

3.1. CEREMONIES

In the Bhutanese way of life, ceremony is the foremost and most important event in the onward proceedings of any activity. The ceremonies are performed both to formalise the activity and to ensure that its successful completion. A ceremony will consist of recitation of prayers or benedictions or at least utterance of propitious words. Since most of the ceremonies involve recitation of prayers, invocation of deities and gods constitute an important part. Therefore, ceremonies are somehow linked with religious activities. If there is a failure to perform ceremonies before the start of an activity or event, people feel that something is not right, as the perceived need for such a ceremony is firmly rooted in Bhutanese psyche and culture. Therefore, performance of an appropriate ceremony has become mandatory before the commencement of any activity held in the country, irrespective of time and place. However, these ceremonies must strictly adhere to auspicious astrological conditions. As a religious component is always involved, ceremonies are presided over by monks or *gomchen* (lay religious practitioners).

3.1.1. Traditional Ceremonial Reception

The literal meaning of *chibdre* is 'the procession led by the riding horse'. It is the traditional way of receiving important dignitaries as a gesture of honour and respect

appropriate to their positions and importance. Such dignitaries range from heads of state to religious heads and high-ranking officials.

The procession comprises monks equipped with their traditional orchestral instruments, namely trumpets, clarinets, drums and cymbals, which they play as they walk. The procession also includes a number of other participants such as *pacham* (hero dancers) and folk dancers in traditional costume, persons carrying auspicious symbols and substances, people carrying flags associated with deities, and a hierarchy of officials, bodyguards and attendants.

Depending upon the importance of the occasion and rank of the dignitary, *chibdre* is organised at three levels: elaborate (*gepa*), average (*dring*), and abbreviated (*duepa*).

During the *chibdre* procession for state level dignitaries, a separate group of monks on the rooftop performs *serdreng*, a ceremonious fanfare of trumpets, cymbals and other religious instruments, as an accompaniment. *Serdreng* symbolises an offering to the ears of the gods and goddesses. It is believed that it is the accumulated merits of the dignitary being received that make him worthy of such a high honour.

