpa Kuenley made a short trip to Bumthang where he had a vision of the female deity, Palden Lhamo (བླེན་ལྷ་མོ།), instructing him to teach the Drukpa doctrine in Bhutan. While in Bumthang he had several discourses with the great Tertoen Pema Lingpa. He, however, returned to Tibet briefly. Visiting Bhutan a second time in 1490 A.D. via Tremo La he arrived at Paro and proceeded onwards to Toep Silung near present day Lobesa. He stayed there for sometime and by the lady of the house, Pelzang Buthri, he had a son who was named Ngawang Tenzin. This son was believed to be the reincarnation of one of Phajo’s sons, Gartoen.
The devotees assembled a vast congregation of people from all over Bhutan to witness the magical powers of the Lama.

‘We have been told that you are able to perform miracles and feats of spiritual power’, they told him, ‘but we have never witnessed them ourselves. We beg you to show us true signs and miracles that we may be convinced of your power and realization’. Then they served him a goat’s head and a carcass of cow, which he devoured with relish.

Then they served him a goat’s head and a carcass of cow, which he devoured with relish. When he had finished he took the goat’s head and stuck it upon the headless skeleton of the cow. ‘You have no flesh on your bones’, he said to the animal. ‘Go up on the mountain and graze’! He snapped his fingers and the beast arose and ran up the valley to the astonishment of all those present. This species of animal with a goat’s head and cow’s body can still be seen in that valley today. It is called Drong Gimtsey (takin).

Descending from Chuyul in eastern Paro district the Lama found his reputation preceding him like the glow of dawn heralding the rising sun. He discovered an old woman, at least one hundred years old, circumambulating a Stupa, muttering the MANI mantra to herself and praying for the Lama’s blessing.

‘Which Lama are you praying to’? Kuenley asked her. ‘To Drukpa Kuenley’, she told him. ‘Could you recognise him if you saw him?’ he said. ‘I’ve never seen him but I’ve heard talk of him, and I have great devotion for him’, replied the old woman. ‘What would you do if you found him standing before you now?’ insisted the Lama. ‘I am an old woman and my body is a decrepit thing, but I have a chang (locally brewed alcohol) and food in the house which I would offer him’, she said. ‘But it is very unlikely that I could be so fortunate as to meet him’. The Lama revealed his identity to her and in her ecstacy she wept and touched his feet with her forehead. ‘I take refuge in you in this life and the next!’ she repeated over and over. Then she took him to her house and offered him the seven measures of chang that she had ready, and while he was drinking she asked him if she could call her neighbours, elderly widows like herself, to pay their respects. The Lama assented and a little later several old women arrived, each carrying a jug of chang to offer him.

After sometime, when he had become thoroughly intoxicated, he called the old lady of the house. ‘How much devotion do you really have in me?’ he asked her. ‘There is no limit to my faith in you’, she replied. ‘If you want my life, take it’. ‘Would you really give me your life?’ asked the Lama. ‘I would do anything for you!’ insisted the woman.

Now Drukpa Kuenley knew that the old woman’s time had come, and that the Lord of Death had sent his messengers to fetch her that very night. ‘If you are ready for death, raise your arms and show me your ribs’, he directed, he shot her through.

Later a crowd gathered, stunned and astonished. Someone began to swear at him. ‘You miserable (savage)! You murderer! Why did you kill this harmless old lady? Others wept and wailed. ‘He is my Lama, and I have complete trust in him,’ whispered the dying woman from the floor. ‘He is my best friend. Do not treat him like an enemy’. And so saying, she expired. The Lama carried her corpse into a storeroom, and leaving it there upon a bench, he sealed the door, instructing the people to make sure that it was kept locked for seven days, whereupon he would return.

After six days, however, the old woman’s son returned to his home and was told how his mother had mistaken a beggar for the Lama Drukpa Kuenley, and how the beggar had killed her in a drunken fit, and then locked her corpse in the storeroom. ‘Ah! These wretched beggars!’ the son raged. ‘They come here demanding our hospitality, murder their benefactors, and calmly lock up their victims’ corpse to rot’. And he broke open the door of the storeroom. To his surprise he found a pleasant odour permeating the place and the corpse transformed into a rainbow light, except for the big toe on the right foot.

At that moment the Lama returned and bit the ear of the old woman’s son who had disobeyed his instruction and opened the door prematurely. The unfortunate son was struck dumb, but eventually he found his tongue and praised the Lama with thanksgiving and deep devotion.

‘Whether you are grateful or not is irrelevant’, the Lama told him. ‘Your mother is now living in a Pure Buddha Land (Zangdopelri), and that is the important thing’. 
Drukpa Kuenley while in Bhutan also subdued a large number of demons and converted them into guardians of the dharma. He passed away in 1529 A.D. shortly after his return to Tibet from Bhutan. His son, Ngawang Tenzin, later went to Ralung and studied under the guidance of the then prince-abbot Ngawang Choegyal. On his return to Bhutan, he restored the Tango Monastery which had by then fallen into decay. He had a son by a lady from Bjimina, and was named Tshewang Tenzin who was believed to be the incarnation of Phajo Drugom Zhigpo. He, therefore, inherited the Tango Monastery and later became a very important disciple and supporter of his distant cousin, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, when the latter arrived in Bhutan in 1616 A.D. While at Chari the Zhabdrung took vows of celibacy and offered Tshewang Tenzin his first wife. It was from their union that Tenzin Rabgye was born. Tenzin Rabgye, who was adopted by the Zhabdrung as the heir apparent, became Bhutan’s fourth Desi. Tenzin Rabgye was the last in the lineage of Drukpa Kuenley.

Conclusion

As prophesied by Tsangpa Gyarey, the founder of Drukpa Kagyue, Phajo Drugom Zhigpo came to Bhutan in 1222 A.D. and started the propagation of Drukpa teachings in the country. Numerous Drukpa lamas and saints visited Bhutan and continued to provide the smooth flow of the teachings as well as necessary vitality and inspiration. As a result, during the period 13th–16th centuries the Drukpa grew ultimately to be the most powerful and well-established school of religious teachings in Bhutan. By the end of the 16th century at least five Drukpa lineages were firmly established in the country. Their strength and importance, however, did not result in any political unity in the country. This task was left to be taken up by a man of extraordinary personality, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, as you will see in a later chapter.

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### Student Activities

1. In a table, insert the names of Phajo’s sons and the temples and dzongs that they built.

2. Identify the major stages by which Drukpa influence was extended in Bhutan.

3. Explain the importance of:
   - Phajo
   - The Hobtsho Chhoeje
   - Drukpa Kuenley

4. There are many interesting stories about Drukpa Kuenley. You might know some. If so, share them with your classmates. Collect as many more as you can from any reliable person. (Your Dzongkha Lopoen might be able to tell you some). From the stories you collect, judge for whether they are supportive of the portrait you get of the Drukpa Kuenley information in the text.

5. Drong Gimtsey, called by the western world as the ‘Takin’ or biologically as budorcas taxicolor is both a rare and a very strange looking animal with goat’s head and cow’s body. It was miraculously created by Lam Drukpa Kuenley. Drong Gimtsey is today the national animal of Bhutan. List possible reasons behind the decision of the Royal Government in adopting the Takin as its national animal.
In chapter 3 you have learnt how Guru Rinpoche, while in the eastern Himalayan regions, hid various religious texts, statues and other sacred religious objects and foretold that these treasures would be rediscovered later at auspicious times by his spiritual heirs, the Tertoens. It is prophesied that 5 great tertoens, 108 other major tertoens and 1,002 minor tertoens would be born and contribute towards the continuity of the dharma as preached by Guru Rinpoche through centuries.

All the 5 great tertoens as well as a large number of great and minor tertoens have already been born while others will be born at auspicious times in the future. Since the early eleventh century Bhutan had been a paradise to the numerous tertoens for their activities in discovering the sacred treasures and transmitting them to the devotees. Many of them were born in Bhutan itself while several others hailed from the neighbouring countries and visited Bhutan in their missions to discover the treasures and then preach the dharma. The first recorded discovery of the religious treasures in Bhutan was in 1027 A.D. when a number of texts were found in Chelkha above Paro by a tertoen names Lhatseun Ngoenmo (ལྷ་བཙུན་སྔོན་མོ). Since then there have been as many as 31 different tertoens who are recorded to have made discoveries in Bhutan. The common places of the discoveries were Kyichu, Chelkha and Taktsang areas in Paro and Geyney, Chumey, Jampa Lhakhang and Khenpajong areas in Bumthang as well as several places in Kurtoe, Mangde, Shar and Gasa regions.

**Minor Tertoens**

Amongst the several minor tertoens to have made discoveries in Bhutan, Gyatoen Tsoendu Sengeydar (རྒྱ་སྟོན་བརྟོན་མོང་བསྙྲ་དངེ་རྒྱུས་པར་), is credited with the discovery of a ritual text devoted to the protective deity Dorji Drakpa (རྡོརྡོ་ཟེར་བ་) which was later used widely by the Drukpa school for their rituals. Another tertoen, Guru Yangwang (གུ་རུ་ཡང་བོང་) is said to have found in Paro a large volume of similar ritual texts dedicated to the deity Hayagriva. There was also a book found by a certain Lam Dum (བླུམ་དུམ་) and his patron, Kharnag (མཁར་ནག་), in a leather box hidden inside the image of a guruda at Kyichu lhakhang and texts found by Tsheten Gyaltsen (ཞེ་བརྟན་རྒྱལ་མཚན་) at Chumophug above Taktsang. These early discoveries made in Paro were believed to have been prophesied in the *Pema Thangyig*. Some of the other minor tertoens listed as having made discoveries in Bhutan were Phurbu Goen, Balpo Ahumbar, Latoed Dampa Marpo, Gompo Rinchen, Drushul, Sarpo Jawa Ngoen.

**Major Tertoens**

Among those classed as major tertoens, Sarban Choegmed (སར་བོན་ཆོས་མོ-1027-1086) was born in Paro and thus was perhaps the first true native Bhutanese tertoen. He discovered a text Jampel Dzogpa Chenpo Choekor (ལྷེན་པོ་ཆེ་ཐོ་རྒྱུས་པ་ཆོས་གོས་) from a turquoise encrusted rock at Taktsang.

This was followed by the famous Guru Choewang (ཞུ་རུ་ཆོས་དབང་-1212-1273) who discovered texts throughout Bumthang and Kurtoe in the thirteenth century. The Dung families of Lukhud and Nyala in Kurtoe region claim their descents from Guru Cheowang through his son Pema Wangchen.
Dorji Lingpa (རྨོ་རི་ངོ་བ་ 1346-1405) was also one of the 5 great tertöns and an important figure in our history. He was active both in Paro and Bumthang. His son Choenying Gyamsho who inherited the monastery at Lingmukha (Punakha) was responsible for establishing several lineages. Among his descendants who survive even to this day is the family of Ugyen Choeling in Tang valley in Bumthang. One member of the family, Tshoki Dorji, became the Trongsa Penlop during the 19th century. One of Dorji Lingpa’s disciples, Ugyen Zangpo, born in Bumthang was also recognised as a tertön. Dorji Lingpa’s traditions in western Bhutan were continued both by his descendants as well as through his own successive reincarnations. Two of them, Chaegden Goenpo and Dongay Jungney established new monasteries in Shar. Another of the disciple of Dorji Lingpa, Choeyingpa, is credited to have recognised Pema Lingpa’s divine birth when the latter was still an infant. Choeyingpa prophesied that the child was destined to accomplish much for the benefit of Buddhist teachings and all the sentient being.

Ratna Lingpa (རི་གྲི་ངོ་བ་ 1403-1479), another famous major tertön visited Bhutan briefly and discovered treasures at Karphu in Kurtoe as well as a few places in Bumthang. His descendants came to be known as the Chusa Chhoeje (ཅུ་ས་ཆོས་རྗེ་).

Sherab Mebar (ཤེས་རབ་མེ་བར་ 1267-1326) was an important tertön who came to Bhutan late in his life after making many discoveries in Tibet. The tertön is very well remembered for the incident in Paro when he was forced by the local chief to extract tertma untimely from a lake in Haa by breaking the rules of the tertöns. The attempt angered the guardian deity, Khunglegtsel, and resulted in major disasters with all the termas being lost and bringing death to the chief as well as the tertön himself before long. Pema Lingpa is said to have rediscovered some of the scrolls of texts which had been lost during the incident. Various temples in Paro as well as one in Tangsibi in Ura were founded by Tertön Sherab Mebar.

Two other important native tertöns of the 14th and 15th centuries were Ngawang Drakpa and his disciple Tshering Dorji. Both were born in Paro and were credited with the discoveries of certain Dzogchen texts in Paro as well as in various places in central Tibet. Ngawang Drakpa founded the monasteries of Boemari and Nayphu in Paro and was reincarnated in the line of Nayphu Truelku (རྨོ་པུ་སྐུ་) which continues to this day. Later, during the period of Truelku Sangay Gyeltshen, the Dzogchenpa traditions of Ngawang Drakpa and Tshering Dorji became merged firstly with traditions of Pema Lingpa and Nyizergang and then ultimately were absorbed into the Drukpa school.

Wugpa Lingpa (འུག་པ་གི་ངོ་བ་) came to Bhutan sometimes during the 13th century and established, through his reincarnations the lineage of Nyizer Truelku (ཉི་ཟྷ་སྐུ་) with its principal seat at Geduen Chogling in Nyizergang, opposite to the present day Wangdiphodrang Dzong. The line was merged with the Drukpa School during the time of Yoenten Thaye and his disciple Thinley Rabgay. Yoenten Thaye was the 13th Je Khenpo of Bhutan (regn. 1771-1775) and was largely responsible, during the time, for the fusion of the Drukpa and Nyingmapa schools in Bhutan. The late Nyizer Trueklu, Thinley Khundup, ascended as the 67th Je Khenpo of Bhutan for the period 1971-1984.

Most of the tertöns who were born in Bhutan after the great Pema Lingpa were his personal disciples numbering as many as six other tertöns. Lethro Lingpa (ལོག་གོ་གི་ངོ་བ་) alias Namkha Dorji) was the most famous amongst them and he made many discoveries at Taktshang and Kyichu in Paro. However, the only native Bhutanese tertön who came after Pema Lingpa and still widely remembered today was Drugda Dorji (འབྲུག་དྲ་རི་ངོ་བ་). He was active in the first half of the 18th century and is believed to have made, amongst others, many political prophesies.
**Tertoen Pema Lingpa**

*Pema Lingpa* (པདྨ་གི་ང་པ་) was by far the greatest tertoen to have been born and made discoveries in Bhutan. He was one of the five great tertons prophesied by Guru Rinpoche by name in the biography Kathang Duep. In the lower classes you have learnt about the life of Pema Lingpa and some of the discoveries of terma he had made.

Pema Lingpa first recovered treasure from the riverine lake of Mebartsho at the age of twenty five in 1475 A.D. *(see story in the box)*. Since then he is said to have made discoveries of a wide variety of scrolls, statues and other sacred relics on no less than 34 occasions. The treasure texts which he unearthed from their places of concealments both in Bhutan and Tibet are said to fill twenty substantial volumes. The most prominent places of discoveries were Mebartsho, Rimochen, Sengeydra, etc. in Bhutan and Lhodrak Mendo, Dramardo, Monkharteng, Samye etc. in Tibet. From the religious texts he discovered, he passed on the teachings to his disciples and other devotees while the statues and other relics he recovered are reverently housed in the numerous lhakhangs throughout the country.

In his visions, Pema Lingpa was often in Guru Rinpoche’s celestial abode of Zangdopelri receiving teachings and initiations. Pema Lingpa during such audiences witnessed the various *paws, pams, khandos and yidams* *(དཔའ་བོ་དཔའ་མཱི་ཐོད་མཁའ་འགྲོ་མཱབྱུ་དམ་)*—fairies and other forms of divine devotees) paying homage to Guru Rinpoche. The various religious dances which came to be known as *Peling Tercham* *(པོད་གི་ཏེར་འཆམ)* were composed by Pema Lingpa based on...
these scenes at Zangdopelri. He also subdued noxious demons and converted them into protective deities of the dharma (see story in the text).

Pema Lingpa’s fame spread not only throughout Bhutan but also to Tibet and the other neighbouring countries. He often travelled to these foreign

THE LEGEND OF MEMBERTSHO (མེད་པའི་གནང་ལྔགས་- THE BURNING LAKE)

PEMA LINGPA’S FIRST DISCOVERY

Suddenly, watching the clouds in the sky, he remembered that the Gomchen had given him a little roll of paper which he had put in his breast pocket. Now he took it out and looked at it musingly. There it was written: ‘Read carefully… and go to the Membartsho, where you will find the treasure’. On that mystic roll of paper were only a few words to be seen, but they were written in the fairy script of the Khadoma (mkah-hgro-ma brda-yig) in which one word stands for a thousand words and has a deeper meaning, but only for those who can understand. Pema Lingpa understood the mystic message and it dawned upon him that the old Gomchen could only have been a manifestation of Guru Rinpoche, who had revealed himself to him – as his true incarnation – in that special form.

In a night, when there was a full moon, Pema Lingpa, accompanied by his relatives, went to the ‘Burning Lake’. In the dense woods surrounding the lake he thought he heard some voices, but on reaching the shore there was no one to be seen. He stood musingly on one of the two large rocks which flanked the lake. He did not know how to enter the water to fulfil the advice of the mystic message. Suddenly he found himself in front of a temple with many doors, but only one of these doors was open. There he saw an old woman with only one eye and only one tooth. This goddess told him that Guru Rinpoche had deposited a box for him, which was waiting for him in the lake… Pema Lingpa became afraid because he realized that he was now deep down at the bottom of the lake and he did not know how to get out again. But suddenly he found himself again standing on the rock at the side of the lake, holding in his hands a little box. Silently he went home with his relatives. On the way they passed a little Mani Gompa. Pema Lingpa, without saying a word, entered and stayed there for a while to meditate. From this time on he became known as Pema Lingpa ‘The Tertoen”.

THE PSYCHE OF ZHONGGAR DZONG

The history of Zhonggar Dzong has been forgotten, and the ruins of its old towers are hidden and nearly covered by gigantic highland-jungle trees. But some strange legends are still very much alive…

On the eastern side of the Kurichu river, just above the afore-mentioned Stupa Chorten, the Monggar Dzong was built. It is the new centre of the Zhonggar district. In its Gongkhang temple the mountain god of Zhong-gar Dzong is still alive: fully armed, he stands guard at the right side of the Goenkhang altar in his new position as guardian deity of Monggar Dzong. On the other side of the altar a maidan stands, regally dressed in the ancient national costume. A local legend is woven around this handsome couple so vitally sculptured and beautifully clad.

The mountain god Golong Daktsan, who, according to his name, shared the honour of belonging to the old Tsan gods, fell in love with a country girl of his district. Changing into the shape of a man he used to visit her every night. However, he always went away before dawn.

Therefore the girl, who was called Panchen Zangmo, could not even imagine what her lover looked like. Eagerly wanting to know who he was, she carefully worked out a plan to trap him. She prepared a ball of thread and, when he came to visit her the next night, she attached the end of the thread to his foot. When he again went away before dawn, she followed the thread with the ball in her hands. It was a long way out of the village. Finally she reached a cave in the rocks in which she saw a gigantic monster, said to be a (large snake or dragon), with one foot attached to her thread. The girl was so terrified and shocked that she swooned and died. The demon god, in despair, let nobody touch the corpse of the dead girl. The villagers did not know what to do and called for help on a famous Lama (Tertoen Pema Lingpa) from Bumthang. The Lama meditated for a long time beside the corpse. Afterwards he blessed the demigod and the girl and transformed both of them into Guardian Deities of religion. They are now a legitimate couple, a Guardian King and Queen, symbolically fighting against the enemies of religion in Zhonggar.
countries on the invitation of the various religious and temporal figures of these countries at the time. He discovered treasures also in these countries. He had a residence at Lhalung monastery in Lhodra. Back in his home country, his main residence was the Tamzhing monastery in Bumthang which he had completed building in 1518 A.D. The Kunzangdra monastery in Bumthang was also built by him.

**Pema Lingpa’s descendants and spiritual lineages.**

After his death, Pema Lingpa was reincarnated in the three forms of Ku(Body) Sung(Speech) Thug(Mind) each represented by a Rinpoche even to this day. One of these reincarnations, **Peling Sungtruel** (པོད་གིང་སུང་སྤྲུལ་) continues to reside in the Tamzhing monastery.

Pema Lingpa’s descendants played over the centuries important roles in Bhutan’s history. His lineages of reincarnations together with his blood descendants wove an intricate network of influence all over Bhutan. (see figure 7-6). In total, Pema Lingpa had six sons and one daughter. One of the most important of his sons, Dawa Gyeltshen, who was born in 1499, married to Choekhor Depa’s daughter and settled in Chumey Prakar where his body is still preserved. Dawa Gyeltshen started a lineage of reincarnations known as **Peling Thugsey** (པོད་གིང་ཐུགསེ) which has also continued to this day in Bumthang. One of Dawa Gyeltshen’s sons, Tenpey Nyima, married the Chumey Dung’s daughter. His descendants were known as the **Prakar Zhelngo** (སྨན་ཐེངས་) or **Chumey Dung** (ཆུ་མེ་དངུང་) lineage (ཆུ་མེ་དངུང་). Dawa Gyeltshen’s other son, Pema Thinley, who was one of the reincarnations of the great tertoon himself, went across the Pelela and founded the Gangtey Goenpa near Phobjekha, Shar. He started the lineage known as the **Gangtey Truelku** (སྒང་སྐུ་ཐུལ་ལུ) principal lineage of the Peling traditions in the country to this day. The present Gangtey Truelku, Kuenzang Pema Namgyal (b. 1955), is the ninth successive reincarnation.

Another of Pema Lingpa’s famous sons was Kuenga Wangpo, who was born in 1505. He chose to settle in Kurtoe where he started the nobility of the **Kochung Chhoeje** (མཁོ་ཆུང་ཆོས་རྗེ་). His great grandsons, Drekha and Langkha, founded the Dungkhar Dzong in Kurtoe and established the **Dungkhar Chhoeje** (དུང་དཀར་ཆོས་རྗེ་) from which the Royal Family of the Wangchuck(s) as well as the Dorji(s) descended. Later in life, Kuenga Wangpo went to Tashigang region where he established the lineage of the **Bidung Chhoeje** (སིདུང་ཚོས་རྗེ་). In the later years, one of his grandsons, Phola (also called Sang-nga), moved south-eastward and settled in Dungsam (Pemagatshel) where he started the lineage of the **Kheri Chhoeje** (མཁས་རི་ཆོས་རྗེ་).

Pema Lingpa’s youngest son was **Sangdag** (གསང་བདག་) who was born in 1509. Sangdag’s first wife bore him three children, one son and two daughters. The son, Tenzin Choekyi Gyelpo, began the **Tamzhing Chhoeje** (ཐམས་ཅད་ཚོས་རྗེ་) in Bumthang. His daughter, Choedroen Zangmo, married her first cousin,
Figure 7-6  Simplified chart of the Religious Nobility Descended from Pema Lingpa

The names in the box are the lineages descended from Pema Lingpa. The names in the circle are the reincarnate lineages of Pema Lingpa. The broken lines (........) represent more than one generation gap. The equal sign (=) means "married to".

The names in the box are the lineages descended from Pema Lingpa. The names in the circle are the reincarnate lineages of Pema Lingpa. The broken lines (........) represent more than one generation gap. The equal sign (=) means "married to".
Yeshey Gyelpo and settled in eastern Bhutan where she and her husband founded the monastery of Dramitse. They started the lineage of the Dramitse Chhoeje (དགྲ་མཆོས་རྗེ་). Another of Tenzin Choekyi Gyelpo’s descendants started the Tsakaling Chhoeje (ཙ་ཀ་གི་ཆོས་རྗེ་) in Mongar.

Meanwhile, Sangdag’s two daughters married into the Sombrang Chhoeje of Ura. It was the son of their elder daughter to whom Choedroen Zangmo was married. After the death of his first wife, Sangdag went to Kupjisa, or Kiju in eastern Bhutan where he married again and had four sons. The eldest, Thubwang, began the lineage of the Yagang Chhoeje (གཡང་སྒང་ཆོས་རྗེ་) in Mongar.

Pema Lingpa’s son Koenchhog Zangpo migrated to Tawang region where he married into the Jowo Clan and became the ancestor of the 6th Dalai Lama of Tibet – Tsangyang Gyamtsho (1683-1700). Pema Lingpa’s other children did not establish any important lineage.

Conclusion

The numerous tertoes came, discovered termas and from these texts gave initiations to their devotees. As foretold by Guru Rinpoche the continuity of the dharma was thus ensured. The tertoes were common both to the Drukpa school as well as the Nyingmapa school. The activities of the tertoes and their descendants prevailed throughout the country from Kurtoe in the east to Haa in the west. While the nomenclature ‘Drukpa Kargyud” and “Nyingmapa” have been retained even to this day the Buddhist sect in Bhutan mainly consists of the results of the fusion between the two schools carried out by, amongst others, the tertoes and their disciples and descendants over the centuries. Amongst the numerous tertoes in Bhutan, Pema Lingpa was undoubtedly the greatest amongst them all. The texts he discovered, the dances he composed and the works of arts he commissioned are today the national heritage of Bhutan. The six sons and one daughter of the great tertoen and their descendants were over the centuries to form the most important lineages of nobilities in Bhutan and played pivotal roles in its social, cultural and political history.
**Student Activities**

1. Complete the following table, using the information given in the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Tertoen</th>
<th>Place where treasure discovered</th>
<th>Year/Century of discovery</th>
<th>Temples founded</th>
<th>Noble families descended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. Compare the places mentioned in the text in this chapter with those of Guru’s visits in chapter 3. Why do you think most of the termas were discovered in Paro and Bumthang regions?

3. Compose a skit (short drama) based on the scenes of Tertoen Sherab Mebar and the chief of Paro area extracting termas from a lake in Haa and the disasters that follow. The class may perform the skit during the school’s annual concert.

4. Study the simplified chart of Pema Lingpa (figure 7-6) carefully and answer the following questions:
   i) When was Pema Lingpa born? How old was he when he died? How many sons and daughters did he have? Among the sons which three were the most important and why?
   ii) Who was the ancestor of the Bonbi Chhoeje in Trongsa? Give the names of his brothers. Which family did they descend from?
   iii) Which noble family or families is Druk Gyalpo Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck a descendant of? Who started this family?
   iv) How are Choedron Zangmo and her husband, Yeshey Gyelpo, first cousins?

5. Explain why Pema Lingpa is such an important figure in the Bhutanese history?

6. What are common amongst the three Rinpoches living in Bhutan, namely, Sungtrul Rinpoche, Late Thugsey Rinpoche and Gangtey Truelku?
Chapter 8

ZHABDRUNG NGAWANG NAMGYAL AND THE CREATION OF THE NATION STATE OF BHUTAN

In the lower classes we have learnt about Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and his many achievements during his 35 years reign in Bhutan. He was undoubtedly the greatest figure in the history of Bhutan. The Zhabdrung was more than any other leader, responsible for Bhutan becoming a unified nation state.

Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal’s early life in Tibet

Ngawang Namgyal was born in Tibet in 1594 into the princely family of Gya who ruled the Drukpa Kagyupa school. His father was Tenpey Nima (1567-1619), who had earlier travelled frequently to Bhutan, and his mother was Sonam Pelkyi Buthri, the daughter of a nobleman from central Tibet.

Ngawang Namgyal was born at the monastery of Gardong near the oldest Drukpa establishment, Druk Jangchubling in the Ü province. His grandfather, Mipham Choegyal, was then the 17th prince-abbot at Ralung monastery, which was the Drukpas’ main monastery, not too far from Bhutan’s northern border. From an early age, Ngawang Namgyal was groomed to succeed his grandfather to the throne. He studied religion and art, becoming skilled in the art of painting and sculpting. When his grandfather died, he was only twelve years old and it was at this young age that he became the 18th prince-abbot of Ralung.

The event that changed his life was his identification as the incarnation of the great Drukpa scholar, Kuenkhyen Pema Karpo (1527-1592), who himself was the reincarnation of the founder of the Drukpa Kagyu school, Tsangpa Gyarey Yeshey Dorje (1161-1211). The reincarnation was challenged by another contender, Pagsam Wangpo who was the son of hereditary prince of Chongye, a powerful principality in the Yarlung valley of Tibet. He also claimed to be Pema Karpo’s reincarnation which was supported by the ruler of Tsang province, Tsang Desi Tensung Wangpo. Ngawang Namgyal’s position became increasingly difficult when Pagsam Wangpo was installed in Pema Karpo’s monastery as the incarnate.

In the meantime, Ngawang Namgyal succeeded his grandfather as the 18th prince-abbot. Representatives of all the religious schools of Tibet, except Gelugpas, and of all the major principalities were present at the enthronement, and so were various missions from Bhutan. One of these missions was headed by the grandson of Drukpa Kuenley, Tshewang Tenzin (1574-1643), who later became an important ally of Ngawang Namgyal in Bhutan.

Until he was nineteen years old in 1613, Ngawang Namgyal devoted himself chiefly to religious studies. His main teacher was Lhawang Lodroe. At this time, the Tsang Desi was Phuntsho Namgyal, who had succeeded his father, Tensung Wangpo. Relations between Ngawang Namgyal and the Desi deteriorated. Ngawang Namgyal requested Tsang Desi to determine Pema Karpo’s true reincarnation but the Desi ignored his request. The two then met at Zhigatse Dzong but the meeting failed to bring a solution to the dispute. On their way back to Ralung, Ngawang Namgyal and his men became entangled in a dispute with a retinue of one of the lamas of Karmapa sect at the ferry crossing at the river Tsangpo. Unfortunately, some of the lama’s men drowned when their yak-skin boat capsized. The lama, who was a supporter of the Tsang Desi, filed a court case against Ngawang Namgyal. The
Figure 8-1 A portrait of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal
judgement passed was that Ngawang Namgyal would have to pay a fine for the dead and hand over the relics of the Drukpa school preserved at Ralung monastery. This clearly indicated that the Tsang Desi openly supported Pagsam Wangpo. Ngawang Namgyal, however, refused to abide by the terms of the court. The Desi was infuriated and began preparations for an attack on the Ralung monastery.

Ngawang Namgyal had for sometime decided to leave for Bhutan where he had many disciples. His decision was supported by several prophecies. One morning, he found at his side a bundle of paddy although nobody from Bhutan had for sometime visited him. This, he presumed was a good omen for favouring his wish to leave for the South. One night he had a vision of the protective deities, Yeshey Goenpo (Mahakala) and Palden Lhamo (Mahakali),

![Figure 8-2 Rangjung Kharsapani inside silver reliquary preserved in Punakha Dzong (Photograph by Education Division)](image)
offering him the valleys of Bhutan. He also dreamt of a black raven (an emanation of Yeshey Goenpo) flying southward. All these omens had only one implication: Ngawang Namgyal would have to go to Bhutan where his forefathers had built numerous monasteries and had many followers.

**Departure for Bhutan**

One of the followers of Ngawang Namgyal’s forefathers was the Hobtsho lama of Gasa whose family had maintained close ties with the Gya family of Ralung since the 13th century and whose monastery was one of the oldest Drukpa foundations in Bhutan. One of the sons of the Hobtsho lama, Tenzin Drugyal (1591-1656) was performing the functions of both Umdze (ཨོད་མཛོད་) - Precentor) and Chagzoe (ཐྱག་མཛོད་ - Treasurer) and was greatly favoured by Ngawang Namgyal and highly respected by the others at Ralung. It is possible that Tenzin Drugyal influenced Ngawang Namgyal in his decision to leave Tibet assuring him that he would be welcomed in Bhutan. The Hobtsho Lama of Gasa also personally sent him messages of invitation with offers of religious estates in Bhutan.

Ngawang Namgyal decided to bring with him to Bhutan from Ralung all his sacred possessions, the most sacred being *Rangjung Kharsapani* (རང་འབྱུང་ཁར་པོ་མེན་པ།), which was a self-created image of Buddha of Compassion *Chenrezi* (སྤྱན་རས་གཟིགས་) - in Sanskrit Avalokiteshvara). This sacred image had appeared on Tsangpa Gyarey’s vertebrae at the time of his cremation and is still safely protected in Punakha Dzong.

In the year 1616, at the age of twenty-three, Ngawang Namgyal left Ralung for Bhutan with his entourage, thus retracing the steps of his ancestors across the eastern Himalayas. He knew that his forefathers had gained a large number of supporters for the Drukpa school in Bhutan and that these supporters would undoubtedly welcome him.

**Unification of western Bhutan**

Ngawang Namgyal first arrived in Laya, where he received by the Hobtsho Lama who had brought with him a small troop to ensure his safety. He stayed in Laya for sometime and then moved on to Gasa where Chup Ngawang Tshering and other Laya families paid their respects to him and received his blessings. Then he left for the upper Thimphu valley via Kabji and arrived at Pangri Zampa where a temple had been built by his great great grandfather, Ngawang Choegyal (1465-1540). He also went to the nearby Dechenphug which had been the temple of the guardian deities of the Drukpas since the visit of Kuenga Sengye in the 14th century. There, Ngawang Namgyal offered prayers of thanksgiving for his safe journey. The main deity, Genyen Jagpa Melen, is said to have appeared before him and paid obeisance to him. He next visited Tshalunang and then went to settle at Druk Choeding in the present Tshongdue, Paro which had also been built by his great great grandfather. There too, his fame as a scholar and leader, a drubthrob and powerful protector of Drukpa Kagyu brought him many followers.

Ngawang Namgyal knew he could rely on the support of many important families in Bhutan; the Hobtsho in the north, descendants of Phajo and Drukpa Kuenley in Paro, Thimphu, Punakha and Wangdiphodrang and Chapcha in the south. He soon brought all these families under his common authority. He travelled extensively in the western parts of the country to give teachings and initiations, and gradually his political influence expanded. He came to be revered as the *Zhabdrung Rinpoche* (ཞབས་དྲུང་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་ - the Precious Jewel at whose Feet One Prostrates).

In 1619, the Zhabdrung was invited to Chapcha by a rich patron named Darchuk Gyeltshen who was then on good terms with the Raja of Cooch Behar, Prem Narayan. The people of Chapcha who had earlier adopted the Drukpa teachings, as preached by Kyura family of Tshamdra, offered Zhabdrung substantial gifts and paid homage to him. The Raja of Cooch Behar also sent Zhabdrung gold, silver items, clothes and an elephant as tokens of friendship.

On his return from Chapcha to Tango in 1619, Zhabdrung heard that his father had passed away in Ralung. He had the body brought secretly to Bhutan and started to build the Chari monastery.
in 1620 to keep the ashes of his father and to use it as his permanent shrine. It was at Chari where Zhabdrung Rinpoche in 1623 ordained thirty monks and organised the first monk body. He invited his Tibetan master, Lhawang Lodroe, to come and teach the first monk body in Bhutan.

In the same year, Zhabdrung entered a three-year retreat in a cave above Chari. He had planned to live an ascetic life following the examples of Jitsun Milarepa (1040-1123). It was at that time when the Zhabdrung had visions of Yeshey Goenpo and Palden Lhamo urging him that he had a greater destiny to fulfil for the benefit of the Dharma and the sentient beings. As soon as his retreat was over he, therefore, decided to take up the temporal matters of his followers. He made an extensive tour of the Shar region where the descendants of Phajo’s sons were the chief rulers and where Zhabdrung’s own ancestors had built several temples. He returned to Thimphu in 1627 after having received allegiance from the people of Shar thus virtually completing the unification of western Bhutan.

A portrait of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal

In order to sketch a portrait of a historical figure it is sometimes more authentic to rely on foreign sources rather than the local sources which often tend to be more concerned about his religious activities. In this respect, one document which has immense value is the “Relacao” which was written in Portuguese by Father Cacella, a Jesuit who with his companion, Father Cabral, was the first European to visit Bhutan. They entered the country in April 1627 en route to Tibet and stayed a few months at Chari monastery with Zhabdrung. In one of his letters, Father Cacella has the following to say about ZhabdrungNgawang Namgyal

“He received us with a demonstration of great benevolence, signifying this in the joy which he showed on seeing us and on knowing where we had come from, where we were from, that is from what country or nation, and he asked the other questions normal at a first meeting…”

“(He) is at the same time the chief lama... He is proud of his gentleness for which he is highly reputed, but less feared... He is also very celebrated for his abstinence in never eating rice or meat or fish, maintaining himself only with fruit and milk... He occupied himself, as he told us, in praying and in his spare time he made various objects which he had and he showed us one of them which was the best, being an image of the face of God in white sandalwood, small but very well made and this is an art of which he is very proud, as also that of painter at which he is good... (The Zhabdrung) has also a great reputation as a man of letters...”

Defending Bhutan’s Sovereignty

Father Cacella also noted that Zhabdrung had to fight with the Tsang Desi and one of the reasons for building the Chari monastery on a steep slope in 1620 was to defend himself. Indeed Zhabdrung’s life since his arrival in Bhutan had not been peaceful. The unification of the country was in fact proving to be a very challenging task. Zhabdrung had to fight simultaneously against the Tibetan armies of the Tsang Desi as well as against the internal enemies who were the group of lamas of other religious schools opposed to the Drukpa Kagyu.

The First Tibetan invasion and composition of Nga Chudrugma

The first of the many Tibetan invasions took place around 1617 shortly after Zhabdrung’s arrival in Bhutan. Immediately after his departure, Tsang Desi Phuntsho Namgyal had taken over the Drukpa establishments of Druk Jangchubling and Gardong in Tibet. However, having the Zhabdrung residing just south of his border posed a permanent threat to the Tsang Desi who was thus determined to destroy him.

The Tsang Desi’s army led by General Laguney initially succeeded in capturing Druk Choeding in Paro. Zhabdrung was compelled to leave for Bjelela Dzong from where he performed the thug (ཐུང - supernatural power invoking the wrathful deities) against the Tibetan army. Some of the enemies were killed in the Battle field and the rest ran away. He then proceeded onwards to Wachen Dzong in Shar.
Zachen Choeje Dargyal and La Ngoenpa Tenzin Drugyal helped the Zhabdrung to gather a large militia which eventually defeated the Tibetan army at Chang Nangkatsa, near present day Paro airport. General Laguney was killed and the reputation of the Zhabdrung and his Drukpa army spread throughout Bhutan and Tibet. The militia or the Pazaabs (པའ་རྩལཔ་ - the militia) raised for the first time in the country for the brief campaign were mainly from amongst the people of Wang of Punakha and Thimphu. They were divided into eight groups according to their villages, to be known collectively as the Wang Tshochengye (ཝང་ཚོ་ཆེན་བརྒྱད - the eight Great Hosts of Wang). It was the militia mainly from Wang which formed the core of the army that ultimately united the whole territory of central and eastern Bhutan in the middle of the 1650(s). During Zhabdrung’s time the militia was, apart from fighting during the various campaigns against the Tibetans, deployed in bringing Dagana and Tsirang areas in south and central parts of the country under the Drukpa rule.

The Zhabdrung was then invited to Tango in the upper Thimphu valley by Tshewang Tenzin (1574-1643), the grandson of Drukpa Kuenley and, therefore, a distant relative. He was amongst those who had been to Ralung earlier for the Zhabdrung’s enthronement. Tshewang Tenzin offered him the monastery of Tango with all its properties and became Zhabdrung’s strongest supporter. While he was meditating in Tango in 1619 the Zhabdrung had miraculously survived from an earthquake which had destroyed a part of the cave where he was meditating. At the same time his arch enemy the Tsang Desi Phuntsho Namgyal had died in Tibet. It was following these two incidences while in Tango that Zhabdrung wrote the Nga Chudrugma (ང་བཅུ་དྲུག་མ་ - the Sixteen I’s). These tenets, carved on wooden seal, show his extreme confidence in the religious mission of the Drukpas (see the box).

Lam Kha Nga and the Second Tibetan invasion

Although Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal was welcomed in all the Drukpa-affiliated places, there still existed other religious schools in western Bhutan. They came to form what was the internal opposition in contrast to the external opposition posed by the Tibetans. Zhabdrung’s successes to establish the Drukpa rule greatly threatened their very existence. These religious schools, namely the Lhapas, Nenyingpas, Barawas, Kathogpas and Chagzampas (all of which were mentioned in the previous chapter) formed a coalition which came to be called Lam Khag Nga (བླ་མ་ཁག་ལྔ་ - the Five Groups of Lamas).

Their first military attack took place in 1629 when Zhabdrung was building Simtokha Dzong. The chief of the coalition was Lama Palden from Langmalung in Wang. He was killed during the battle and the attack on Simtokha was repelled. However, the opposition was totally vanquished. In 1634, they took advantage of the deadly feud between the Tsang Desi and Zhabdrung and called on Tsang Desi for help. The Tsang Desi was at that time Karma Tenchog Wangpo, son of late Phuntsho Namgyal. The Tibetan invasion which followed occurred at six different fronts, two in the Paro area, one in Goen – Gasa Tagtsekha, one Dechul Sokha (Chari), one in Neyinging Yulsar (Ngingla) and the final front in Bumthang. However, in the end, the invasion was repelled and several Tibetan commanders captured along with their soldiers. The rival religious schools were as a result greatly weakened.

The Third Tibetan invasion and the Zhabdrung’s ascendance as the supreme authority in Bhutan

Three years later, Zhabdrung embarked on a campaign of dzong-building. Simtokha was the first dzong to be constructed in the country earlier in 1629. Constructions of Punakha Dzong started in 1637 and Wangdiphodrang Dzong the following year. In 1639 the third Tibetan invasion occurred, again at the invitation of the Lam Kha Nga. The Tibetan army was commanded by Depa Galungpa. The combined army of the Tibetans and the Lam Kha Nga made a prolonged seize on Punakha Dzong. Once again, Zhabdrung’s troop under the joint command of La Ngoenpa Tenzin Drukdra and Gyalpo Tenzin, the brother of King Singye Namgyal of Ladakh was successful in defeating the Five Lamas and their Tibetan allies. This time an agreement was reached between the Zhabdrung and the Tsang Desi which recognized Zhabdrung as the
supreme authority in Bhutan.

Zhabdrung’s great victory over the Tibetan invaders enhanced his prestige and established his supremacy throughout Bhutan. His fame also spread to neighbouring countries. He received messages of friendship and goodwill from the rulers of Cooch Behar, Nepal and Ladakh. The Tsang family of Tibet which had already recognized him as the supreme power in Bhutan sent a goodwill mission of lamas to wait upon him at Punakha. Raja Padmanarayan of Cooch Behar sent him offerings of gifts. The King of Ladakh presented him with eight villages including Zangkar, Hem Goenpa and Gaspar in and around Kailash area in western Tibet. A Bhutanese lama was appointed to administer these territories in Ladakh and this system continued till 1959.

Similarly, the fourth Gorkha king of Nepal, Rama Shah (1606-1626), and his successors sought for both friendship as well as spiritual guidance from the Zhabdrung. Lam Damchoe Pekar (later the 4th Je Khenpo) was sent as the representative of the Zhabdrung and thus as he was the first Bhutanese preceptor to the court of the Gorkha king. Damchoe Pekar returned to Bhutan after being in Nepal for nearly twenty years sometimes during the reign of Prithvipati Shah (1669-1716). There had been since then eighteen lamas appointed as successive Bhutanese preceptors in Nepal and following their efforts Drukpa Kagyu had at one time considerable followers in many parts of eastern Nepal. In return, the successive Gorkha kings offered several estates to the Bhutanese government who in turn established monasteries in such places. Phagpa Shingkuen (ཕགས་པ་ཤིང་ཀུན་, Swayumbunath) in Kathmandu and Nagarthali in north eastern Nepal are two such famous monasteries. These estates were administered directly by the Bhutanese government till the present century.

At home in Bhutan the Zhabdrung was fully accepted as the supreme authority and his power already began to extend towards the eastern regions where he had not made any attempt to impose direct control. The chieftains of these regions began to dispatch regular tribute missions pledging their loyalty to the Zhabdrung. In the main biography of the Zhabdrung there is a list of such tribute missions received in the course of a single year which includes names of missions of the chieftains from Khaling, Merak Sakteng, Dungsam and the Duar areas of Hajo (from east and south east), Ada, Rukha, Tserag Dumbu (Tsirang Damphu), Darkar (Dagana) and the Duar areas of Byema (from south and south central) and Lingshi, Phiyagla, Lunngag (Lunana) and Goen (from the pastoral region of north).

In 1641, Zhabdrung seized without any resistance the old Do-Ngeon dzong of the Lhapas in Thimphu where Dechenphodrang now stands. He enlarged it to become the summer residence of the monk-body. In the 18th century, the dzong was shifted to the bottom of the valley where the present-day Tashichhodzong stands. Temples and monasteries of the other religious schools were also taken over by the Drukpas. In 1645, the old Drukpa family of Hungrel in Paro presented their dzong to Zhabdrung. It was enlarged and renamed as Rinpung Dzong. While in Paro the Kathoggpas presented him with the monastery of Taktshang.

Gasa Tashi Thongmoen Dzong (གསུམ་བཀྲ་ཤིས་ཐོང་མོན་རྫོང་), Lingzhi Yugyel Dzong (ཞིང་བཞི་གཡུལ་རྒྱལ་རྫོང་), and Paro Drugyel Dzong (སྤ་རྫོ་འབྲུག་རྒྱལ་རྫོང) were built between 1646 and 1649 to defend the western valleys against the Tibetan invaders. Orders were given in early 1647 to extend the dzong built in Tongsa by Ngagi Wangchuk, Zhabdrung’s great grandfather. It became Choekhor Rabtentse Dzong (ཆོས་འཁོར་རབ་བརྟན་རྩོང་). Zhabdrung was thus paving the way for the ultimate unification of central and eastern Bhutan within a few year. Later, in 1651, Daga Tashi Yangtse Dzong (བཀྲ་ཤིས་གཡང་རྩོང་) was built in Dagana, completing the expansion of the Drukpa control over the southern regions of the country.

The Fourth and Fifth Tibetan Invasions

While Zhabdrung was completing the unification of the country, the Tibetans launched two more attacks on the country. By 1642 A.D., the power of the Tsang Desi had collapsed and Tibet was then governed by the Gelugpa school headed by the 5th Dalai Lama and supported by the Mongols under
NGA CHUDRUGMA

"I am he who turns the wheel of the dual system (of spiritual and secular law).
I am everyone’s good refuge.
I am he who upholds the teachings of the Glorious Drukpas.
I am the subduer of all who disguise themselves as Drukpas.
I achieve the realisation of the Sarasvasti of Composition.
I am the pure source of moral aphorisms.
I am the possessor of an unlimited view.
I am he who refutes those with false views.
I am the possessor of great power in debate.
I am he before whom all rivals tremble.
I am the hero who destroys the host of demons.
I am he whose power cannot be repulsed.
I am mighty in speech that expounds religion.
I am wise in all the sciences.
I am the incarnation prophesied by the patriarchs.
I am the executioner of false incarnations”.

LIVING LEGENDS OF THE ZHABDRUNG AND PUNAKHA DZONG

One day while the Zhabdrung was in Punakha valley he came across a hill that resembled a sleeping elephant with its trunk stretching towards the confluence of Phochu and Mochu. He concluded that the tip of the ‘trunk’ would be an auspicious place to build another dzong. The construction was entrusted to a famous architect called Balib. One day in his dream Balib was taken by Zhabdrung to Zangdopelri and shown the palace of Guru Rinpoche. Based on what he had seen in his dream, Balib made a plan for the new dzong which can be seen inside the Punakha Dzong today.

People came from all over Bhutan to help the Zhabdrung and Balib to build the dzong. Everyone worked hard and the dzong was built very quickly. When it was finally completed it was called Pungthang Dechen Phodrang (སྤུངས་བདེ་ཆེན་ཕོ་བྲང་). A grand inauguration ceremony was held where representative of every valley in Bhutan came to pay tribute and pledge loyalty to the Zhabdrung. They brought all kinds of products as gifts to the great lama for the occasion. Rice and other cereals as well as different varieties of fruits and vegetables came from the nearby valleys of Shar, Wang and Paro. Woven fabrics and other products came from the eastern regions of Kurtoe, Mongar, Tashi Yangtse and Tashigang. Pastoral people from Haa, Lingshi, Lunana, Bumthang and Merak Sakten brought cheese, butter and other animal products while those from Mangde and Darkar brought walnut and other fruits. Doma and pani (bettle nuts and leaves) came from Dungsam and the Duar regions while sugarcane and molasses came from Wamrong and Kheng regions.

The Zhabdrung was deeply impressed both by the gathering of people as well as by the variety of products, particularly food products, from different parts of Bhutan. He concluded that the occasion was a very good omen. The Zhabdrung then asked the gathering to be seated in rows and instructed every food item brought from the different parts of the country to be served to everyone seated in rows.

The meal thus hosted by the Zhabdrung during the inauguration of Punakha Dzong gave origin to the ceremony known as Zhugdrel Pheunsum Tshogpa (བཞུགས་གྲལ་ཕུན་སུམ་ཚོགས་པ་). It literally means ‘coming together and seating in rows of
all the good things’ or for that occasion in 1640 A.D. ‘coming together and sitting in rows of all the valleys in Bhutan’. The ceremony symbolizes the Bhutanese nationhood and unity amongst its different valleys and is today widely performed as a prelude to any important function. During the Zhugdrel ceremony, members of the gathering are seated in rows in order of seniority; offerings made to the guardian deities for their blessings; special prayers said to the Zhabdrung and other saints for peace and prosperity amongst all the people and sentient beings throughout the land; and every member of the gathering served with doma pani, different fruits and raisins and other products up to twenty one items and finally with suja desi (སྲུ་ཇ་འབྲས་སི་) - ceremonial tea and sweetened rice.

Finally, as a part of the inauguration ceremony of the great dzong, relics, books and chortens were put in the temples of the new dzong. The most important relic was the Rangjung Kharsapani which the Zhabdrung had brought from Ralung. It was only the size of a rice grain but the person who had this relic was the leader of the Drukpas. When the Tsang Desi heard that the Rangjung Kharsapani was in Punakha dzong he decided to send his soldiers to bring it back to Tibet.

The Tibetan soldiers came over the mountains down to Punakha and made prolonged attacks on Punakha dzong. One day when such an attack was imminent the Zhabdrung devised a plan which would make the Tibetans believe that there were thousands of Bhutanese soldiers inside the dzong. He told his men to go out of a door in the side of the dzong, walk in front of the dzong, and come back into the dzong by another door. They did this for a whole morning. The Tibetans who were watching the scene from the nearby hills thought that a huge army was going into the dzong and the planned attack was called off.

Another day the Bhutanese made men out of straw and put old clothes on them. Then, at night, they put out several hundred such straw men in front of the dzong. In the morning the Tibetans thought that the Bhutanese had come out of the dzong to fight. As the Tibetan and Mongol horsemen rode down to the dzong the Bhutanese archers, who have been waiting behind the walls and on the roofs of dzong, rained on them with arrows. Many of them were burning arrows which set the straw men on fire. The Tibetans ran away in panic leaving behind many of their colleagues dead or wounded.

After several months Zhabdrung at last decided to stop the fighting. He knew that the Tibetan army only wanted one thing – the Rangjung Kharsapani. The next day he walked to a big tree beside the river. Both the Tibetan and Bhutanese soldiers could see him and hear him. “It is not good that our people are fighting for this special relic,” he said. “I will throw it into the river so neither of us will have it and we will not fight again.” “Oh”, cried the Tibetans. They had come all the way to get the relic. Now, without it, there was no need to fight. They returned to Tibet thinking that the Bhutanese were very stupid to throw away such a sacred relic. But the Bhutanese were not stupid. The Zhabdrung did not throw the real relic into the river. Instead he hid the original in his sleeve and threw a copy into the water. The true Rangjung Kharsapani is still in Punakha Dzong today, and once a year the people of Punakha remember the way the Zhabdrung saved the relic and their dzong.

It is spring and the time of Punakha Dromchoe. The town is full of soldiers wearing red ghos, black tegos and red hats. They look like ghosts from the Zhabdrung’s time. Every year each of the eight gewogs send thirteen men, their gup and a general to the dzong, waiting for the ‘battle’. They sing and dance and we can see them having fun in the town.

On the last day of the Domchoe the soldiers go to the dzong and get blessing from the Je
Khenpo. They asked their deities to protect them in the fight. Each group of soldiers leave the dzong with their leader. He gets on his horse and rides through the crowd towards the river. His soldiers run quickly behind him.

After the horsemen and their soldiers have left the dzong, the Je Khenpo and the monks come out. Then the Je Khenpo slowly walks to the same place where, long ago, the Zhabdrung threw the copy of the Rangjung Kharsapani into the river. One of the monks is carrying a small basket of oranges. The Je Khenpo blesses them and then, throws the oranges into the river.

Many men and boys are waiting beside the river. When the Je Khenpo throws the oranges into the water they jump in and swim quickly towards them. If they get an orange they carry it back to the side and keep it in their houses. They believe that these oranges will bring their family good fortune.

Now the horsemen and soldiers return to the dzong. They are all very happy because the ‘battle’ has been won and they have been in turn blessed. The Dromchoe is finished for the year. Everyone goes home tired, but happy.

Gushri Khan. Like the Tsang Desi, the new Tibetan rulers thought that they could not afford a powerful Drukpa Kagyu pa state on their southern border. In 1644, a combined Tibetan and Mongol army attacked Bhutan from the province of Lhodra in the direction of Bumthang. The invaders were once again completely routed by the Zhabdrung’s forces who captured a large number of horses and a great deal of armour, weaponry and other war materials.

Tsepon W.D. Shakabpa in Tibet: A Political History (pp. 112) records

“…Gurshi Khan and (Desi) Sonam Chosphel ... sent...Mongol and Tibetan troops to Bhutan...
The troops were accustomed to fighting on the high mountains and plateaus of Tibet and had no experience with the dense forests and high temperatures of Bhutan. They marched too far south, lost their bearings, and were surrounded by the Bhutanese. Three prominent officers, Nangso Dondup, Drongtsenas, and Dujungnas, were captured. Their troops scattered and fled, most of them finding their way back to Tibet. This defeat shattered the myth of an invincible Mongol army and, in the future, Mongols were unwilling to fight in the humid southern regions”.

In 1648 and 1649, several Tibetan and Mongol columns again attacked Bhutan at many points. Although they advanced as far as Thimphu, Punakha and Paro, they were ultimately crushed by the Drukpas and all their possessions and arms were also captured. Tsepon Shakabpa in the next page of the same book writes:

“The Tibetan troops came as far as Paro, via Phari, capturing a Bhutanese fort on the way. They camped a few miles out of Paro; but at night, Bhutanese troops took them by surprise and the Tibetans had to leave their tents and supplies behind in their hasty retreat to Phari. The Tibetan commander had to manage with a very common tent; his elaborate and costly one had been captured. That defeat went down as a disgraceful one in Tibetan history”.

A part of the large armour and weapons captured from the Tibetan army are still preserved at the Paro Museum. It was during this victory that the Punakha Dromchoe was first celebrated with grand offerings and rites to the protective deities (see story in the box).

Tibetan invasions during Zhabdrung’s retreat

The sixth Tibetan invasion took place in 1656-57 after Zhabdrung’s retreat with yet the largest Tibet-Mongol forces in an effort to bring Bhutan under Tibetan domination. Commander Gamponey, Depon Tashi Tsegpa, Chagurnesog and Gon Lama Dechog Gonpo attacked from the Paro sides and
Depa Sonam Wangchuk and Dung Nagpo from the Bumthang side; Lhajarepa from the Trashigang side. Despite its large scale the invasion was successfully repulsed primarily due to the tactical shrewdness and experience in warfare of Bhutan’s second Desi, La Ngoenpa Tenzin Drugdra.

Bhutan was to face at least another six invasions from Tibet, namely in,

- 1668 and 1675 when on both occasions Tibet sided with chiefs of the Lepchas of Sikkim in their dispute with Bhutan that led to the Tibetan invasions of Bhutan.
- 1714 when Tibet again sided with Tawang in its dispute with Bhutan and under Lhazang Khan made three prolonged invasions one each towards Paro, Bumthang and Trashigang which again resulted in the defeat of the combined Tibetan and Mongol forces.
- 1729 and 1730 when Tibetans tried to interfere in the internal power struggle within Bhutan and made three successive invasions.

On the 14th day of the 10th month of the Iron Dog Year in 1730 A.D. a treaty of friendship was signed between Tibet and Bhutan in the Utse of Tashichhodzong. Subsequently, Oense Tshering Wangchen, brother of the tenth Desi Mipham Wangpo, was sent as the first envoy of Bhutan to Tibet thus beginning the system of Drukpa Lochak (བབྲུག་པ་ལོ་ཕྱག་ - Bhutanese envoy) which continued till the Chinese takeover of Tibet in 1959. It however took at least another four years before friendship between the two countries was totally established and before that Bhutan had to fight two further attacks from Tibet.

The Code of laws - “Kathrim” (རྒྱལ་ཁབ་)

The Zhabdrung also gave Bhutan the first codification of laws that became known as “Kathrim”. The code was originally passed down greatly and was only written down after Zhabdrung’s death by Tenzin Choegyal, the 10th Je Khenpo, in 1729.

The code had several purposes, amongst which were:
Firstly, it established clearly the relationship between the Drukpa monastic community, representing the state, and the lay population. While the monk-body had to give teachings and initiations as well as perform rituals for the benefit of the lay community and the country, the people, in exchange, had to provide materials and financial support. Thus, when a family received an initiation for the first time and became a follower of the Drukpas, the names of its members as well as their places of residence and their lands were recorded in a sathram (ས་ཁམ་ - a register which was kept in each dzong. In return for the faith that the lay community displayed, the monk-body performed a Tshechu every year which was the occasion of a general initiation and

The creation of a unique national identity

It was following these repeated Tibetan invasions of Bhutan that Zhabdrung realized Tibet would remain to be the biggest threat to Bhutan’s sovereignty as well as to the Drukpa Kagyu school. The threat would be either in the form of military intrusion or religious and cultural dominance. It was this that prompted the Zhabdrung to create for Bhutan customs, traditions, dress, ceremonies and rituals which reflected the Bhutanese characters as distinct from anywhere else. Even the religious rituals within the Drukpa Kagyu School were deliberately changed to be appropriate only to the Bhutanese. These changes introduced by Zhabdrung Rinpoche became firmly embedded in the country’s social and cultural structure. They were, therefore, perhaps the greatest achievements of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal as they paved the way to the creation of a unique national character in the social and cultural life of Bhutan.
blessing called *thromwang* (ཐོརིམུང་).

Secondly, taxes were also codified. The Code explains:

> “The welfare and the prosperity of the people greatly depend on the fair judgement of cases and also on the taxes, ulag (woola) and government loads transport”.

Among other taxes, there were contributions of meat, butter, salt, wood and cereals as well as of paper and clothes. The *woola* consisted of compulsory labour for the government such as in the building and maintenance of the dzongs, monasteries, mule tracks and bridges. The transport of loads for the government was indeed a very heavy tax for the people. Moreover, they had to feed, lodge and provide horses free of charge for any government official on tour. This tax was so unpopular that the Code addresses the issue:

> “As frequent tours are a source of great expenditures for the people (patrons), from now on it is forbidden, except in case of transfer, for officials to go on tour even by one step under any pretext”.

Only monks and laymen attached to the monastic community were exempted from these taxes.

Thirdly, all important aspects of social life were also regulated by the Code of Laws. It included laws related to inheritance, trade, crime and punishment, behaviour of monks and officials, and the prohibition on the use of tobacco. The laws were meant to help the people to be just and fair in dealing with each other. A few examples from the Code are:

> “The dzongpoens are to treat the subjects under them impartially and not to favour anyone over anyone else. They should not give the subjects unnecessary trouble”.

> “Compulsion is forbidden. Neither salt nor butter may be forced on the tenants as a part of the whole of the price paid to them or may wool be forced on tenants in order that they may be compelled to weave it”.

> “The representant (representative) of the government must not grant any remission of rents of any kind in return for private gifts or gains to himself”.

> “He should not accept or demand any present for marriages or separations for which he is the civilian representative.”

In criminal law, dealing with matters such as theft, robbery and murder, the punishments were established in such a way that they directly balanced the weight of the crime. Honesty in trade and commerce was guaranteed by a series of laws and regulations which prevented cheating and corruption in the market-place.

**Setting up a political system**

Zhabdrung Rinpoche was the Head of the Theocratic State that he himself had created. Father Cacella wrote: “He was the King and at the same time the Chief Lama”, combining religious and secular
powers in his hands. All the high-ranking officials were monks. The government took its definitive form in the late 1640(s), just before Zhabdrung’s entry into the retreat in early 1651.

Before entering into retreat, Zhabdrung wanted to leave behind a strong government which could replace him effectively. Therefore, he introduced an original system of government with two persons responsible for two different fields. This system was known as *Choesi* (ཆོས་སི - religious and political matters) or *Choesi Nyiden* (ཆོས་སི་ནྱེད་ - Dual System of Government).

**The administration of religious matters (Choe)**

The monk-body was first established in 1623 at Chari Monastery. At the time of the setting up of the political system a *Je Khenpo* (རྒྱལ་མཁན་པོ - Head Abbot) was appointed to look after the monks and to ensure the discipline and purity of the religious teachings.

The first *Je Khenpo* was Pekar Jungney (1604-1672) nominated sometime after 1646. He had gone to Ralung at a very young age and then returned to Bhutan with the Zhabdrung. He was from the family of the Choje of Changangkha, who had descended from Phajo’s son, Nyima.

**The administration of political matters (Si)**

The chief official in charge of political affairs was the Desi. The first Desi was Tenzin Drugyal (1591-1656) of the Hobtsho family who had served as Umdze in Ralung. He formally took the title of Desi in 1651, only after Zhabdrung entered into retreat although he had been looking after political matters for a long time.

Other important posts in the central government were that of the *Droenyer* (གྲོན་ལྡན་གྲོལ་ - Chief of Protocol), who was also the Chief Justice, and of *Kalyoen* (བཀའ་བློ་ན་ - the Executive Minister), who passed along Zhabdrung’s orders to the other civil servants.

**Local administration**

The Desi was helped in the administration of the country by local governors known by the title *Poenlop* (པོ་ལྡན་ - Governors). The country was divided into three large regions under the jurisdiction of the Trongsa, Paro and Dagana Poenlops who represented the central government. The Paro Poenlop looked after the western and southwest region; the Daga Poenlop looked after the south-central region; while the Tongsa Poenlop was responsible for the large area east of Pelela. When the jurisdiction of a poenlop was too extensive, *Drungpas* (དྲུང་པ་ - Subdivisional Administrative Officers) served as deputies in certain areas.

Another post of importance was the post of *Dzongpoen* (རྫོང་པོ་ལྡན་ - Chief of the Dzong) who was responsible to the Poenlop. The first Dzongpoens were those of Punakha, Thimphu and Wangdiphodrang who were, however, not responsible to any poenlop but were directly under the control of the central government. In practice, these three Dzongpoens were at equal rank with the Poenlops. They were also members of the *Lhengye-Tshog* (ལྷན་རྒྱས་ཚོགས་ - Council of Ministers created by Zhabdrung). At a lower level, there were the *Gups* (པོ་ - the Elders), who looked after several villages and transmitted orders from the Dzong to the people.

**Personal attendants**

To look after his personal matters, Zhabdrung had a *Gongzim* (གོང་གཟིམ་ - Chamberlain), Drung Damchoe Gyeltshen (1602-1672). He was born near Ralung and had accompanied Zhabdrung from Tibet. He served as Gongzim till the latter’s retreat in 1651 and beyond. He was always close to Zhabdrung and was thus in a position to exercise considerable influence. Another person who was in contact with Zhabdrung daily was his *Soelpoen* (གསོལ་དཔོན་ - the Chief Steward). The first Soelpoen was Saga who occupied the post until 1700.
Figure 8-6 Bhutan and its Dzongs at the end of Unification of the country in 1659 A.D.
Reret and Death

Towards the end of his life, Zhabdrung devoted himself mainly to religious activities. He personally supervised the fabrication of one hundred thousand tshatsha (ལྷ་གྲོང་ - miniature images moulded in clay) of each of 115 main deities of the Drukpa school and he considered them as offerings. As this activity was taking much of his time, he delegated some of his powers to Umdze Tenzin Drugyey and to Drung Damchoe Gyeltshen.

On the 10th day of the 3rd month of the Iron Rabbit Year, i.e. 1651, Zhabdrung entered into strict retreat in the Punakha Dzong never to reappear. Zhabdrung’s body (Machey – sacred embalmed body) is kept in preservation even to this day in the Machey Lhakhang of Punakha Dzong as one of the most valuable possessions of the monk body. A series of eight chhoetens may also be noted installed in commemoration of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. The anniversary of his death, Zhabdrung Kuchoe (ཞབས་དྲུང་སྐུ་མཆོད) is now commemorated on the 10th day of the 3rd Bhutanese month every year.

The death of this great historical figure, however, remained concealed until the year 1705 A.D. Some time in 1705, the fourth Je Khenpo Damchoe Pekar, officially declared the death of Zhabdrung. At that date, according to the Lho’i Choejung, “three rays of light emanated from Zhabdrung’s body, speech and mind” which led to three reincarnations of Zhabdrung – Zhabdrung Kutruel (སྐུ་སྤྲུལ་), Zhabdrung Sungtruel (གསུང་སྤྲུལ་) and Zhabdrung Thugtruel (ཐུགས་སྤྲུལ་). However, only the reincarnation of Zhabdrung’s mind, Zhabdrung Thugtruel, was to be considered as the Head of State and the real successor to the Golden Throne (གསེར་ཁ) of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal.

Conclusion

Thirty five years after his arrival from Tibet, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal had unified most parts of Bhutan under his rule, and had subdued and united the other religious schools. He repelled the repeated Tibetan invasions and built a fortress in each valley of the country thus establishing firm political and religious control over the region. These fortresses, which still exist today, are a unique feature of our country. Each of them houses the monk body and the administrative organization of the district, thus identifying the latter with the former. They were to become the symbol of the Drukpa theocracy which gave the name, Druk Yul, to our country – the country of the Drukpas. The Zhabdrung also gave the country a unique national identity in the form of social and cultural life which greatly contributed towards protection of Bhutan’s sovereignty over the centuries. An outstanding and valiant saint soldier, a statesman with foresight, a great scholar and a great builder, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal is rightly regarded as the architect of a unified nation state of Bhutan.
### Student Activities

1. Explain why Zhabdrung left Tibet and settled in Bhutan?
2. How did Zhabdrung manage to unite the different regions of Bhutan?
3. Using the pictures of Zhabdrung, describe his physical appearance. Be as vivid as you can.
4. Describe Zhabdrung’s struggle against external and internal opposition.
5. Imagine yourself as a chieftain living in eastern Bhutan during the era of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. Compose a letter addressed to the Zhabdrung paying tribute and pledging your own and your subjects unwavering loyalty to the great lama for all times to come.
6. Outline the major dimensions of the “Kathrim”.
7. Identify what you think are the advantages and disadvantages of the dual system of government.
8. Summarize the problem of the succession and its resolution.
9. Draw a map of Bhutan showing the regional jurisdiction established by Zhabdrung. List the difficulties that were likely experienced in administering these regions in the 17th century.
Chapter 9

COMPLETION OF UNIFICATION OF SHARCHOG KHORLO TSHIBGYE ERA OF THE ZHABDRUNG IN RETREAT

In the previous chapter we have learnt about the Zhabdrung entering into strict retreat in 1651, his probable death a few years later and his death being kept as a state secret till the year 1705 A.D. In fact, the Zhabdrung had ordered his close attendants (Umze Tenzin Drugyal and Drung Damchoe Gyeltshen) to keep his death a secret for 12 years, but circumstances were such that it was only in 1705 that the death of the Zhabdrung was officially declared. There were several reasons:

Although by 1651, the Drukpas had united most parts of Bhutan, they were still campaigning and consolidating their position in several parts of central and eastern regions. Zhabdrung’s death occurred at this crucial time when Bhutan was in the midst of the process of unification.

The Tibetan government, which was still hostile to Zhabdrung was watching, with interest, the situation in Bhutan. To declare the death of Zhabdrung at such an unstable time could have, therefore, led to challenges of all types to the newly unified nation.

The government was also faced with the problem of Zhabdrung’s succession in that there was no clear successor.

The country was during these fifty four (1651-1705) years ruled in the name of the Zhabdrung in retreat by the various Desis appointed under the Choesi system and other political and administrative systems established by the Zhabdrung himself. The Desis and other senior officials were appointed under the seal of the Zhabdrung and took oath by prostrating to the Zhabdrung in ‘retreat’ in Punakha dzong. By the time the death was officially declared in 1705 the Choesi system was well established with seven Desis and four Je Khenpos having already ruled the country in the name of the Zhabdrung.

THE FIRST FOUR DESIS

Out of the 57 Desis to rule the country from 1651 to 1907 the first four were perhaps the most important. In the lower classes we have learnt about their lives and reigns.

The first four Desis were all very devoted disciples
of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. They were very pious and learned people. They were basically concerned that the wishes of the Zhabdrung were carried out and the interests and welfare of the people were protected. The first four Desis, therefore, ensured that the Drukpa Kagyud school, unification of the country, law and administration introduced by the Zhabdrung were consolidated and continued long after the retreat of the Zhabdrung. In this way, the first four Desis were largely responsible for preserving the unity and the integrity of the country.

Umze Tenzin Drugyal (དབུ་མཛད་བསྟན་འཛིན་འབྲུག་རྒྱལ 1651-1656) was Bhutan’s first desi. He assumed the post of Desi immediately on the Zhabdrung entering into retreat in 1651, although he had been looking after the political affairs of the state for a long time. Tenzin Drugyal was a member of the Hobtsho family of Gasa and he had been one of the most trusted advisers of the Zhabdrung since their days together in Ralung. In fact, it was Tenzin Drugyal who had persuaded the Zhabdrung in 1616 to leave Tibet for Bhutan.

The first Desi was a great scholar in religion and well versed in administration. Tenzin Drugyal was a true follower of the Zhabdrung whose rules of conduct both in civil administration and religion served as his guiding principles in administration. He and the Gongzim Drung Damchoe Gyeltshen are usually seen depicted on either side of the main figure of the Zhabdrung. The two officials successfully managed the affairs of the state during the crucial early years of the post Zhabdrung era. Tenzin Drugyal made great efforts to consolidate the new nation state of Bhutan. During his regency the entire region of central and eastern Bhutan were unified under the Drukpa rule through the campaign directed by Minjur Tenpa, the then Trongsa Poenlop.

Umze Tenzin Drugyal ruled as Desi only for 5 years. In 1656 he resigned and retired to Chari for meditation and died there at the age of 64.

La Ngoenpa Tenzin Drugda (ལ་སྔོན་པ་བསྟན་འཛིན་འབྲུག་སྒྲ 1656-1667), the second Desi, is one of the famous figures amongst the various Desis to rule Bhutan. He was the son of Tenpey Nima, father of the Zhabdrung and born from the Choje family of Dungsam Dungkhar (present day Khar in Pema Gatshel Dzongkhag). He was thus a half brother of the Zhabdrung. He was a man of manifold accomplishments and well versed both in religion and administration. Tenzin Drugyal was the most famous generals of the Zhabdrung’s forces which brought many Bhutanese victories during the various campaigns against the Tibetans.

The Zhabdrung appointed Tenzin Drugyal as the first Paro Poenlop in 1646 and it was from this position that the Lhengye Tshog appointed him in the name of the Zhabdrung as Bhutan’s second Desi in 1656 A.D.

Tenzin Drugyal ruled Bhutan for 12 years. He rebuilt the famous Drugyal Dzong and the Ta Dzong at Paro as well as the 8 huge sandalwood chortens inside the Punakha Dzong. He is also known for promoting medicine, literature, and general education and various artistic skills throughout Bhutan.

Choegyal Minjur Tenpa (ཆོས་རྒྱལ་མི་འགྱུར་བསྟན་པ་ 1667-1680), another famous general of the Zhabdrung, was earlier appointed by Zhabdrung Rinpoche as the first Trongsa Poenlop. As Trongsa Poenlop, he led campaigns to quell revolts in central
and eastern Bhutan where several chieftains had declared themselves as rulers. His various victories in these regions, as detailed in the following paragraphs, brought unity to the country. He further consolidated the Bhutanese nation state by constructing a dzong in each of the valleys.

Choegyal Minjur Tenpa was enthroned as the 3rd Desi in 1667 and he ruled for 12 years. He was a powerful and wise Desi and did a lot for the happiness and well being of the people. During his reign Minjur Tenpa defended Bhutan against at least seven major invasions from Tibet. His reign also strengthened Bhutan’s diplomatic contacts with the neighbouring kingdoms and thus in turn enhanced its status as a sovereign independent country.

Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye (རྒྱལ་ཟླིས་བསྟན་འཛིན་རབ་རྒྱས) was born in 1638. His father was Tshewang Tenzin of Tango Chhoeje and mother Damchoe Tenzin of Changangkha Chhoeje who had earlier married the Zhabdrung. Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal adopted Tenzin Rabgye right from the early age and was groomed to succeed him. He was therefore given the title, Gyalse (རྒྱལ་ཟླིས་- Crown Prince). Even after entering into retreat in 1651, the successive Desis took the additional responsibilities of looking after his special education in his role as a Gyalse. In 1672 during the reign of 3rd Desi Minjur Tenpa, Tenzin Rabgye assumed the title of Thri Rinpoche (ཁྲི་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་- lam on the throne of the Zhabdrung). He was eventually installed in 1680 as the Gyaltsab (རྒྱལ་ཚབ་- representative of the Zhabdrung) the highest official position in the Government. The hereditary succession system for the ruler of the united Bhutan was thus introduced for the first time and was to be renewed in 1907 with the establishment of the present hereditary monarchy system. Tenzin Rabgye did not appoint a new Desi but officiated himself as the 4th Desi.

Tenzin Tabgye proved to be the most energetic and capable ruler. He was very vigilant and often went on inspection tours throughout the country including the distant Sharchhog Khorlo Tshibgye. Such official tours greatly improved the provincial and district administrative system and the unification of the different parts of the country. He introduced many reforms both in religious as well as temporal matters. After a long reign of fourteen years, he retired from active political life in Tango monastery where he died in 1696.

Revolts and military campaigns in central and eastern circles

For centuries the different regions in central and eastern Bhutan had remained greatly divided amongst the numerous clans often warring against each other. During the reign of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal the regions were brought into the union through a loose federation system. The chieftains of the clans, though had pledged their allegiance to the rule of the Zhabdrung and sent regular tribute missions to the court of the Zhabdrung, were however permitted to retain a great degree of autonomy in their rule over their respective territories. There were at the same time several other chieftains who were yet to formally pledge their allegiance to the Drukpa rule while a few even discontinued their pledges after the Zhabdrung’s retreat. It, therefore, required immense foresight and statesmanship on part of the four Desis to fully unify the region of
History of Bhutan

Sharchhog Khorlo Tshibgye under the central rule with one main religious school, common political and administrative system and traditions and with a sense of common nationality. It was due to their credit that by 1659 A.D. the whole country was united under the Drukpa rule and fully integrated into a nation state known today as Bhutan.

Mangde

Ngagi Wangchuk (1517-1554), the great grandfather of the Zhabdrung, visited Trongsa in 1543 and had established a small temple at the site where Trongsa Dzong stands now. A hundred years later in 1647 the Zhabdrung had brought the Mangde region under his authority. He then appointed Minjur Tenpa as the first poenlop of Trongsa who gradually expanded the dzong as well as built the Ta dzong (ཏ་རྔོང་གྲངས་ - watch tower) above the dzong in 1652.

By the time of Zhabdrung’s retreat Trongsa was thus in a position to conduct the courses of events in bringing rest of the central and eastern regions fully under the central authority.

Lam Namsey and his role in the unification of eastern and some parts of central Bhutan

One of the leading figures in the unification of the central and eastern regions was a person from the east by the name of Lam Namsey Dorji. He was a Drukpa Lama who was born in Bjirizor in Khaling and lived most of his early years in the East. However, he had a dispute with Dewa, the chieftain of Khaling and was forced to seek refuge at Trongsa Dzong where he became an attendant to the Trongsa Poenlop, Minjur Tenpa. The Poenlop eventually took him to Punakha where he met the Zhabdrung.

He was ordained into the central monk body where he pursued his religious studies under the personal care of the Zhabdrung. One day, Lam Namsey was prompted to request the Zhabdrung to send an armed force to unify all the eastern province, but the Zhabdrung replied

“There is a prophecy that in the near future my teachings shall flourish and increase throughout the eastern realm by means of the dual system. At that time you must act according to the prophecy without losing courage”.

With that reassurance from the Zhabdrung, Lam Namsey eventually returned to Trongsa. He well remembered the instructions of the Zhabdrung for the rest of his life and played an important role in the subsequent events that led to the completion of the unification of the central and eastern regions.

Bumthang

Three years after Lam Namsey’s return to Trongsa, the Choekhor Deb, Kunthub who had been till then the most loyal official of the Drukpas in the Bumthang area, turned against Poenlop Choegyal Minjur Tenpa. Three expeditions were sent from Trongsa to overcome the Deb, but to no avail. However, the Trongsa Poenlop was confident that he would eventually defeat the Choekhor Deb because he remembered the prophecy related to Lam Namsey by the Zhabdrung. He therefore decided to be patient. He quietly won over some of the closest supporters of the Choekhor Deb. Then having gathered a large force from Wang, Shar and Mangde regions and personally assuming the role of the commander he led the force to Bumthang with Lam Namsey as his second-in-command. With the help of the Choekhor Deb’s officers they captured the Jakar dzong. The Deb was forced to flee to Tibet.

The campaign brought the whole of the Bumthang region under the central rule. Jakar Dzong which was also established by Ngagi Wangchuk a century earlier was strengthened. Trongsa Poenlop Minjur Tenpa then appointed Nyerpa Longchen (བཞི་རྩེ་བྱུང་གེ་) -The Blind Steward) as the Dzongpoen of Bumthang.

The people at first could not imagine how a blind man would perform the functions of a Dzongpoen. Their doubts were, however, removed when the Trongsa Poenlop recalled that Guru Rinpoche had prophesied that Sendha Gyab would be one day reborn as a blind and lame person and would become the ruler of Bumthang.

4 Minjur Tenpa won over Kalyon Magma of Choekhor Deb, Mipon Wangthob of Domkhar, and the Dung Sonam Wangpo of Chumay.
Chapter 9: Completion of Unification of Sharchog Khorlo Tshibgye

Kurtoe

While the central government forces were still resting after their victory in Bumthang, the chieftain of Ragsa in Kurtoe was killed by the chieftain of Kyiling and Phagdung. The relatives and officers of the slain chieftain sought help and justice over the death from the representatives of the central government now in Bumthang. The Drukpa forces responded to the appeal and defeated the chieftains of Kyiling and Phagdung at the Battle of Kurilung. They then built the Lhuntse Dzong and used it as the base from which central rule was extended over the whole Kurtoe region.

Trashiyangtse and Zhongar

After their victory in Kurtoe, the government forces set off for the region of Kholong (present day Trashiyangtse) where they met no resistance. The chieftains of the area submitted willingly to the advancing Drukpa forces and assisted them in building the Trashiyangtse Dzong. They then proceeded to Zhongar, and while on the way they defeated the chieftain of Tongphu. The victory made also the ruling clans of Ngatshang and Pehitsang to submit to the government forces without resistance and reconfirm their loyalty to the Drukpa rule. The whole Zhongar region was thus brought under the central rule and there too a fortress was built. The ruins of the fortress can still be seen near Lingmithang, some kilometres away from Mongar town.

Trashigang

The main Government forces camped at Zhongar Dzong while Lam Namsey advanced to Uzorong with a small detachment. From there he sent messages to the chieftain of Tsengmi, Trashigang, Kanglung, Khaling and Merak demanding upon them to submit and reconfirm their allegiance to the central government. The chieftain of Khaling, Lam Namsey’s old enemy, tried but was unsuccessful to persuade the other chieftains of the region to join him in resisting the government forces. Only the chieftains of Kanglung and Merak, who were expecting help from the Tibetans, initially responded and joined the chieftain of Khaling. However, when the anticipated support did not come they too soon submitted to Lam Namsey’s force.

Similarly, other rival factions in the region also submitted to the forces of Lam Namsey and reconfirmed their allegiance to the Drukpa rule. Lam Namsey then returned to Zhongar.
Khyeng

Shortly thereafter, Norbu Wangchuk, the Dung of Tunglabi in Khyeng, arrived at Zhongar, and reported to the government representatives that the Dung of Nyakhar (ཉ་མཁར), had become too powerful in the area and was not respecting the laws of the central government. The Drukpa forces under the guidance of Dung Norbu Wangchuk marched through Goshing, Phangkhar, Sudrang (Surrey), Gomphu, Tali and Buli. All the Dungs and other chieftains of the region submitted to the advancing government forces and confirmed their allegiance to the Drukpa rule. The Dung of Nyakhar offered some resistance but was soon overcome. The whole of Khyeng region was thus united under the central rule.

The Drukpa army of the central government returned to Trongsa where they were given a warm reception by the Trongsa Poenlop. It appeared that the unification of Bhutan had been completed and the army was then disbanded.

Second Rebellion in the East

After a few years Lam Namsey thought that the time had come to reconfirm the loyalties of the different chieftains and further consolidate the authority of the central government in the region. He also felt that the taxes which were introduced by Zhabdrung in western Bhutan should now be also levied in these parts of the country.

Lam Namsey sent his officers to collect taxes. The chieftains of Khaling, Tsenkhar and Chenkhar refused to pay taxes and once again revolted. Lam Namsey immediately gathered a force from Zhongar, Ngatshang, Pchitshang, Tsengmi and Trashigang and, led by Umdze Damchoe Rabgay, dispatched it against the rebelling chieftains. The chieftain of Kanglung joined the government forces while in march to Khaling. The combined forces of the three rebellious rulers confronted the central force army at the Battle of Chenkhar, where the chieftain of Chenkhar was killed. The chieftain of Khaling was captured and sent to Punakha and all his properties confiscated. Lam Namsey then decided to build a fortress from where he could enforce the central authority throughout the region. He chose his own place of birth, Bjirizor in Khaling as the site for the new dzong. Lam Namsey next made all the chieftains of eastern Bhutan assemble at Bjirizor and made them once again reconfirm their allegiance to the Drukpa hierarchy.

Lam Namsey was however still concerned about the loyalty of the people of Merak since their Lam, Lam Nagseng, was a close associate of the Tibetans. In 1683 the reincarnation of the 5th Dalai Lama Ngawang Lobzang Gyatsho was found to be born of the Jowo Clan, a descendant of Tertoen Pema Lingpa, in a village called Bekhar in Tawang region not far from the Bhutanese border. The child, Tsangyang Gyamtsho (1683-1706), was soon taken to Lhasa and enthroned as the 6th Dalai Lama. The birth of a Dalai Lama in the region brought the whole of Tawang region under the spiritual influence of the Tibetans who tried to extend their influence also across the border to the areas in Bhutan.

Lam Namsey took an armed detachment to Merak. On the way, the people of Radhi, Bartsham and Ramgengra (Ramjar) and other villages of the whole Gamrichu basin submitted and reconfirmed their loyalty to the central government. The Drukpa forces also met with similar reception a few days later on reaching Merak. Lam Nagseng and his ally, the chieftain of Bikhar, fled to Tawang. Lam Namsey returned to Bjirizor and for next eight months concentrated in consolidating the site.

In the meantime, Lam Nagseng returned with a Tibetan force assisted by their associates from the Tawang region. They camped in Kilingshing and held Bengkhar (present Trashigang dzong) in siege. They then marched to Bjirizor and enticed the people of Khaling to rebel against the Drukpas by telling them that their chieftain Dewa had escaped from Punakha. Lam Namsey could not hold Bjirizor and was soon captured by the hostile forces. He later managed to escape from captivity but was recaptured and finally executed.

Umdze Damchoe Rabgey returned to Trongsa and reported on the distressing situation in the east. Trongsa Poenlop Minjur Tenpa soon raised another army from Wang, Shar and Mangde and dispatched to the east under the command of Kudrung Pekar.
Choephel and the Bumthang Dzongpoen. A great battle took place at Bartsham.

The rebel forces of Khaling, Uzorong and Merak Sakteng were soon routed by the government forces. The rebel forces and their chieftains finally gathered in front of a large assembly and took an oath of allegiance and loyalty to the central government. In order to ensure the subservience of these chieftains some of their sons were taken to Punakha and admitted into the monk body. Kudrung Pekar Choephel and Umdze Damchoe Rabgey stayed back and completed building Trashigang Dzong at Bengkhar in 1659. The dzong not only ensured the establishment of strong central stronghold in Trashigang but also defended the region against repeated Tibetan invasions. Peace, law and order were restored and the whole of the eastern region was finally united with the rest of the country.

The eight provinces of central and eastern Bhutan were collectively named as **Sharchhog Khorlo Tshibgye** (ཤར་ཕོགས་འཁོར་ལོ་རིབས་བརྒྱད་) Eight Provinces of the Eastern Circle). Each province was in turn named on the basis of their respective political sizes as hereunder:

- **Mangde Tshozhi** (མངའོས་ཐོག་) four blocks of Mangde,
- **Bumthang Dezhi** (བུམ་ཐང་སྡེ་) four sub-divisions of Bumthang,
- **Kurtoe Dozhi** (ཀུར་སྟོད་མདོ་) four valleys of Kurtoe,
- **Yangtse Tsho Nga** (གཡང་རྟོས་ལྔ་) five blocks of Yangtse,
- **Khyengri Namsum** (མཁུན་རིས་རྣམ་གསུམ་) three different regions of Khyeng,
- **Zhongar Tshoduen** (གཞོང་རྟོགས་དུན་) seven blocks of Zhongar,
- **Trashigang Tshochu** (བཀྲ་ཤིས་སྒང་ཆོས་) ten blocks of Trashigang,
- **Dungsam Dosum** (དུངས་མོས་མདོ་སུམ་) three valleys of Dungsam.

Each of the eight provinces was governed by a Dzongpoen under the authority of the Trongsa Poenlop. Drungpas were also appointed wherever required to assist the Dzongpoens.

**Conclusion**

The completion of the unification of the country particularly the region of the Sharchhog Khorlo Tshibgye was carried out during the early years of the Zhabdrung in retreat. The campaigns were in fact carried out in the name, under the banners and the seal of the Zhabdrung by his officials. Due to the distance over the difficult terrains and the complicated but powerful clan system ruling over the regions, the task of completing the unification of the entire country had not been easy. The repeated invasions from Tibet during the same period made it even more difficult. It therefore required considerable statesmanship and political and administrative acumen on part of the first four Desis of Bhutan not only to see the country the difficult period of the first few years of the Zhabdrung in retreat but also to fully unify the whole country under the central rule with one main religious school, common political and administrative system and traditions, and with a sense of common nationality. The completion of Trashigang Dzong in 1659 A.D. marked the end of the completion of the unification of the whole country into a nation state known today as the Druk Yul or Bhutan.

We shall learn in the later chapters that the country was to undergo through yet another process of unification nearly 250 years later in 1907. This time the various poenlops and dzongpoens appointed under the Choesi system were found to be perpetually in rivalry and often at war with one another virtually paralysing the central rule under the successive Desis. It, therefore, took another leader of extraordinary statesmanship, Gongser Ugyen Wangchuck, the Trongsa Poenlop and thus the leader of Sharchhog Khorlo Tshibgye, to unite the various warring Poenlops and Dzongpoens under one firm central rule and at the same time established the hereditary monarchy system. It has been since then a tradition to bestow the title of Trongsa Poenlop on the Crown Prince before he ascends the golden throne.
Student Activities

1. Construct a time-line showing the major steps in the unification of Bhutan from the arrival of Zhabdrung until 1659.

2. On an outline map of Bhutan show the route of the central forces in bringing unification of the Sharchhog Khorlo Tshibgye.

3. Write a short essay in which you outline what might have been the fate of Bhutan had it not been unified in the 17th century. Make sure to give reasons for your views.

4. Suggest reasons why it was important for the “series of valleys” to become unified.

5. Look at today’s political map of Bhutan showing twenty Dzongkhags. Compare the boundaries of the Dzongkhags in central and eastern Bhutan with those of the Sharchhog Khorlo Tshibgye of the 17th century. Explain possible reasons for their changes, if any.
Chapter 10

A CENTURY OF INSTABILITY
FIRST ENCOUNTERS WITH THE BRITISH

The beginning of a new century (eighteenth) and the official announcement of the death of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in 1705 seemed to be almost like the ill omen that sparked off the difficult times which the country and its people were to endure for the next 200 years.

During these 200 years, internally, there was rampant instability with incessant strife among the Poenlops and Dzongpoens mainly in their constant power struggle to control the post of Desi. The country was divided into multiple factions. Plagued by these struggles, the central government was greatly weakened and it was gradually losing its authority. Externally, for the first time the country came into contact with the British power in India. Prior to 1772, Bhutan had no political relations with the British. Bhutan was soon to be brought into extensive contacts with them which led to unprecedented developments in the country’s history.

Internal Instability

The fourth Desi Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye retired in 1694 after successfully ruling Bhutan for 14 years. He was succeeded by Karbi Geduen Choephel (1694-1701) who in 1701 was assassinated by Ngawang Tshering, the then Dzongpoen of Wangduephodrang. The assassination of the 5th Desi thus gave the start to the 200 years of internal instability featured by repeated civil wars, political assassinations, political intrigues, plots and counter plots coupled with numerous external invasions.

Appendix 10-1 consists of a chrononological list of Desis, Je Khenpos and important incarnations associated with the Zhabdrung to rule Bhutan after the unification of the country. There were, during the period beginning with the Zhabdrung’s retreat in 1651 and till the establishment of the hereditary monarchy in 1907, as many as fifty seven Desis who ruled Bhutan. There were during the same time forty nine Je Khenpos, six Zhabdrung Thugtruel (ཞབས་དྲུང་ཐུགས་སྤྲུལ། incarnations from the Zhabdrung’s mind or the Dharma Rajas of the British records), five Zhabdrung Sungtruel (ཞབས་དྲུང་གསུང་སྤྲུལ། incarnations from the Zhabdrung’s speech), five Gyalse Truelku (རྒྱལ་སྲས་སྤྲུལ་incarnations of Jampel Dorji, son of the Zhabdrung) and four Lama Thripa (བླ་མ་མཁྲིས་པ་incarnations of Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye).

The Choesi system established by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal which worked so well during his own lifetime as well as during his retreat came under severe challenge immediately after his death was officially announced. The seat of the Desi eventually became, for most of the Poenlops and Dzongpoens as well as senior members of the clergy, a fulfilment of power and a lifetime political achievement. Although the post of the Desi was elected by a decision of the Lhengye Tshog the later Desi resorted to military strength as the deciding factor to get the throne for themselves or for their own nominees. The most powerful and wealthy Poenlop or Dzongpoen of the time was usually in a position to overcome the other rival claims and enthron e himsel f or put his own nominee on the throne as the new Desi. The incumbent Desi in anyway held the post only by the virtue of support, both political as well as men and material, from the Poenlops and Dzongpoens who had elected him in the first place and once these supports were withdrawn he had no choice but to resign. The Desis during their tenure were mostly mere puppets at the...
hands of the powerful Poenlops and Dzongpoens. The struggle for power was similarly intense also for the lesser posts such as those of the Dzongpoens and Poenlops.

A Desi elected as the head of the government was challenged and assassinated or otherwise removed by rival claimants. The two and a half centuries saw a total of fifty seven Desis reigning for an average period of about four and half years. Many of them of course ruled much longer and while some for just a few months. Several others shared the throne with another as a compromise to the feuds. The 13th Desi, Sherub Wangchuk (1744-1763), served for the longest period of nineteen years. Six of the Desis appear to have been killed and at least twelve others deposed.

By the latter half of the 19th century, however, the position of the Desi became rather less attractive. Indeed many of the Desis of that period were the nominees of the Trongsa Poenlop Jigme Namgyal and his son Ugyen Wangchuck who preferred to leave the affairs to trusted men of their choice while they wielded power from behind the throne.

There were constant civil wars throughout the land caused by the power struggles as well as disputes over territories and other causes. The common people suffered for generation after generation. They had to bear the bulk of the burden of the perpetual war efforts made by their respective Poenlops and Dzongpoens.

The first encounters with the British and the Battle of Cooch Behar

The country while being amidst such internal instability had to simultaneously encounter a new and powerful adversary, namely the British in the South. Bhutan had no relations with the British in India till 1772 when for the first time the two confronted each other over Cooch Behar.

Cooch Behar was an independent kingdom established in 1510 and since then maintained very close links with its Himalayan neighbour. Bhutan’s political influence over Cooch Behar went back to the year 1730 A.D. when, during the reign of the 10th Desi Mipham Wangpo, there was a family dispute between Upendra Narayan (1714-1763 C.E.) and Din Narayan for the throne. Muhammad Shah Rangila, a local official of the Mughals of Rangpur, interfered in the dispute and supported Din Narayan. Upendra Narayan sought the help from Bhutan against the Mughal intrusion in a family feud. Bhutan agreed to give support and in 1730 the Bhutanese defeated Upendra Narayan’s rivals and their Mughal supporters. Upendra Narayan was enthroned as the ruler of Cooch Behar and a Gya Chila (རྒྱ་སྤྱི་བླ་- Bhutanese Agent) with a Bhutanese small force was posted at Cooch Behar to help the ruler.

Cooch Behar therefore became a protectorate and ally of Bhutan since 1730 AD. In 1770 A.D. Cooch Behar’s ruler Raikat Ram Narayan joined forces with the Bhutanese when the 16th Desi Sonam Lhundrub (alias Zhidar) invaded Sikkim and the principality of Morang (Vijaypur). Two years later, in 1772, the Bhutanese were compelled to intervene on Cooch Behar once again following a succession feud in the kingdom. Following their victory the Bhutanese carried off Raja Dharendra Narayan and his brother Diwan Dev to Bhutan and imprisoned them in Chapcha Dzong. The political scene suddenly changed when Nazir (regent) Khagendra Narayan, one of the other claimants to the throne, requested for help from the British East India Company and offered to surrender half of the revenue of the State. The British accordingly sent a large force under Captain John Jones to expel the Bhutanese from Cooch Behar.

Course of the war

The British and the Bhutanese thus fought their first battle at the fort of Cooch Behar on 22nd December, 1772. The British troops had to bear with considerable losses, but were in the end victorious. A new king (Dharendra Narayan-1772-1775 C.E.) was reinstalled on the throne of Cooch Behar. At the same time, a treaty was signed between the East India Company and Cooch Behar making the Company in effect the real ruler of Cooch Behar. In future, the Bhutanese would, therefore, no longer be raiding the lands of the kingdom of Cooch
Behar, but the properties of the powerful East India Company.

The British government then ordered the Collector of Rangpur to take possession of all the low lying cultivated land up to the foothills, which would thereafter be considered as the new border. Consequently if the Bhutanese were to raid the lowlands, they would be considered to be trespassing into the British territory. The Bhutanese were also informed that no treaty could be signed before this land became the Company’s property.

The Bhutanese were infuriated and decided to send a force to the South to regain the lost territory. The country was at that time ruled by Sonam Lhendup alias Zhidar as the 16th Desi. The Desi personally led the force. In January 1773 the Bhutanese attacked the Chichacotta garrison held by the Collector of Rangpur. A fierce battle was fought and Desi Zhidar’s forces were defeated compelling them to retreat into the mountains. The commander of the British forces wrote in his memoirs:

“The Bhotias (Bhutanese) behaved with amazing bravery... I fought for glory, but here I was obliged to fight for life”.

In April 1773, Captain John Jones occupied the post of Daling (near present day Kalimpong) and threatened to follow Bhutanese into the mountains. The plan was eventually called off when his troop was decimated by malaria.

While the Desi Zhidar lost the war against the British, the internal strife in Bhutan assumed graver proportions. Tsheney Lopen (མཚན་ཉིད་སློབ་དཔོན་) Kuenga Rinchen led a successful coup d’etat and proclaimed himself as the 17th Desi. Simultaneously an order was issued to all the district heads to prevent the return of Desi Zhidar from India, and to kill him if he tried to re-enter Bhutan. The returned route from Buxa Duar was blocked at Chapcha and Desi Zhidar could not return to the capital. However, he managed to reach Paro secretly. Desi Zhidar then proceeded onward into exile to Tibet where he was killed by the bandits sometime in later 1773.

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**Figure 10-1** Buxa Duar (Pasakha), from Samuel Tuner’s BHUTAN AND TIBET
Meanwhile Desi Kuenga Rinchen favoured an agreement with the British and sent his representatives to negotiate. He also requested for the mediation from the 3rd Panchhen Lama of Tibet, who wrote accordingly to Warren Hastings in March 1774 to settle the dispute. The British agreed.

1774 British Bhutanese Treaty

The battle of Cooch Behar finally came to an end with the signing of a Treaty of Friendship (Appendix 10-2) between the government of Bhutan and the British Government of Bengal on 25th April, 1774. According to the treaty:

1. Bhutan regained its lost territories in the east, the lands of Chichacotta and Palaghat. And in the west, the lands of Kyranty, Maraghat and Luckypur;

2. the Bhutanese were permitted to trade in Rangpur and in return they agreed not to offer shelter to Sanyasis hostile to British or to criminals escaped from the British’s territory and to allow British troops to follow the criminals into Bhutanese territory when necessary;

3. the Bhutanese agreed to free the Raja of Cooch Behar and his brother from captivity;

4. the Bhutanese agreed to respect the territory of the British and to return run-away British subjects who had taken shelter in Bhutan territory;

5. the British were permitted to fell timber in the hill forests and were promised that the woodcutters would be protected.

By this treaty the first Anglo-Bhutan war came to an end and trade and commercial relations between the two countries commenced.

The British and the Bhutanese Bilateral Missions, 1774-1838

The British were deeply interested in opening up a new trade route through Bhutan to Tibet. Following the Treaty of Friendship of 1774 they, therefore, sent a series of missions to Bhutan.
The Mission of George Bogle, 1774

The first of these was a goodwill mission that took place in May 1774. Except for the two Portuguese Jesuit priests who had visited Bhutan in 1627 during the period of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, this was the first time in our history that Europeans were allowed inside the country. The mission was headed by George Bogle who was accompanied by Dr. Alexander Hamilton as assistant surgeon. The purpose of the mission was to collect information on the country, to establish commercial links between Bhutan and Bengal, and also, more importantly in the eyes of the British, to explore possibility of a trade route through Bhutan to Tibet.

The mission entered the country via the Buxa Duar and arrived at Thimphu after a long march across streams and rivers. They spent a few weeks in Thimphu while waiting for the permission to proceed to Tibet. George Bogle was finally allowed to proceed, but with only four other people. They went just as far as the monastery of Tashilhunpo (near Zhigatse) in Tibet where Bogle held discussions with the 3rd Panchhen Lama (པཎ་ཆེན་བླ་མ) Lobzang Palden Yeshey (1737-1780), who supported the plan of increasing trade between Tibet and India via Bhutan. On his return to Bhutan, Bogle managed to persuade the Desi, Kuenga Rinchhen, of the advantages of the new arrangement for trade. However, the Desi insisted that only Indian and Tibetan merchants and no Europeans would be allowed to cross through Bhutan. It was also agreed that, in addition to being permitted to send a Bhutanese caravan to Rangpur every year, the Bhutanese would be allowed to sell their horses anywhere in Bengal and all custom duties would be abolished.

Although George Bogle’s mission was initially hampered by several delays and problems, it was on the whole politically successful, and his report about Bhutan is very favourable to the country and its people.

He wrote:

“The simplicity of their manners, their slight intercourse with strangers and strong sense of religion preserve Bhutanese from many vices to which more polished nations are addicted... The more I see of the Bhutanese, the more I am pleased with them. The common people are good humoured,... and I think thoroughly trustworthy. The statesmen have something of the art which belongs to their profession. They are the best built race I ever saw; many of they are very handsome...”.
It is interesting to note that on his way to Tashichhodzong, Bogle is said to have planted potatoes at his halting places. Bogle’s visit to Bhutan was of considerable political interest and for the first time direct Anglo-Bhutanese relationship was established.

**Missions of Dr. Hamilton, 1776 and 1777**

In 1776, Dr. Hamilton, returned to Bhutan alone to maintain and strengthen the links between the two countries and to examine the Bhutanese claims to Ambari Falakata and Jalpais (present day in Jalpaiguri District). He followed the same route and halted at Punakha for a month before proceeding to Thimphu. Based on his recommendations the districts of Ambari Falakata and Jalpais were returned to the Bhutanese by the then Governor-General Warren Hastings as a gesture of conciliation with the Bhutanese.

The following year, Dr. Hamilton made yet another visit to Bhutan, a third time on behalf of Warren Hastings, in order to congratulate Thritruel Jigme Sengye on his accession to the throne as the 18th Desi (1776-1788) of Bhutan.

**Mission of Samuel Turner, 1783**

In the meantime, problems arose because the new rulers of Cooch Behar would no longer recognize the 1774 treaty between the British and the Bhutanese. The Raja of Cooch Behar claimed to be the rightful owner of all the lands which had been returned to the Bhutanese and requested Governor General Warren Hastings for their return. The Governor-General was still in favour of the Bhutanese over the dispute mainly because of the past British commitment as well as in their desire to maintain peaceful relations with Bhutan in order to secure a trade route to Tibet. He therefore, decided to send another mission to Bhutan.

In 1783, Captain Samuel Turner was appointed to lead a mission to Bhutan, accompanied by Lieutenant Samuel Davis who was to sketch scenes of the country and Robert Saunders who was a surgeon. They set off in the month of January and followed the Bogle mission route through Buxa Duar to Chukha Dzong and eventually to Tashichhodzong.

While at Tashichhodzong they met the 18th Desi, Thritruel Jigme Sengye, with whom Turner held several rounds of friendly and informal talks. Turner also witnessed a rebellion of the Wangduephodrang Dzongpoen which was rapidly quelled. Turner’s mission to Bhutan was partially successful in the sense that it consolidated George Bogle’s work but did not achieve any new breakthrough in Bhutanese-British relations. Davis’s sketches, however, were to become very famous and bring Bhutan to the notice of the outside world.

The leader, Samuel Turner, and the surveyor, Samuel Davis, both left diaries which give information on the internal political situation of the country at that time.

**Bhutanese envoy at Calcutta (1787)**

In 1787, the Bhutanese government deputed the Dzongpoen of Tashichhodzong to Calcutta to discuss with the British government on the adjustment of certain boundary issues in Bejni, Goomah and Byakantapur areas. The British government in its anxiety to renew and commit to the friendship already established, was very favourable towards the Bhutanese and directed the disputed lands, viz. Falakata and Jalpais, to be handed over to Bhutan.

**Mission of Kishan Kant Bose, 1815**

By the beginning to 1792, relations between Bhutan and British India began to deteriorate. First, Bhutan closed all its doors to merchants from the territories of East India Company who wanted to travel to Tibet. Then, there was a series of minor disputes along the border that culminated in a major incident at Maragahat in 1808. Maragahat was a large area comprising eight districts which had been formally a part of Cooch Behar and had been allotted to the Bhutanese under the 1774 Treaty. A Bhutanese party killed five people in this region, and a British detachment was sent to restore order. The British Collector of Rangpur ordered the return of Maragahat to Cooch Behar but the Bhutanese refused. In 1811, there were more skirmishes in the area, and the Bhutanese were adamant in their refusal to surrender Maragahat or to accept any other boundary demarcations which would be to their disadvantage.
In 1815, the British decided to send Kishan Kant Bose, a native Indian official from the East India Company, to gather information on the state of affairs in Bhutan. Unlike his predecessors, he entered the country through the Sidlee Duar to the east of that used by Bogle and Turner. His report covered several aspects of Bhutanese life and politics. According to him, the Dharma Raja (དྷརྨ་ར་ཛཱ་ - incarnate of the Zhabdrung – the Supreme Ruler) was “the spiritual guide, the incarnate deity and the sovereign Prince” of the Drukpas. “In respect of the internal government of the country or its relation with any foreign states, he has no authority whatever, and, with exception to spiritual and religious matters, the administration of the government of the country is conducted by the Deb Raja (Desi)”.

The pyramidal structure of the Choesi system established by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal appears to have changed considerably by the beginning of the 19th century. It must be recalled that originally, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal was both the spiritual as well as the temporal ruler. Towards the end of his life, he delegated part of his responsibilities to the Desi, who was to look after the temporal matters and to the Je Khenpo, who was to administer religious matters, while the Zhabdrung himself retained the supreme power. In the early 19th century, at the time of Bose’s mission to our country, the pyramidal structure had somehow collapsed and although the Zhabdrung Thugtrel sat on the throne as the head of the state, the power was in reality shared between the Zhabdrung and the Desi. The Zhabdrung held authority over all religious matters and the Desi held the discretionary power of controlling all other matters.

Kishan Kant Bose was the last British mission before the Great Duar War of 1865 to give a favourable report on Bhutan and its people to the British government. Based on his report the British government in 1816 decided to accept the Bhutanese claims on Maragahat. Times were however fast approaching when the British attitude towards the Bhutanese was going to change. By 1826 the British had driven out the Burmese out of Assam and, therefore, felt much more confident in their encounters in the northeast frontier regions.

Moreover, the Nepalese invasion of Tibet in 1791 had been defeated. A chain of new military posts were then established along the whole southern Tibetan frontier which prohibited all British Indian links with Tibet through Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim. Thus, all attempts of the British to open and preserve direct political and commercial link with Tibet through Bhutan since 1774 came to a standstill. Bhutan was no longer on the priority list of the British for maintaining friendly relations. The British therefore gradually assumed more aggressive attitudes in their future dealings with the Bhutanese and was to ultimately culminate into the Great Duar War of 1865.

Conclusion

The period between the official announcement of the death of the Zhabdrung in 1705 until the first hereditary king in 1907 is marked by internal instability and external invasions. For all its hazards the office of the Desi under the Zhabdrung’s Choesi system enjoyed remarkable continuity with as many as 57 different Desis having ruled the country for almost two and a half centuries.

It was also during these two and a half centuries that Bhutan came across the British in India who in due course of time forced on Bhutan as many as eleven wars. After the first war between the two countries, the Battle of Cooch Behar, the earlier British officials’ missions were generally well disposed towards Bhutan. This was primarily due to their respects for the Bhutanese people as a race as well as their interest of maintaining peaceful relationship with Bhutan in order to obtain necessary transit route through Bhutan for their political and commercial links with Tibet. This was however to change gradually and was to culminate into the Great Duar War of 1865 as we shall study in the next chapter.
History of Bhutan

Student Activities

1. There is a popular saying that where there is no monarchy there is anarchy. How would you substantiate the relevance of this statement to the Bhutanese context particularly during the eras of the successive Desis vis-a-vis those under the hereditary monarchy beginning with 1907?

2. Study the list of rulers and other historical personalities in Appendix No. 10-1. Choose any one or more era(s) that the class feels is important as well as interesting. Divide the whole class into 5 groups of imaginative Bhutanese people living during the era:
   - Group A – Poenlops and Dzongpoens
   - Group B – Monks
   - Group C – Soldiers
   - Group D – Farmers (men)
   - Group E – Farmers (women)

   Each group should discuss and write an essay on their respective imaginary experiences during the period. Give the groups a week to complete the assignment at the end of which each essay should be read out.

3. Describe the causes of the Battle of Cooch Behar.

4. On a map of Bhutan and the Duars, trace the routes taken by the various missions. Name the missions and dates of their visits. Specify why they were sent and list their major accomplishments.

5. Identify the major concerns of Bhutan’s relations with other countries from 1730 to 1815. Discuss how these concerns are similar today?

6. Assess the Treaty of Friendship of 1774 (Appendix No. 10-2) that ended the troubles in Cooch Behar. What did the Bhutanese get from the treaty? What did the British get? Who got the best part of the bargain?

7. Summarize the major changes in the relationship between Bhutan and British India between 1774 and 1815.
Chapter 11

THE SECOND CENTURY OF INSTABILITY: THE GREAT DUAR WAR

Between Bhutan and the present day Indian states of Assam and Bengal there was a long narrow strip of land called the Duars (‘gates’ or ‘passes’ into Bhutan) (see Figure 11-1). It extended from where the Bhutanese hills end to the borders of Assam and Bengal, between the Teesta river in the west and Dhunsiree river on the east, covering a total surface area of 7,124 square kilometres. There were in all eighteen Duars. Seven of them which lie between the Manas river and Dhansiri river were known as the ‘Assam Duars’, while the remaining eleven situated between the Teesta river and the Manas river were known as the ‘Bengal Duars’.

The Duar areas were inhabited mostly by Sanyasis, Mechis and Kacharis. Over the centuries the more warlike Bhutanese highlanders from the hills used to often invade the Duars and following victories over the petty kings carry away captives to work as slaves. The rulers of the area being unable to defend the area against the repeated Bhutanese invasions surrendered the Duars to the Bhutanese. In return, the Bhutanese paid compensations comprising of yak tails, gold dust and blankets. A Dzongpoen was appointed by the Desi to administer the area and collect the revenue.

Early British and Bhutanese squabbles over the Duars

During the reign of the 32nd Desi Choekyi Gyaltsen (1823-1831) the British in 1828 occupied Assam, and began to share a long common border with Bhutan. They also inherited the arrangement regarding the seven Assam Duars. It was obvious that the tension between the British and the Bhutanese would gradually escalate. When the next Bhutanese compensation was paid shortly afterwards, goods of inferior quality was substituted by the middlemen working for the British. The values of the goods were ultimately far below the amount paid. This led to the initial resentment. Sometime during the year 1828, the Bhutanese while trying to recover some stolen goods, attacked a frontier post in Buriguma Duar killing the British officer in charge and carried away captives. The British counter-attacked with troops, and Buriguma Duar was confisticated. It was later returned in 1834 after the Bhutanese had paid a compensation of 2,000 Rupees.

In 1835, the Bhutanese raided Ngogong (Assam) and took away nine captives. They were released when an armed British detachment was sent against the stockade of Bijni Duar. The same year, another British detachment freed twelve captives who had been taken from the Kalling Duar during a raid by the Bhutanese.

In 1836, a party of eighty British men went to Deothang (Dewangiri), which commanded the Banska Duar, and demanded on its Dzongpoen to surrender fugitives who had committed crimes in the British territory. When the Dzongpoen refused to comply, the British officer threatened with the possible annexation of the Duar. The Dzongpoen then attacked the British detachment. The British due to their superior fire power, however, won the battle and the Banska Duar was annexed. The following year in 1837, Bhutanese messengers were sent to Guwahati with a letter from the Desi asking for the return of the Duar. The British agreed to withdraw from the Banska Duar, in return for which the Bhutanese messengers were compelled to sign an agreement regarding the harbouring of criminals. This agreement, however, was never ratified by the Bhutanese government.
Figure 11-1  Map of Bhutan and the Duars showing regional divisions
Mission of Pemberton, 1838

In the meantime, in the Bengal Duars, petty incidents continued to occur in which the Rajah of Cooch Behar was largely responsible for playing the British against the Bhutanese. Border demarcations were yet to be fixed and, faced with a troubled situation along the entire border as well as with the breakdown of communication with Bhutan, the British decided to send another mission to the country.

Captain R. Boileau Pemberton was selected as the head of the new mission and he was accompanied by Dr. W.M. Griffith who was a botanist as well as a medical officer. The mission left for Bhutan without receiving any travel authorization from the Bhutanese authorities.

Pemberton’s route was different from those of the earlier missions to enable them to discover more about the eastern part of the country. The mission reached Deothang in early January 1838. The country was in the middle of another civil war following a rebellion led by the Zhongar Dzongpoen, Zhongap Sangye, against the 35th Desi Choekyi Gyaltsen compelling the Desi to resign. The mission had to wait at Deothang for a whole month before the permission from the government to proceed arrived. The route which the mission then followed was Trashigang – Tashiyangtse – Kurtoe – Jakar -Trongsa and finally to Punakha, where they arrived on 1st April 1838.

Captain Pemberton stayed a month in Punakha trying to convince the Bhutanese government to sign an agreement with the British. The agreement included clauses about the extradition of criminals, freedom of movement between the two countries and payment of the compensation. The Zhabdrung, the Desi and the other officials initially gave their consent to the draft treaty and some of them even affixed their seals. However, with the Trongsa Poenlop Ugyen Phuntsho, opposing it, the draft treaty was finally rejected by the Bhutanese government. Captain Pemberton returned to India through the normal route via Thimphu and Buxa Duar.

Although Captain Pemberton’s report is full of useful information, his distaste for the Bhutanese is only too apparent. This is in striking contrast to previous as well as future reports on Bhutan. Politically his mission did not achieve anything. Instead, it further damaged the relations between the two countries.
History of Bhutan

Annexation of the Assam Duars, 1841

In the years following Pemberton’s mission, incidents along the border continued with both countries sharing the responsibilities. Moreover, the British continue to complain that the compensation the Bhutanese paid them for the Assam Duars was always late and never corresponded to the exact amount owed. This was, however, due to the British practice of auctioning the goods that were received, goods which were often not the originals sent by the Bhutanese but products of inferior quality substituted by middlemen. As for the cash compensation, the British refused to accept the Bhutanese currency.

Each episode built resentment as both parties had the impression that they were being cheated by the other.

The situation came to a head in 1840 with the British annexation of the two of the easternmost Assam Duars if Kalling and Buriguma in the Darang region. They offered to pay compensation to the Bhutanese for the loss of revenue. In May 1841, the Zhabdrung and the 37th Desi Dorji Norbu wrote to the British agreeing to pay arrears of the compensation for the return of the annexed Duars and inviting an envoy in the winter. Lord Auckland, the Governor-General, however, replied stiffly that the situation in the Duars was extremely disturbed and warned that, if the Bhutanese continued their raids, the British would take over all their Assam Duars. Accordingly, all the seven Assam Duars were annexed on 6th September 1841. However, the British agreed to pay a yearly compensation of 10,000 Rupees to the Bhutanese.

An internal strife was once again raging within Bhutan between the two Desis, namely Dorji Norbu in Punakha and Tashi Dorji of Thimphu. There were also two groups, one supporting the Wangdiphodrang Dzongpoen and the other the Thimphu Dzongpoen, fighting for the control of some of the Bengal Duars. Hurgobind Katna, a loyalist of the Thimphu Dzongpoen was in fact trying to reach an agreement with the British independently of the central government.

In the Wood Serpent Year of the 14th Rabjung i.e. 1845 A.D. a session of the Lhengye Tshog was convened in Tashichhodzong to discuss the internal situation as well as the problem on the southern border. In the course of the five day meeting, a ritual ceremony was performed in the goenkangs of Tashichhodzong and Simtokha Dzong. All the officials of importance, including Desi Dorji Norbu, participated in the deliberations. The Je Khenpo, Lopoens and other members of the Central Monastic Body assembled in the goenkhang, alongwith all the officials present on the occasion and took a solemn oath to work in unity for the peace and prosperity of the country, and to refrain in future from any misdeed that may contribute to internal civil war. An understanding was also forged between the two Desis, Dorji Norbu and Tashi Dorji, to rule the country jointly.

Meanwhile repeated requests were made to the British in vain for the return of the Assam Duars. Inspite of the annexation, incidents continued and in 1845 seven people from the area were taken captive by a party organized by the Deothang Dzongpoen. In retaliation, the Banska Duar was once more taken over by the British. In 1854, the Bhutanese government under the joint reign of the 41st Desis Dorji Lopen Damchoe Lhundub and Jamtruel Jamyang Tenzin sent a mission to Guahati to negotiate for an increase in the compensation for the Assam Duars. The Agent of the Governor-General would not accede to their demands, and in their frustration on their way back to Deothang, the Bhutanese plundered the British controlled Banska Duar. Following several exchanges of letters accompanied by threats from the British the central government directed the Trongsa Poenlop, Jigme Namgyal, to apologize to the British government. The British then paid in July 1856 the annual compensation after deducting the value of the property plundered.

Situation in the Bengal Duars (1850-1864)

The situation in the Bengal Duars was no better than in Assam. It further deteriorated after 1850 when Colonel Jenkins, who was already the Governor-General’s Agent for Assam, was also made responsible for the Bengal Duars. He believed that “if we posses the Duars, the source of their subsistence, the Bhutanese government would in a short time become entirely dependent on us”. With such aggressive attitude on the part of the Governor-General’s Agent there was little hope for any amicable settlement.
In 1841, there were internal disruptions in the Daling Duar. The British summoned the Bhutanese to restore order threatening otherwise to take over all the Bengal Duars. The British then carried out the threat by taking over the region of Ambari Falakata in the Daling Duar in 1842. It may be recalled that Ambari Falakata had been taken by the British in 1784 from the estate of Byakanthpur belonging to the Rajah of Cooch Behar, and given to the Bhutanese. In accordance with the changing relations between the two, the British took back the region with the agreement that compensation would be paid to the Bhutanese.

During the reign of the 42nd Desi Kuenga Palden (1856-1861) minor incidents kept on occurring along the border. Each incident dealt with a case of Bhutanese trespassing on territory claimed by the British. The British suspected that the Bhutanese government, weakened by internal feuds, had very little control over the officers in charge of the Duars and that, most probably, revenues and correspondences never reached the capital of Bhutan.

In 1857, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal toured the northern border and, in view of the situation, decided to assume even more aggressive stands against the Bhutanese. He stationed troops at Jalpaiguri primarily as an intimidating measure. Furthermore, in order to press for the return of captives, he also decided on the permanent annexation of Ambari Falakata, which was briefly delayed by the Revolt of 1857 throughout the British India. In 1859, the British submitted a list of the Bhutanese violations on their territory since 1857, including the kidnapping of forty-five people, and on that pretext Ambari Falakata was permanently annexed by the British Crown.

Many of the violations cited were of course grossly exaggerated by the British in order to suit their purpose. The Desi even wrote to the British Agent:

“The wicked and evil disposed persons of your territory enter into mine and commit serious deprivations.”

Nevertheless, by that time, misunderstandings between the two countries had reached such a level that it was difficult to conceive a clear-headed and peaceful settlement of the situation. However, the British were also simultaneously dealing with a number of petty kingdoms on the north-east frontier. They, therefore, did not want at least at this stage an open conflict with Bhutan and tried to temporise the situation. Moreover, from the letters written by the British government of British India to Bengal, it appears that the failure of the government to understand the internal situation of Bhutan made it adopt a more cautious attitude. At the same time, in 1860s, Bhutan had ceased to be important to the British in developing trade route through its territory to Tibet. Therefore, in the eyes of the British, it was no longer essential to placate the Bhutanese although it was important that the border regions be kept peaceful.

However, by January 1862, during the reign of the 43rd Desi Nagdzi Pasang alias Phuntsho Namgyal (1861-1864), two major incidents forced the Government of India to take drastic steps. In 1861, the British had signed a treaty of free trade and circulation with Sikkim which had as a result become a British protectorate. Then in January 1862, a Bhutanese party from Daling Dzong near Kalimpong entered Sikkim and captured men and cattle. The raid was said to be a revenge against the Sikkimese for their role in persuading the British to take over Ambari Falakata. Another Bhutanese party from Bhulka Duar raided the Cooch Behar territory during the same month and again carried away men and cattle.

The British response to these raids was stern: the revenues of Ambari Falakata were withheld and the Agent in Guahati demanded the immediate annexation of the Bengal Duars. If this was not possible, the British decided that a mission would have to be sent to Bhutan. The British were by now sure that the letters and revenues sent to the Bhutanese government never reached the capital, and that the central government was kept in the dark about the situation on the southern borders by the local officers who had no interest in exposing their own questionable actions.
The Ashley Eden Mission: 1864

The Government of India decided that a mission would be the most appropriate course. A messenger was sent in 1862 to arrange the visit of the British envoy. The Bhutanese were not ready to receive a mission at this stage as the country was torn apart by yet another civil war. They delayed and replied that the time was not convenient for a mission. They added that they would send messengers in due course of time inviting a British mission. In the meantime, during the same year of the Wood Dog Year (1862) Punakha Dzongpoen Darlung Tobgye started a rebellion against Desi Phuntsho Namgyal who was forced to resign in 1864. As such, the messenger the Desi promised was not sent. The British decided to go ahead with the mission and dispatched letters to the Zhabdrung and the Desi announcing the imminent arrival of a mission and demanding upon them to make all the necessary arrangements. Ashley Eden, the Secretary of the Government of Bengal, was appointed as the leader of the mission. He was to explain to the Bhutanese government why Ambari Falakata had been occupied, and that this territory would be given back as soon as the properties and people plundered by the Bhutanese were returned. Inquiries into various legal cases would be made as well. Eden was also to explain the benefits enjoyed by the British protected states of Sikkim and Cooch Behar and persuade the Bhutanese to follow the same course. He was also supposed to try to obtain permission to station a permanent Political Agent in Bhutan and to have free trade between the two countries. All these points were ultimately to be formalized as a treaty, a draft of which Eden carried to serve as a basis for discussion. The terms of the draft treaty which Eden was carrying was in anyway not only one sided but also openly accused the Bhutanese of their misdeeds. The draft, therefore, could not have been accepted by the Bhutanese.

On his arrival in Darjeeling in November 1863, Ashley Eden heard that Bhutan was in a state of turmoil but he decided to proceed anyway. They encountered on the way many problems because the Bhutanese officers along their route had not received any notice of their coming, and had no orders from the central government to receive them.

The mission was first held up at Daling Dzong near Kalimpong. The coolies, understanding that the Bhutanese government was not being cooperative, deserted. In Sibsoo, faced with the prospect of being
short of supplies, Eden decided to go ahead with his trip with a reduced escort without waiting any longer for the approval of the Bhutanese government. On the way, they encountered messengers from Punakha who had brought orders from the government that the mission should return to Darjeeling. Eden refused to comply and continued his journey.

Descending from the Chelela in Paro on 20 February 1864 the mission met another party sent to stop them. Eden was once more adament and proceeded to Paro. The Paro Poenlop stopped them for a while and made one last attempt in vain to make them return to India.

The mission finally arrived in Punakha on 15 March, 1864. Apparently, there was no Desi at that time and the affairs of the state were conducted by the Lhengye Tshog consisting of the Trongsa Poenlop (Jigme Namgyal), Paro Poenlop (Nyima Dorji), Punakha Dzongpoen (Drung Tashi), Wangdiphodrang Dzongpoen (Darlung Tobgye), Thimphu Dzongpoen (Kawang Mankhel) and others.

The arrival of the British mission required the immediate convening of the Lhengye Tshog. While the different members of the Lhengye Tshog were being summoned from the different regions the members of British mission were kept waiting which they found highly insulting. Two days later on 17th March they were however given an interview by the Lhengye Tshog presided over by the eighteen year old Zhabdrung Thugtruel. As expected the reception of the British mission by the members of the Lhengye Tshog was far from friendly. The situation was made worse by the Bhutanese customs which required, during the occasions such as the audience with the Zhabdrung, all present to be seated on the ground. The members of the British mission flatly refused to do so. Similarly, they were jostled roughly to make way for the Zhabdrung when he decided to leave the meeting tent. The mission found these incidences during the meeting highly insulting which were to contribute towards the subsequent breakdown of negotiations.

The Trongsa Poenlop Jigme Namgyal was directed by the Lhengye Tshog to negotiate the draft treaty on behalf of the Bhutanese. During the negotiations on March 19 objections were raised by the Bhutanese particularly on article 8 and 9 of the draft regarding the appointment of a British Agent at Punakha and the proposed free trade between the two countries. The Bhutanese also demanded the inclusion of an additional clause regarding the return of Assam Duars to which Eden said he had no authority from his government.

When the negotiations with the Trongsa Poenlop broke down the Lhengye Tshog in an attempt to find a viable solution to the disagreement gave two more interviews to the British mission. By 22 March all understandings between the two sides came to a standstill. The British found the Bhutanese crude and arrogant and deliberately trying to humiliate the members of the mission. The Bhutanese on the other hand felt that the British mission had forced itself into the country. The clumsy and undiplomatic British envoy was now arrogantly trying to force upon them a treaty which would, like so many other neighbouring kingdoms, certainly bring Bhutan also under the British rule. Tempers ran high on both sides during the interviews with the members of the Lhengye Tshog on 22 and 24 March 1864. Each side made insulting remarks and gestures on the other and threats and counter threats were exchanged.

The talks came to a dead end and the mission decided to leave before things deteriorated further. However, before the mission left, the Trongsa Poenlop compelled Eden to sign a treaty agreeing to give back the Assam Duars and to the payment of compensation for each year of occupation. Eden, of course, was not willing to sign it, but decided to do so for the mission’s safety. From the British point of view the treaty was considered invalid. Eden did not have the Government’s approval to sign it and he had cleverly added the words “under compulsion” in English which the Bhutanese could not read. Without further delay, the mission finally left and reached India at the end of April 1864 after fifteen days of marching.

Eden’s report was, of course, very negative towards the Bhutanese, and he was especially scornful of their military skills, a judgement which was to be proved wrong the following year during the Duar war. His report confirmed the role of Je Khenpo as the head of the monastic community and the Desi as the nominal temporal ruler of the country.
“In practice he is the mere nominee of whichever of the two Poenlops of East and West Bootan happens for the time to be the most powerful. He is a complete puppet, and is never consulted on any matter of State. These internal commotions are the normal condition of the country. ... it was admitted that the Deb Raja and Dhurma Raja were mere names”.

During Ashley Eden’s visit, the Trongsa Poenlop Jigme Namgyal was the “de facto Ruler of Bootan”.

The Annexation of the Bengal Duars, 1864

Ashley Eden was severely reprimanded by the headquarters and by the Governor-General, who wrote:

“In our opinion it would have been well had Mr. Eden given up his mission, particularly after he arrived in Paro...”

He also wrote to the Bhutanese government to denounce the agreement Eden had signed. He further said that no revenues would be paid to the Bhutanese for the Assam Duars and Ambari Falakata in retaliation for the outrages to British subjects. The Governor-General added that these territories would be permanently annexed to the British Crown along with all the Bengal Duars if the British Indian captives were not released. The Bhutanese government replied that they would fight any aggression and that, in turn, they were offended that the British had denounced the treaty Ashley Eden had signed.

On November 12, 1864, the British issued a proclamation of war in the form of a declaration annexing the Duars. The Assam Duars and Ambari Falakata were permanently annexed, along with all the other Bengal Duars.

During the early Wood Ox Year of the 14th Rabjung (1865 A.D.) the Lhengye Tshog was convened to decide upon the strategy and distribution of the Bhutanese army. The Thimphu Dzongpoen, Paro Poenlop, Zhung Kalyoen and Zhung Droenyer headed for the defence of Buxa Durar, Dunga, Samtse, Mainaguri and Dzayanggang. The army in the east was to be led by the Trongsa Poenlop Jigme Namgyal with Jakar Poenlop Tsuendrue Gyaltsen as his second in command and also included Lam Zimpoen Sonam Dondrub. The Lhengye Tshog at the same time issued a proclamation in the name of the Zhabdrung, probably drafted by the Trongsa Poenlop, which stated:

“The English do not cease attacking Bhutan and the people must now prepare for the attack of the English. They will now try to take the duars and after that they will attempt to proceed to Punakha and deprive the inhabitants of Bhutan of the freedom they have enjoyed from time immemorial. It is the duty of the Poenlops and Dzongpoens to be firm in the faithfulness and love of freedom to protect Bhutan”.

Course of the War

The British Offensive: Dec. 1864-Jan, 1865

As soon as war was declared, without waiting for response from the Bhutanese, the British started their advance. Except for the officers, the 5,000 troops which had been despatched on the border were mostly native Indians and Nepalese. The British force was divided into two columns (Figure 11-6). The Force Commander, Brigadier-General W.E. Mulcaster, commanded the right column. The extreme right column was to take the forts of Deothang (Dewangiri), and the centre right column headed for the fort of Bishensingh which commanded the Sidli and Bijni Duars. The left columns were commanded by Brigadier-General H.F. Dunsford. The extreme left column was to occupy the fort of Daling near Kalimpong and Chamurchi (near Samtse), and the centre left column was to take the Buxa and Bala Duars.

On the 5th of December 1864, Daling Dzong was taken with great loss of lives. On the 7th of December Buxa Durar fell. Bala (Tazagong) stockade and then Chamurchi stockade were taken at the end of December 1864. The centre right column occupied Bijni and Sidli Duars during the last days of December 1864, and Bishensing, its main objective in Bhutan, was taken without problem on the 8th of January 1865. The extreme right column took Deothang (Dewangiri) fort on the 11th of December after a short fight.
The annexation of the Bengal and Assam Duars was completed by mid-January 1865, and the British thought the campaign was over. They felt confident enough to reduce their forces in all the places they had taken over and to start establishing a civil administration in the Duars.

**The Bhutanese counter-offensive: end of January to end of February 1865**

The British dismissed intelligence reports in the early part of 1865 warning of a Bhutanese counter-offensive. When the Bhutanese attack came it was in great force which took the British totally by surprise.

This time, the British marvelled at the skill, coordination and unity shown by the Bhutanese. Captain Warren wrote to a newspaper published from Calcutta:

“The Bhhoteahs fighting against us are of two classes – the regular enrolled soldier and the armed villagers. The former is generally clad in red and is armed with matchlock, shield and sword; he had often an iron or brass helmet, and is a tall, fine-made, muscular man. The armed villager carries bow and arrows; he does the manual labour of making stockades and felling wood; he is a powerfully made man though not so much so as the soldier. The Bhootaeh, far from being a coward, had proved himself brave, cool man. The coolness he exhibits under an artillery fire has called out our own men’s admiration; and when it is remembered that he only owns matchlock, bow and arrows, or a catapult, and that with these he stands stoutly to his works, facing Armstrong shells, mortars and the improved musket he deserves a full meed of praise”.

Trongsa Poenlop, Jigme Namgyal, was the man behind these various victorious counter-offensives which took place simultaneously along the whole border. The counter-offensive ended in a total disaster for the British, especially at Deothang (Dewangiri), which was attacked by a force commanded by the Trongsa Poenlop on the 29th of January 1865. The British evacuated the fort on the 4th of February leaving everything behind them, including their cannons and the wounded (see story in box). The British troops also had to abandon Bala (Tazagong) fort on the 2nd of February, and Bishensingh on the 24th. Chamurchi, too, was evacuated. Daling was the only fort the British could hold.

**The final British attack: mid-March – April 1865**

The route which the British experienced at the hands of the Bhutanese was a severe blow to their prestige throughout the Indian sub continent. They reacted swiftly. New Commanders were appointed: Brigadier-Generals Tytler and Tombs replaced Brigadier-Generals Dunsford and Mulcaster. Regiments were brought up to the border as reinforcements, and the counter-attack started in mid-March 1865.

On March 15, Bala (Tazagong) stockade was reoccupied, followed by Chamurchi (near Samtse) on March 28th. A British force commanded by Brigadier-General Tombs attacked Deothang from the Darang pass on the 2nd of April and recaptured it after fierce resistance from the Bhutanese force guarding the fort. Jakar Poenlop Tsuendrue Gyaltshen was killed in the battle. This was the decisive battle of the entire War though it brought no honour to the victors. The Bhutanese who surrendered at that time were slaughtered and every building razed to the ground before the British evacuated.

**1865 Treaty of Sincula**

In April 1865, comprehensive plans were made for an invasion of Bhutan, at the proposal of Brigadier-General Tytler. One column was to invade Punakha from Buxa and another was to march to Trongsa from Deothang. The British Government was however reluctant to continue the operations in what seemed to them an inhospitable and mountainous country, and was keen on ending the war. Negotiations lasted...
If somebody is today travelling from Phuntsholing to Samdrup Jongkhar, he would do so through the Indian Highway No. 31. Somewhere along the Highway was the old border between Bhutan (with its Duars) and the numerous kingdoms in Assam and Bengal (see Figure 11-1). The route to Samdrup Jongkhar eventually branches off from the National Highway northward towards Bhutan upon reaching the Assamese town of Rangia. If the traveller at that particular point looks to the north he will see the blue mountains of Bhutan. There is one particular peak which is higher than the others in the vicinity and is seen in a shape of a phurbu (ཕུར་བུ་- 3 edged dagger) signifying the powers of the wrathful manifestations of Guru Rinpoche) with a small white speck almost on its tip. The small speck is Yongla Goenpa (ཡོངས་ལ་དགོན་པ་) located some kilometres above the present Dzongkhag Headquarters of Pemagatshel. Yongla Goenpa is one of the holiest shrines in eastern Bhutan.

Kheydup Jigme Kuenduel, alias Jangchub Gyeltshen, was born in Darlung village of Wang valley. As a boy he attended at the Desi’s court in Punakha and was later posted to Trongsa as Shangyer (ཤ་གཉེར་- incharge of meat store). While in his post he had to witness as well as supervise butchering of many animals. He became a very compassionate person and ran away to Tibet to begin a pious life. He completed his studies at Mindoling and proceeded to Samye area where he became a disciple of the great Tertoen Rigzin Jigme Lingpa (1729-1798) under whom he took for many years meditation and other religious studies. When the time was appropriate Tertoen Rigzin Jigme Lingpa advised Kheydup Jigme Kuenduel to return to his native country Bhutan where he was prophesied to complete important missions. The great Tertoen instructed Jigme Kuenduel to locate there a mountain that resembles a phurbu and which overlooks into the vast plains of India and on it’s ascends to establish a monastery. Tertoen Rigzin Jigme Lingpa prophesied that the monastery would play very important roles at a later date when the nationhood of Bhutan alongwith its Buddhist doctrine was threatened.

As prophesied by his master, Kheydup Jigme Kuenduel returned to Bhutan and arrived in Bumthang. He stayed and meditated for sometime in Thowadrag in Tang valley. He then proceeded to the south eastern parts of the country in search for the mountain prophesied by his master until he reached Dungsam area. The mountain peak above the present Pemagatshel was found to be the one so prophesied and accordingly a monastery was established with its name Yongla (ཡོངས་ལེགས་- written as Yong Leg). The monastery was a phurba temple with 108 phurbus (also known as the phurbu lhatshog) as its main retention. Kheydup Jigme Kuenduel thereafter assumed the name of Dung Tshampa.

In 1865 during the great Duar War with the British, Jigme Namgyal the then Trongsa Poonlop personally led the Bhutanese Army in the East. Yongla Goenpa became the base for Jigme Namgyal and his troops for the religious rites, including the great Phurbu Drubchen (ཕུར་པའི་སྒྲུབ་ཆེན་- rites invoking the powers of Phurbu Lhatsho, in Sanskrit Vajra kila) during the entire course of the war. It is said that while visiting the Goenpa earlier enroute to Deothang, Jigme Namgyal decided to load his own flint lock gun in its goenkhang while the Drubchen was being performed.

On one occasion during the war the officers of the British forces were found to be assembled at Deothang (presumably somewhere in the present day golf course). At that particular moment the Bhutanese primed and fired with the gun that was loaded in Yongla Goenpa killing a senior British officer as well as creating a general panic amongst the British troops. The incident proved to be decisive as it led to a great victory for the Bhutanese troops commanded by Jigme Namgyal.

Bhutanese also captured during the course of the battle two British cannons. The cannons became a symbol of the British pride lost during the war at Deothang. With the British demanding for their return and the Trongsa Poonlop refusing to do so, the guns were therefore to become the last issue of contention between the British and the Bhutanese during the post war settlements. They were finally handed over to the British column, commanded by Lt. Colonel W. Richardson, despatched for the purpose in January 1866 at Dangme Zum (གྲང་མའི་ཟམ་Manas Bridge) below Yongla Goenpa.
Chapter 11: A Second Century of Instability: The Great Duar War

Figure 11-6 Map of Bhutan illustrating the Duar War

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the whole rainy season though preparations for the invasion were ready from August, most probably as an intimidating measure. However, an agreement was reached and on November 11, 1865, the treaty of Sinchula was signed. By this ten-article treaty, which was signed by the Bhutanese Government under duress,

- the Bhutanese surrendered all the Bengal and Assam Duars including Ambri Falakata, Daling (Kalimpong), the hill tract between the rivers Teesta and Jaldhaka, and Deothang (Dewangiri);
- the Bhutanese were to release all their captives and give back the treaty signed in 1864 by Ashley Eden in Punakha;
- the goods imported into each country would be duty-free and the Bhutanese were supposed to refer to the British in case of disputes with Sikkim and Cooch Behar;
- the British agreed to pay to the Bhutanese a compensation of 25,000 Rupees the first year on the fulfilment of the terms of the treaty and the return of the two cannons captured at Deothang. This compensation was to increase every year until it reached 50,000 Rupees.

Whatever the compensation, by this treaty, the Bhutanese lost 7,124 square kilometres of precious arable lowland. Still, the treaty was important as it laid the foundation for better relations between the two countries. Minor incidents continued to occur on the border which was finally demarcated in Bengal in 1867-68 and in Assam in 1872-73.

Conclusion
Our country’s relations with British India, which had started in the second half of the 18th century, underwent a long period of turbulence culminating in the Great Duar War in 1865. The aftermath of the War was the establishment of better relations between the two countries, which developed into the long-term relationship between Bhutan and the later independent India.

Inspite of the constant feuds and power struggle there had been always a common love and concern shared by all the Bhutanese for their country and its sovereignty, religion, unique culture and traditions and lifestyle. When these common heritages were threatened, earlier by the Tibetans and again during the eighteenth and nineteenth century by the British in India, the Bhutanese people of all walks of life put aside their own differences and confronted with a united front in overcoming these threats. This was perhaps the single most important factor that contributed towards Bhutan remaining a sovereign independent nation inspite of the repeated efforts of its powerful neighbours, namely Tibet and British in India, to bring it under their domains.

Finally, the ravages of the 200 years of internal instability and wars with the British in India gave rise, since the era of the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, to the first strong men of Bhutan in the form of Trongsa Poenlop Jigme Namgyal and his son Gongasar Ugyen Wangchuck. Between the father and the son all the warring poenlops and Dzongpoens were united, internal civil wars as well as external invasions brought to an end and gradually guided Bhutan’s destiny into the present century.

Student Activities

1. Explain what is meant by the term ‘free trade’ as it is used in this chapter. Distinguish between free trade and “unfree” trade.
2. Identify the major conflicts between the British and Bhutan leading to the Duar War of 1864-65.
3. Suggest reasons why Ashley Eden’s mission did not produce satisfactory outcomes for the British or the Bhutanese.
4. Evaluate the Treaty of Sinchula from the point of view of Bhutan and from the point of view of the British. What do you think would have been the state of relation between Bhutan and the British India if the mission had not failed? Would you have preferred its success? Give reasons for your answer.
5. Summarize the importance of the Second Century of Instability for Bhutanese development.
### Appendix No. 10-1

**CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF THE RULERS, JE KHENPOS AND IMPORTANT INCARNATIONS OF BHUTAN AFTER THE UNIFICATION**

#### I. The Zhabdrung Thugtruel (mental incarnation) of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651)

1. Jigme Drakpa I  1724-1761
2. Choekyi Gyaltshan  1762-1788
3. Jigme Drakpa II  1791-1830
4. Jigme Norbu  1831-1861
5. Jigme Choegyal  1862-1904
6. Jigme Dorje  1905-1931

#### II. The Zhabdrung Sungtruel (Chogley Truelku) (verbal incarnation) of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal

1. Chogley Namgyal  1708-1736
2. Shakya Tenzin  1736-1780
3. Yeshey Gyaltshen  1781-1830
4. Jigme Dorje  1831-1850
5. Yeshey Ngoedup  1851-1917
6. Jigme Tenzin  ? - ?

#### III. The Gyalsey Truelku of Jampel Dorje (1631-1681), son of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal

1. Kuenga Gyaltshen (Ganapati)  1689-1713
2. Jigme Norbu  1717-1735
3. Drugdra Namgyal  1735-1762
4. Jigme Namgyal  1763-1795
5. Jampel Dorje  1798-1829

#### IV. Lam Thripa (Thri Truel), incarnation of Tenzin Rabgye (1638-1696)

1. Mipham Wangpo  1709-1738
2. Jigme Sengye  1742-1789
3. Ngawang Jampel Gyamtsho  1790-1820 (alias Tshulthrim Dakpa)
4. Thinley Gyamtsho  1835- ?
5. Mipham Namgyal  ? - ?

#### V. The Druk Desi (The Deb Rajas of the British records)

1. Tenzin Drugyal  1651-1656
2. Tenzin Drugda  1656-1667
3. Minjur Tenpa  1667-1680
4. Tenzin Rabgye  1680-1695
5. Geduen Choephel  1695-1701
6. Ngawang Tshering  1701-1704
7. Oen Penjor  1704-1707
8. Druk Rabgye  1707-1719
9. Ngawang Gyamtsho  1719-1729
10. Mipham Wangpo  1729-1736
11. Khuwo Penjor  1736-1739
12. Ngawang Gyaltshen  1739-1744
13. Sherab Wangchuk  1744-1763
14. Druk Phuentsho  1763-1765
15. Druk Tenzin  1765-1768
16. Sonam Lhuendup 1768-1773  
(also Zhidar)
17. Kuenga Rinchen 1773-1776
18. Jigme Sengye 1776-1788
19. Druk Tenzin 1788-1792
20. Tashi Namgyal 1792-1799  
(also Soenam Gyaltsen) Also Umdze Chabchapa
21. Druk Namgyal 1799-1803
22. Tashi Namgyal (again) 1803-1805
23. Sangye Tenzin 1805-1806
24. Umdze Paro + No. 25 1806-1808
25. Lama Choedrag 1808-1809
26. Thritruel Tshuelthrim 1809-1810  
Dakpa
27. Thug Truel Jigme 1810-1811  
Drakpa – II
28. Chog Truel Yeshey 1811-1815  
Gyaltsen
29. Tshephupa Dorje 1815
30. Sonam Drugye 1815-1819
31. Tenzin Drugda 1819-1823
32. Phugyal 1823-1831  
(also Choekyi Gyeltshen)
33. Dorje Namgyal 1831-1832
34. Thinley 1832-1835
35. Choekyi Gyaltsen (again) 1835-1838
36. Dorje Norbu + No. 37 1838-1847
37. Tashi Dorje 1847-1850
38. Wangchen Gyalpo 1850
39. Thug Truel Jigme Norbu 1850-1852  
(Ruled from Thimphu)
40. Chagpa Sangye 1851-1852  
(Ruled from Punakha)
41. Damchoe Lhuendup 1852-1856  
(also Barchungpa) + Jamyang Tenzin
42. Kuenga Pelden 1856-1861  
(also Soem Tobgye)  
Ruled from Punakha + Uma Dewa  
(also Sherab Tharchen) Ruled from Thimphu
43. Doedup 1861-1864  
(also Ngadzi Pasang, also Phuentsho Namgyal)
44. Tshewang Sithub 1864
45. Tsheul Thrim Yoenten 1864
46. Kagyued Wangchuk 1864
47. Tshewang Sutbub (again) 1864-1866
48. Tsondue Pekar 1866-1870
49. Jigme Namgyal 1870-1873
50. Kyitshelpa Dorje Namgyal 1873-1879
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ANGLO-BHUTANESE TREATY OF 1774

1st: That the Honourable Company, wholly from consideration for distress to which the Bhutanese represented themselves to be reduced, and from the desire of living in peace with their neighbours, will relinquish all the lands which belonged to the Deb Rajah before the commencement of the war with the Rajah of Cooch Behar, namely, to the eastward, the lands of Chitchacotta and Panholahaut, and to the westward, the lands of Kyruntee, Maragahat and Luckypur.

2nd: That for the possession of the Chitchacotta Province, the Deb Rajah shall pay an annual tribute of five Tungun horses to the Honourable Company which was the acknowledgement paid to the Behar Rajah.

3rd: That the Deb Rajah shall deliver up Dhujunder Narain, Rajah of Cooch Behar, together with his brother, the Dewan Deo, who is confirmed with him.

4th: That the Bhutanese, being merchants, shall have the same privilege of trade as formerly, without the payment of duties; and their caravan shall be allowed to go to Rungpoor annually.

5th: That the Deb Rajah shall never cause incursions to be made into the country, not in any respect whatever molest the ryots that have come under the Honourable Company’s subjection.

6th: That if any ryot or inhabitant whatever shall desert from the Honourable Company’s territories, the Deb Rajah shall cause him to be delivered up immediately upon application being made for him

7th: That in case the Bhutanese, or any one under the Government of the Deb Rajah, shall have any demands upon or disputes with any inhabitant of these or any part of the Company’s territories, they shall prosecute them only by an application to the Magistrate, who shall reside here for the administration of justice.

8th: That whereas the Sunneeyasies are considered by the English as an enemy, the Deb Rajah shall not allow anybody of them to take shelter in any part of the districts now given up nor permit them to enter the Honourable Company’s territories, or through any part of his, and if the Bhutanese shall not of themselves be able to drive them out, they shall give information to the Resident on the part of the English, in Cooch Behar, and they shall not consider the English troops pursuing the Sunneeyasies into those districts any breach of this Treaty.

9th: That in case the Honourable Company shall have occasion for cutting timber from any part of the woods under the Hills, they shall do it duty free, and the people they send shall be protected.

10th: That there shall be a mutual release of prisoners.

This Treaty to be signed by the Honourable President and Council of Bengal etc. and the Honourable Company’s seal to be affixed on the one part, and to be signed and sealed by the Deb Rajah on the other part.

Signed and ratified at Fort William, the 25th April, 1774.
THE TREATY OF SINCHULA, 1865

Article 1: There shall henceforth be perpetual peace and friendship between the British Government and the Government of Bhutan.

Article 2: Whereas in consequence of repeated aggressions of the Bhutan Government and of the refusal of that Government to afford satisfaction for those aggressions, and of their insulting treatment of the officers sent by His Excellency the Governor-General-in-Council for the purpose of procuring an amicable adjustment of differences existing between the two States, the British Government has been compelled to seize by an armed force the whole of the Duars and certain Hill Posts protecting the passes into Bhutan and whereas the Bhutan Government has now expressed its regret for past misconduct and a desire for the establishment of friendly relations with the British Government, it is hereby agreed that the whole of the tract known as the Eighteen Duars, bordering on the District of Rungpoor, Cooch Behar and Assam, together with the Talook of Ambaree-Fallacottah and the Hill territory on the left bank of the Teesta up to such point as may be laid down by the British Commissioner appointed for the purpose is ceded by the Bhutan Government to the British Government for ever.

Article 3: The Bhutan Government hereby agree to surrender all British subjects as well as subjects of the Chiefs of Sikkim and Cooch Behar who are now detained in Bhutan against their will, and to place no impediment in the way of the return of all or any of such persons into British territory.

Article 4: In consideration of the cession by the Bhutan Government of the territories specified in Article 2 of this Treaty, and of the said Government having expressed its regret for past misconduct, and having hereby engaged for the future to restrain all evil-disposed persons from committing crimes within British territory or the territories of the Rajahs of Sikkim and Cooch Behar and to give prompt and full redress for all such crimes which may be committed in defiance of their commands, the British Government agree to make an annual allowance to the Government of Bhutan of a sum not exceeding fifty-thousand rupees (Rupees 50,000) to be paid to officers not below the rank of Dzongpoen, who shall be deputed by the Government of Bhutan to receive the same. And it is further hereby agreed that the payment shall be made as specified below:

- On the fulfilment by the Bhutan Government of the conditions of this Treaty, twenty-five thousand rupees (Rupees 25,000).
- On the 10th January the 1st payment, thirty-five thousand rupees (Rupees 35,000).
- On the 10th January following forty-five thousand rupees (Rupees 45,000).
- On every succeeding 10th January, fifty thousand rupees (Rupees 50,000).

Article 5: The British Government will hold itself at liberty at any time to suspend the payment of this compensation money either in whole or in part in the even of misconduct on the part of the Bhutan Government or its failure to check the aggression of its subjects or to comply with the provisions of this Treaty.

Article 6: The British Government hereby agree, on demand being duly made in writing by the Bhutan Government, to surrender, under the provisions of Act VII of 1854, of which a copy shall be furnished to the Bhutan Government, all Bhutanese subjects accused of any of the following crimes who may take refuge in British dominions. The crimes are murder, attempting to murder, rape, kidnapping, great personal violence, maiming, robbery, burglary, knowingly receiving property obtained by dacoity, robbery or burglary, cattle stealing, breaking and entering a dwelling house and stealing therein, arson, setting fire to village,
Article 7: The Bhutan Government hereby agree, on requisition being duly made by or by the authority of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, to surrender any British subjects accused of any of the crimes specified in the above Article who may take refuge in the territory under the jurisdiction of the Bhutan Government, and also any Bhutanese subjects who, after committing any of the above crimes in British territory, shall flee into Bhutan, on such evidence of their guilt being produced as shall satisfy the local court of the district in which the offence may have been committed.

Article 8: The Bhutan Government hereby agree to refer to the arbitration of the British Government all disputes with, or causes of complaint against, the Rajahs of Sikkim and Cooch Behar, and to abide by the decision of the British Government; and the British Government hereby engage to enquire into and settle all such disputes and complaints in such manner as justice may require, and to insist on the observance of the decision by the Rajahs of Sikkim and Cooch Behar.

Article 9: There shall be free trade and commerce between the two governments. No duties shall be levied on Bhutanese goods imported into British territories nor shall the Bhutan Government levy any duties on British goods imported into, or transported through the Bhutan territories. Bhutanese subjects residing in British territories shall have equal justice with British subjects, and British subjects residing in Bhutan shall have equal justice with the subjects of the Bhutan government.

Article 10: The present Treaty of Ten Articles having been concluded at Sinchula on the 11th day of November, 1865, corresponding with the Bhutea Year Shim Lung 24th day of the 9th month, and signed and sealed by Lieutenant-Colonel Herbert Bruce, C.B., and Samdojey Deb Jimpey and Themseyrensey Donai, the ratifications of the same by His Excellency the Viceroy and Governor-General or His Excellency the Viceroy and Governor-General-in-Council and by their Highnesses the Dhurma and Deb Rajahs shall be mutually delivered within thirty days from this date.