May the external enemies be vanquished!
The one sitting in the middle is
His Majesty the King, the religious and secular head;
Through the state of his compassionate mind
May his subjects be led to prosperity!

2.1.2.3. Rigsar — the Contemporary Genre

The most recent, and perhaps the most prolific, among all song types is the Rigsar. Literally meaning ‘the contemporary genre,’ or ‘new idea’ rigsar dates back to the 1960s. While the traditional songs are highly formal, rigsar is more personalized and allows for expressions of emotions, for example in love songs, most of which are outside the matters of faith. This genre has more latitude in its composition and singing style, and therefore allows greater freedom to the artist. The popularity of this genre is growing these days as it fits in well with the changing forms of artistic expression in modern Bhutan and is an important component of the commercial film industry. However, some compositions, like their predecessors, are hymns and praises to the saints, kings and the country. A good example of rigsar is ‘Miwang Nga Da Gyalpo’ composed in praise of the fifth king on the occasion of his marriage in 2011 and sung by popular rigsar singer, Namgay Jigs:

His Majesty the King, the People’s King
Ascending the golden throne is the luck of the people of Bhutan
The karmic connection of previous lives has brought us together like parents and brothers and sisters.
Our gathering together today will never be forgotten
May the Blessings of the Triple Gem grace the people of Bhutan with the eternal reign of the Wangchuck Dynasty

Like the never diminishing rays of the Sun.

2.1.3. The Dances of Heroes and Warriors

2.1.3.1. The Dances of Folk Heroes

Zhey literally meaning ‘dance’ is a traditional folk dance, having specific affiliation to Bhutan. There are zheys connected to the four districts in Bhutan: Paro (Wuchu-bi Zhey), Thimphu (Wang Zhey), Gasa (Goen Zhey), and Trongsa (Nub Zhey). Though the basic theme and significance of the zhey in all the four districts is more or less same, there are subtle variations among them such as dress code, and the steps and movements of the dance. This folk dance is performed only by menfolk, on special occasions like traditional ceremonies and tshechu.

This genre of folk dance is typically performed by a group of men singing and dancing simultaneously, and it often requires rigorous movements and rapid rhythm. While performing, the dancers tread firmly, gradually intensifying the pace of their steps. This genre of folk dance has a specific number of steps, with a specific dedication for each step.

Goen Zhey

Goen Zhey is performed by people of Goen, in Gasa district. This dance is the oldest of the genre and was first performed in a place named Bangdekaras as a way of receiving Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal when he first arrived in Bhutan. The following stanzas describe the arrival of Zhabdrung, escorted by Lam Namgye of Obtsho. These are significant verses.

From the east, there always rises a sun; but the sun that rises today is much warmer.
From Tibet, lamas have always come; but the lama who comes today brings more blessings.

The dance is today performed by twenty one dancers (comprising one lead dancer and twenty other dancers) during Gasa Tshechu. The lead dancer wears a chamok (helmet) and colourful silk scarf, while other dancers wear a kopak (headband) and a plain white scarf. Each dancer wears a red woollen gho (robe), black tego (undershirt), yuelham (traditional boots), and a pata (sword). It is said that the costumes for the Goen Zhey are similar to battle gear worn by warriors during troubled times in the past.
Wang Zhey has its origin in the Thimphu valley. In the 17th century, when Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal first arrived in the Thimphu valley, his followers in the district performed this zhey as a mark of their devotion. The dancers are bare-headed. Each wears a raw silk gho, signifying the sovereignty and independence of the country, over which is wrapped a patterned silk meyo (knee-length skirt), signifying protection against adverse influences. Each dancer carries a white scarf (kabney) as a sign of respect and allegiance to the Lama (i.e. the Zhabdrung). The dancers wear dralham (traditional leather and silk boot) to subdue the country’s enemies. Each dancer wears a five-coloured headband made of silk signifying the spread of the Lama’s blessing to all mankind. Wang Zhey is performed by a lead dancer with twelve assistant dancers. Today, Wang Zhey is performed during tschechu and tendrel (special official occasions).

Wang Zhey has fourteen steps, with a specific dedication to each step.

Step one: Chatselma, obeisance to lamas and leaders.
Step two: Sa-chagi, the initiation.
Step three: Zhuk-drelserdeng yoyo, dedicated to the fineness of the assembly line.
Step four: Yagi-gungying-demolu, dedicated to the gathering’s wellbeing.
Step five: Sa-norbu-dungkar-yekhyil, preciousness of conch in Buddhism.
Step six: Sa-nagtoe-takmo-jukjuk, freedom of tiger.
Step seven: Boegi-jachen-ngangpa, freedom of swan.
Step eight: Yesu-yeley-wongmi, offering of water to the Buddha.
Step nine: Sa-boegi-yarlung-tshokha, dedicated to Yalung Lake in Tibet.

The Goen Zhey has thirteen steps, each with a specific dedication, as follows:

Step one: Sa-chak, dedicated to the initiation.
Step two: Chak-tshelma, dedicated to commemorate spiritual teachers, deities and ancestors.
Step three: Shar-pharley-thridu, dedicated to guests of the occasion.
Step four: Ts Hopkins-namyang-tshok, dedicated to the gathering.
Step five: Norbu-dungkar, acknowledging preciousness of conch in Buddhism.
Step six: Tsel-sum-pa, dedicated to the three powerful forces: sky, sun, and rays.
Step seven: Zhuk-drel, dedicated to the excellence of the assembly line.
Step eight: Pa-tsha, dedicated to the usefulness of cane.
Step nine: Chamshok, dedicated to the dance itself.
Step ten: Jachen-ngangpa, dedicated to the giant swan.
Step eleven: Meto-kumud, offering of lotus and water to the deities.
Step twelve: Thridu-nyima-jugjung, dedicated to the wellbeing of the spiritual teachers, deities and ancestors.
Step thirteen: Chaluk-lekchi-chaluk-lek, concluding prayer.

Wang Zhey
Step ten:  *Sa-meley-kepi-patsha-dang-lungkey*, dedicated to the usefulness of cane.


Step twelve: *Zambuling-la-sung-jurwa*, dedicated to the worthy belongings of the world.

Step thirteen: *Rigo-inchi-menchi*, dedicated to the meditator and his abode.

Step fourteen: *Trashi-trashi-zerwa*, dedicated to the wellbeing and blessing to all sentient beings.

**Nub Zhey**

Nub Zhey originated in Trongsa district in central Bhutan. Originally, this folk dance was performed in a village called Jee located in the Nubi Gewog of Trongsa District as a ritual performance to local deities. Nub indicates a specific community that speaks a dialect called Zha ked similar to Bumthangkha and the people of Jee village speak this dialect. That is why the zhey they perform is called Nub Zhey. It is said that the lyrics of the Nub Zhey were initially composed by a man named Aku Tempa. Later, the dance came to be performed during Trongsa Tsechu, with some modification.

The dress code of the dancers consists of a red gho, blue tego, a khamar kabney (white kabney with a red/white/blue stripe down either edge), ko lham (traditional knee-length boots) dungkar-gi along (conch shell finger ring), and a thoe (ring-like headband). The red gho signifies devotion to Buddhism; the blue tego signifies the presence of numerous medicinal herbs in the country; the khamar signifies the vow of adherence to the precepts; the ko lham signify the ability to bring all the eastern regions under control; the dungkar-gi along signifies victory over the invaders; and the headband signifies acknowledgement of the presence of the Lama’s teachings.

The Nub Zhey has twenty two steps, each with a specific dedication.

**Step one:**  *Chag-buel*, prostration to the teachers of Kagyu lineage.

**Step two:**  *Choe-buel*, offering to the Lama.

**Step three:**  *Sharley-thridu-namyang-shar*, praise to the gathering and the occasion.

**Step four:**  *Zhey-phachi-toego-bey*, dedicated to the dance itself.

**Step five:**  *Zhey-kyi thrungas*, for the birth and origin of the dance itself.

**Step six:**  *Zhey-gobi-chigohyey*, opening the door of the dance.

**Step seven:**  *Choe-zhuwa*, dedicated to teachings of the Lama.

**Step eight:**  *Karza-tihi-nyinzang*, acknowledging the sacredness and auspiciousness of the occasion.

**Step nine:**  *Lhocho-norbui-ling*, dedicated to the lamas and leaders of Trongsa.

**Step ten:**  *Yuegi-riwo-chograp*, dedicated to the king and his palace in Trongsa.

**Step eleven:**  *Nye-dakpi-zhingkham*, dedicated to the place of origin of the Kagyud lineage.

**Step twelve:**  *Moen-tshekhar-kewi-patsha*, acknowledging the usefulness of cane.

**Step thirteen:**  *Kongyul-la-shar-jung*, dedicated to the village of Kong.

**Step fourteen:**  *Meto-dema*, dedicated to the father (i.e. Aku Tempa) of this dance.

**Step fifteen:**  *Janag-tshomo*, dedicated to a sacred lake in China.

**Step sixteen:**  *Zhey-gi-sung*, dedicated to singing of the dance.

**Step seventeen:**  *Thangkar-goepo*, appealing features of the vulture.

**Step eighteen:**  *Gongtoe-toenpo-yi-phodrang*, celebrating wellbeing and prosperity.

**Step nineteen:**  *Thashed*, acknowledging the values of weaving.

**Step twenty:**  *Tempa-yongwa*, dedicated to the place of origin of the father of this dance.

**Step twenty one:**  *Thola-yangpa*, prayers for wellbeing of the gathering.

**Step twenty two:**  *Trashi*, concluding aspirations of the occasion.

**Wochubi Zhey**

*Wochubi Zhey* was introduced by the people of Wochu
village, in Paro district during the initiation ceremony of Dzongdrakha monastery. The monastery was built by Choejay Penjor, who was a son of Choejay Dawa, the reincarnation of Drupthob Goenpo Dorje, a Buddhist saint from Tibet. Drupthob Gompo Dorje originally initiated the construction of the monastery by building a Chorten (stupa), named Karmo Gul. The monastery is located above Bonde village, on the ledge of steep cliff, overlooking the village. Later, the dance was introduced as one of the many other religious dances at Paro Tsechu. The costumes of the dancers consist of a headband (which is made of green leaves), black tego, khamar, and yuelham (traditional boots). The dress code is supposed to represent the physical appearance of pigeon, dwelling in the cliff above the monastery, thus, signifying a pigeon.

The Wochubi Zhey has eighteen steps, with a specific dedication:

Step one: Lamdroe, dedicated to the Lama, local deities, and Chorten Karmagoul.

Step two: Shar-pheley-tridu, dedicated to the Lama, occasion, leaders, and the gathering.

Step three: Aku Tempa, dedicated to the father (Aku Tempa of Zhey).

Step four: Boegi-aku-tempa-nga, Aku Tempa’s expedition in Bhutan.

Step five: Choekhor-lhasa, dedicated to the Lhasa Jowo temple in Tibet.

Step six: Boegi-beldap-zhung, Aku Tempa’s life.

Step seven: Dungkar-yekhyil, acknowledging the preciousness of the conch in Buddhism.

Step eight: Zhakpa-thrulgi-along, dedicated to the bonding of the people.

Step nine: Choe-buel, offering of the dance to the deities, lamas and the gathering.

Step ten: Thowa-yekhyil, dedicated to peace, harmony and prosperity.

Step eleven: Nam-khorlo-tsip-gey, dedicated to the sacredness of the occasion.

Step twelve: Bumthang-choekhor-kepa, dedicated to a courtier from Bumthang Choekhor.

Step thirteen: Aku-tempa-mizhu, welcoming Aku Tempa.

Step fourteen: Lam-se-nyi-gi-zbel-jel, commemorating Choejay Dawa and Choejay Penjor.

Step fifteen: Jatoe-gep, in praise of birds.

Step sixteen: Nanga, dedicated to Ashinangsa [a Tibetan queen].

Step seventeen: Choep, praying to the lamas and local deities.

Step eighteen: Trashi, concluding aspirations of the occasion.

2.1.3.2. The gallant warrior

Punakha Dromchoe was first staged to celebrate Bhutan’s resounding victory over the invading Tibetan forces in the 17th century and to propitiate the tutelary deities, particularly Yeshe Goenpo. It is marked by a three-day extended pazap festival. Pazaps (warriors), attired for combat and brandishing the accessories of warfare, stage elaborate battle scenes to the accompaniment of loud trumpets, fireworks and war cries. The celebrations are an enactment of their victory over the many Tibetan invasions all of which were successfully repelled. The first festival was mounted by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal who is said to have led the Tibetans into believing that the Ranjung Kharsapani, the revered relic that was the source of conflict between the two enemies, had been cast away in the river for good.

Apart from the rather theatrical ceremonial role, the festival depicts how the pazaps had played an important role in guarding Bhutan from external forces. Given the limited resources of the country, Bhutan could not afford to keep a standing army for defence purposes, so instead it established peasant militias that could be called upon at short notice to fight. The flexibility and cost-effectiveness of a pazap force compared to the
maintenance of an adequately strong standing army would have contributed to the security of the country by allowing a size of force disproportionate to the population to be raised, for short periods of time.

Pazap ceremonies that were held in the dzongs and the provinces were as much a ritual of peace as they were a show of strength and preparedness to deter aggression. Practices and performances of battle scenes were ideal training grounds for village men, young and old alike, who were introduced into the martial tradition. Thus, the pazaps are hailed as a benevolent warrior force.

2.1.3.3. The Dance of Gallant Warriors

Literally, the term Jipai Pawo refers to “young warriors or heroes”, who are symbolic of a bodyguard. There is no written history of the origin of Jipai Pawo. According to oral sources, when Bhutan was facing much internal strife the Paro Poenlop, Agay Haap was able to protect Zhabdrung Jigme Norbu who was his candidate for the post of 39th Desi. He escorted Zhabdrung to Thimphu safely and enthroned him as the Desi in 1850. On this occasion Poenlop Agay Haap staged Jipai Pawo for the first time. Young warriors escorted the Zhabdrung, dancing along the two sides of the ceremonial procession to prevent people from coming nearer to him and also to entertain the spectators as he was escorted to Trashi Choedzong.

The main reason for performing Jipai Pawo was externally to protect the Zhabdrung from enemies and internally to show pride and bravery.

Today the dance is performed during ceremonial receptions accorded to dignitaries, to symbolise guarding the dignitaries. The dance with accompanying song of praise is performed in front of the podium, as a mark of honour and respect to the dignitaries and to wish them good health and long life. It is a traditional gesture of welcome and good-will incorporating in it sentiments of lasting friendship, cooperation and mutual respect.

Costumes and accessories for the dance are as follows:

1. A gho of either brocade or raw silk;
2. *Tub* (Five different colours of silk scarf criss-crossed over the chest);
3. *Baekham/Khaishub* (a pouch to contain a needle) hung by the side;
4. *Phor-shub* (a pouch to contain a bullet) hung by the side;
5. *Ngueshub* (a purse hung by the side);
6. *Ri-nga* (a gold-plated silver helmet);
7. A full white mid-calf length skirt worn over the gho;
8. A sword at the back;
9. A single scarf in the left hand and a *damaru* (small hand drum) in the right hand.

2.1.4. Drama

In the 15th century, as had been prophesied by the protective deities, Thangtong Gyalpo came to Bhutan. Considered as the father of Tibetan opera, it is said that he raised money for his various bridge-building projects in Tibet through developing a dharma theatre troupe which performed operas, recited mantras and told tales meant to subdue demons and teach sentient beings. Arriving via the Chumbi valley with his followers in 1433, he went on to build temples in western Bhutan and chain-link iron suspension bridges over big rivers. It is believed that Thangtong Gyalpo brought the knowledge of the dramatic arts to Bhutan as well as introducing many songs and dances. Although no records are available to tell us how the new art form developed over the following centuries, it may be presumed that the tradition was maintained within the monastic institutions. In the 1980s the tradition was revived, with the then Semtokha Rigzhung Institute as pioneer in composition and mounting of new productions based on earlier tradition, to educate people on our cultural values and also to entertain them in an era where modernisation was already under way but television and video had yet to be introduced to provide popular entertainment. Since drama involves depicting human emotions and engaging the audience, the new art form with its staged enactment of traditional stories and legends soon gained popularity. Legends staged by Bhutanese artists included the following: Biographical legend of Khandro Drowa Zangmo, Gyalpo Norzang, Nangsa Oebum, Ling Gesar, Yeshe Tshogyal, Life of Drukpa Kuenley, Khandro Sonam Peldron, and Life of Lord Buddha. Schools offering a modern education later took up the dramatic arts, mainly staging modern dramas. In the 1990s the Dzongkha Development Commission made video recordings of most of the dramas staged in schools and other organizations.

More recently, plays by Shakespeare and other foreign dramatists of high standing have been staged for the Bhutanese audience, either in their original medium or in translation. From the Bhutanese perspective, all forms of the dramatic arts are the means of benefitting other beings and the actors are believed to be accumulating merit based on their own intentions.