Ngawang Namgyal, arriving from Tibet, was received with a zhugdre ceremony by Lam Druk Namgyal of the Obtsho family at a place called Lebnathang in Gasa District. Then at the consecration of Punakha Dzong, an elaborate zhugdre phunsum tshogpa was performed and the ceremony gained immense popularity thereafter. In order to receive what is being served during the occasion, participants are expected to bring their own phop (bowl) and tora (small piece of cloth, usually white, to receive food items) to the ceremony to receive what is being served during the occasion.

The final stage of the zhugdre ceremony, known as trashi moelam, is a prayer for the good health, wellbeing and prosperity of the dignitaries and those present on the occasion. It is designed to help guests accumulate merits in order to attain the highest qualities of which man is capable, in this way benefiting not only those present on the occasion but also all sentient beings.

3.1.4. Consecration Ceremony

It is a custom that any significant structure or item is appropriately consecrated to grant a divine blessing. This is called rabney, which means to seal firmly. The ceremony is performed upon completion of a new or renovated structure, in order to assure its durability and resilience against natural and manmade disasters. It is a very special ceremony whereby constructions (such as temples, stupas and/or statues) are consecrated with wisdom energy bestowed from the Enlightened Ones, which is then absorbed into the construction or object. This wisdom energy is sealed with prayers and meditations and the energy will remain alive and active until or unless requested otherwise. The thangka (religious scroll pictures), statues and stupas, which have been consecrated in this way, are considered effective in granting blessings and protection, and thereby fulfilling the wishes of the devotees. A lama or local priest performs this rabney ceremony. The most popular structures that are generally consecrated comprise private or public building structures or infrastructure, monasteries and temples, stupas, and statues. The ceremony is also carried out for the installation of prayer flags and prayer wheels. Besides these, Buddhist wall hangings, murals, and even new or second-hand vehicles are also consecrated.

3.1.5. Milk Libation

Cattle or yak owners perform milk libation to appease their local deities and livestock gods. Right after the milking, the person faces the direction of the local deities, holding the milking-pail in the left hand and a twig or leaves in the right hand. Dipping the twig into the milk, the person sprinkles a few drops of milk in the direction of the deity. During the act of sprinkling, the person says some propitious prayers. There are no standard written verses for the prayers; people just say some propitious words appealing to the deities that their animals be free from illness and animal predators, and that their produce be bountiful. The main prayer will be dedicated to the gods of livestock. It is in fact a thanksgiving to the gods for ending the previous day successfully and seeking their support in the days to follow.

3.2. TRADITIONS & CUSTOMS

3.2.1. Religious Traditions and Customs

In the 7th century when the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo began building temples, Bhutan also saw the light of Dharma. In the 8th century, Guru Rinpoche visited Bhutan at least three times, gave the teachings and blessed the land.

During the 9th century, when King Langdarma and his Bonpo ministers were harassing the Buddhists and causing destruction of both monasteries and scriptures, many of the learned lamas came to Bhutan to practise in safety. In the 13th century, Phajo Drugom Zhipo established the root of Drukpa Kagyud tradition in Bhutan followed by his sons who continued the lineage after his death. Many other teachers followed him to strengthen the tradition. There were also Nyingmapa...
lamas, among whom Pema Lingpa was the most notable figure.

However, with the arrival of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in the 17th century, the dharma tradition had started to take shape. The Drukpa Kagyud tradition, having close affinity with the Nyingma tradition, was adapted to suit the sovereign independent status of Bhutan. Today, the Drukpa Kagyud tradition with its ordained monks residing in the dzongs, monasteries and institutions as well as the nuns, is Bhutan’s state religion. The ordained monks and gomchens (literally ‘great meditators’) and nuns of the Nyingma tradition also complement the spiritual needs of the people of Bhutan.

Besides the Drukpa Kagyud and Nyingma traditions, there are minor communities, which practice Bon, Sakya, Gelug, Bodong tradition and Hinduism.

3.2.1.1. Life of Monks

The monks and monastic community in Bhutan play an important role in religious and cultural life of the different sections of society. In the past, each family enrolled at least one of their sons into the local monastery, so that monks constituted a considerable proportion of the male population. Although this percentage has declined with the passage of time, the roles of the monastic community have increased in recent years. The Head Abbot or Je Khenpo, who is responsible for the nation’s religious affairs, holds a prominent place in the social and cultural life of the people. Five deputies or senior masters assist him in supervision across the kingdom. Below them are the monks of other ranks with specific responsibilities.

A boy may be enrolled in the monastery at an early age, on an auspicious day. He starts to wear the maroon robe and his head is shaved. The novice receives ordination step by step, based on the monastic code of conduct specified in the Vinaya.

The curriculum begins with the learning of the alphabet, spelling and reading, and advances to the memorisation of prayers and other relevant texts besides observing daily monastic rules of discipline. They also learn various ritual arts, metrical rhymes, trumpet playing, making ritual cakes etc. As they proceed to higher classes, they learn grammar, prosody or literary science, in preparation for pursuing higher Buddhist philosophical studies.

After having gained a basic proficiency in religious studies from the monastic schools, the monks graduate to higher Buddhist philosophical studies. Besides emphasising liturgical, doctrinal and esoteric scriptures, monastic education also offers training in the auxiliary sciences and arts such as medicine, astrology, calligraphy, painting and grammar. The novice monk is eligible for full ordination only after the successful completion of a graded nine-year course. The entire period of study encompasses fifteen to twenty years. Needless to say, many whose abilities fail to meet the progressively higher standards settle for the lesser monastic grades, while the select few, in accordance with their accomplishments, rise up the hierarchical ladder.
The monk’s education does not end with his gaining proficiency in Buddhist studies alone in the Buddhist colleges. After receiving theoretical teachings, he must undergo retreat for three years to practice meditation, called ‘losum choesum,’ which means three years and three faces of a month (the first face from the 1st day to the 15th day which is known as upper-face, the second face from the 16th to the 30th, known as the lower-face. Choesum means a complete month – upper and lower faces – and the upper face of the following month, which makes one and a half months).

Performances of rituals on daily, monthly and annual basis are part of the normal monastic life. The monk must master different types of instruments including the trumpet, drum, clarinet and cymbals. Since almost every important occasion in the life of the average Bhutanese is coloured with religious significance, monks also visit households to perform annual rites for diverse occasions such as birth, marriage, sickness, death, construction of houses, promotion of senior officials, inaugural functions and many other day-to-day needs.

3.2.1.2. Gomchen

Gomchen literally means ‘great meditator’, which clearly implies what they normally do. They devote their entire lives to retreat, moving from cave to cave, mountain to mountain and from forest to forest seeking the reclusive life, living in complete isolation in these areas. They are also called tshampa (one who stays in retreat). However, the concept of living such a reclusive life has largely faded away these days and the gomchen has now become a part of village life.

Therefore, the term tshampa took over the essence of gomchen, as a tshampa more or less solely dedicates his entire life to retreat in caves or in monasteries, meditating and praying. As with gomchen, the term tshampa also refers to a meditator. A tshampa, however, has long hair and may be wearing a red striped scarf (khamar kabney). Both gomchen and tshampa receive their education from monastic institutions or from private tutors. Tshampa who achieve an advanced stage of meditation may be honoured with a khamar kabney, as a sign of higher attainments called togdenpa.

3.2.1.3. Alms Begging

Soe-nyom or alms begging is an activity of both a gomchen and a tshampa, as he or she (sometimes a nun is also tshampa) has renounced all attachment to property. Therefore, they beg only for sustenance rather than for accumulation of wealth. For the devotees, giving alms to such people is an opportunity to accumulate merit.

The great Milarepa has commented on this unique culture of alms begging:

The Great Meditator who meditates in the cave,  
And the benefactor (villager) who makes an offering,  
Have an auspiciousness to attain enlightenment at the same time,  
And the auspiciousness of both come together in the prayer of dedication.

The hermit seeking alms will approach the threshold, and say or chant prayers, but some also use a drum, and sing along with the rhythm of the drum. Alms beggars recite excerpts from the Sutra of Boundless Life and Wisdom on Six Transcendent Perfections (phar chin drug) as hereunder:

The Buddhas who are the strength of generosity are perfectly sublime.  
Lions among men, they have realised generosity's strength.  
When entering the citadel of the compassionate ones,  
The sound of the strength of generosity is heard.

The Buddhas who are the strength of discipline are perfectly sublime.  
Lions among men, they have realised discipline's strength.  
When entering the citadel of the compassionate ones,  
The sound of the strength of discipline is heard.

The Buddhas who are the strength of patience are perfectly sublime.  
Lions among men, they have realised patience's strength.  
When entering the citadel of the compassionate ones,  
The sound of the strength of patience is heard.
The Buddhas who are the strength of diligence are perfectly sublime.
Lions among men, they have realised diligence's strength. When entering the citadel of the compassionate ones, The sound of the strength of diligence is heard.

The Buddhas who are the strength of meditation are perfectly sublime.
Lions among men, they have realised meditation’s strength. When entering the citadel of the compassionate ones, The sound of the strength of meditation is heard.

The Buddhas who are the strength of wisdom are perfectly sublime.
Lions among men, they have realised wisdom’s strength. When entering the citadel of the compassionate ones, The sound of the strength of wisdom is heard.

Hearing the call from the alms beggar at the door, the house owner will scoop up a phueta (traditional measure) of rice and present it to the hermit. No sooner are the alms presented, then the hermit will recite a dedication prayer as follows:

Give alms and adhere to discipline,
Embrace patience and develop diligence,
Practice meditation and attain realisation,
Let auspiciousness be here and peace prevail at all times.

With these invaluable generous words, the hermit will move on from door to door until he accumulates enough rations for his retreat.

3.2.1.4. Seasonal Migration

In the olden days, during the spring and autumn seasons it was customary to migrate between the lower and higher altitudes to avoid harsh wintry weather and hot summer climates. Soethab, therefore, refers to migration of high-ranking officials or a monastic body to their summer or winter residence, driven by the seasonal conditions. One such continuing tradition is the migration of the Central Monastic Body from Trashi Choezong in Thimphu to Pungthang Dewa Chenpo Phodrang in Punakha during autumn. The entourage headed by the Je Khenpo spends a night at Thinleygang Lhakhang and arrives on the first day of the tenth Bhutanese month in Punakha Dzong. After spending six months at Punakha, the entourage returns to Thimphu and spends a night in Semtokha Dzong. The monastic body reaches Trashi Choezong on the first day of the fourth Bhutanese month and spends the next six months in Thimphu. During the migration, hundreds and thousands of devotees line up along the road to receive blessings from His Holiness the Je Khenpo, the monk body and the sacred relics that are carried along with the entourage. Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal instituted this tradition of maintaining a summer and a winter residence in the early 17th century.

3.2.1.5. Making Offerings

Since the foundation of Bhutanese culture and tradition rests upon the Vajrayana Buddhism, offerings to the Buddha, gods, and deities have become part of Bhutanese daily life. All Bhutanese make some kinds of offerings to the gods in the form of water, butter, smoke, or edible items. These items are offered before the Buddha and deities, represented in the form of statues and paintings, on the altar that is ubiquitous in all Bhutanese homes. The best chamber of the house is reserved as a shrine room for the Buddha and deities at which the following offerings are made irrespective of their social status.

Fresh Water Offering: Offering of fresh water is very popular. Every Bhutanese household offers fresh water in seven bowls on the altar. It is the cheapest resource available and a basic necessity for all living beings. While offering the water, one should pray for all sentient beings to be free from thirst. As the water is supposed to be clean without any contamination in the morning, fresh water is collected in the first morning hour for offering. The water is poured into the seven bowls, arranged in a straight row, from left to right if possible before sunrise and emptied in the evening before sunset. There are a few things to bear in mind while offering the fresh water: the bowls should be properly cleaned and placed in a straight row while the space between the bowls should be equal, about 5mm (equal to the space occupied by a grain of barley); and the bowls should be filled up to a level not lower than 5mm from the brim or not up to the brim. Offering water helps accumulate merits.

Butter-lamp Offering: This offering is made during auspicious days of 8th, 10th, 15th, 25th and the 30th of the month and on other auspicious days in accordance with the Bhutanese calendar. There are households who offer butter-lamps every day and night. In any case, butter is considered the best for offering, although it is widely substituted by various kinds of cooking oils. The butter-lamp offering is made in a chalice and there is no specific required number set for making the offering.

The chalice is cleaned with the help of mosses from the forest, which are considered very clean, but any piece of clean material will suffice. The clarified oil is poured into the chalice after fixing a strong wick in the hole. The
wick should be made of cotton and the fibre is twisted clockwise straight and tapering upwards like the tip of a needle. The chalice is placed before statues or religious items and then lighted reverentially. As one lights the lamp, one should pray that the lamp should multiply in millions and light the six realms and wish that all sentient beings in these realms are awakened and liberated from darkness.

Smoke Offering: The burning of incense is to drive away impurities besides it is an offering made to the gustatory organs of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas. Fragrant leaves such as juniper, cypress, mountain azalea, artemisia, and other herbal plants are collected, dried and then crushed into smaller pieces or into powder. The mixture is then burnt on the embers.

However, with the introduction of the stick incense, many more ingredients are now added to make the smoke more aromatic. In fact, the Bhutanese incense includes about a hundred precious aromatic substances like nagi (scale of pangolin), giwang (bezoar, intestinal stone), clove, musk, nutmeg, saffron, red and white sandalwood, and other medicinal herbs.

In making incense, the dried pieces of juniper wood are ground into powder with other herbs, ingredients and dyes, and then kneaded into a mixture. The mixture is then pushed into a hand-made wooden squeezer from which it is extruded in the shape of noodles. The incense noodles are levelled in height, cut to the required size and dried for about five days in the shade before being packed into paper boxes to retain their perfume. In Bhutanese homes, incense is offered every day.

Food Offerings: Bhutanese think of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas above all other beings even while eating a small piece of food. Therefore, they offer foodstuffs firstly to the Buddha and deities before consuming them. Likewise, even at home, meals and tea are first offered at the altar as phue or first offering, before their consumption. This food offerings culture is firmly embedded in the everyday lifestyle of the Bhutanese.

After making the offerings, it is important to sprinkle a few drops of water (this is called chab), uttering ‘Om Ab Hung’ three times. It is an act of purifying the offerings made to the Buddha and deities. In Buddhist tradition, although material offering has values and benefits that is equivalent to its physical size and amount, it is believed that much more benefit and merit will accumulate from mentally emanated offerings. So, a mentally emanated offering or praising the virtuous deeds of others accumulates more merit than material offerings.

3.2.1.6. Hoisting of Prayer Flag

Another very popular activity of the Bhutanese is the hoisting of prayer flags with scripts printed on them. That is why beautiful places, mountains, hilltops,
treetops, cliff tops, riverside are festooned with multi-coloured prayer flags. In general, prayer flags are hoisted for the benefit of sentient beings, both living and dead, to boost one's positive energy or luck and to help liberate the souls of our loved ones. There are huge flags called lhadar in front of dzongs, each with a gyetshen (victory banner) on top.

There are also flags without scripts printed on them, such as a small white flag called darchung on the rooftop of one's house and lhadar near one's house that has just the print of four legendary animals on it. A lhadar with the printed images of the four legendary animals (tiger, snow lion, garuda, and dragon) is also hoisted in front of temples and dzongs.

The darchung on rooftops are placed during the annual religious rituals performed by the household, and hoisted in honour of the deities that the household worships. The lhadar showing the images of the four legendary animals is a sign that the temple and dzong contains scriptures like the Three Pitakas (sutra, vinaya and abhidharma). If the temples have sertog (golden pinnacles) on the roof, the victory banner pinnacle is permitted at the tip of the lhadar.

The prayer flags come in five different colours: blue, white, red, green, and yellow. The colour of the flag is determined based on the individual's birth sign represented by the five elements of the twelve year cycle — white for metal, yellow for earth, red for fire, green for wood, and blue for water.

The plain flags representing all the five colours hoisted on both sides of the path or road and around houses, or temples or pitched tents, signify important functions, celebrations of happy occasions and reception of dignitaries. They do not have any religious significance.

In order to install flagpoles, tall and straight young trees are selected, preferably from coniferous trees that are sometimes called lhashing (tree of the higher beings). Where lhashing is not available, other trees may be substituted, provided they are straight and meet the required height. After felling of the selected tree, bark, branches and knots are completely removed. Sherab rel dri (wisdom sword) and khorlo (wheel) made of wood are affixed at the tip of the pole. The base of the rel dri is shaped as crescent moon and sun and painted likewise, while the sword is painted bluish in the middle and reddish on the side to represent the sharp blade that destroys ignorance. A curved red line goes upward in the middle of the rel dri to signify fire to boost the power of the blade. Lotus petals are painted on the part immediately below the moon to signify the purity of the base of the wisdom sword.
In rural villages where these elaborate preparations are not possible, the leafy tops of the branches are used as substitute for reldri and khoro. The reldri represents Manjushri, the wisdom deity; while the flag represents Avalokiteshvara, the deity of compassion; and the pole represents Vajrapani, the deity of power. Once a flagpole has been selected, it is considered unvirtuous for humans to walk over it, and therefore it should be kept with its tip on a higher ground.

The texts and images are printed on cotton cloth from xylographs available in temples and monasteries and with certain private individuals. In the old days, ink was prepared from soot mixed with water and very old singchang (juice of fermented grains) to give the required thickness and strength. The ink is spread over the printing block and the cotton cloth is stretched over the block, and rubbed over gently using a broad leaf. The print will appear on the cotton cloth. The manual printing is repeated until the desired length is achieved. The printed cloth is then attached to the pole with strands of bamboo, leaving a gap of 30 cm below the khorlo and about a metre above the ground. Mantras are printed left to right across the width of the cloth and generally, while attaching the long strip of cloth to the flagpole, it is positioned so that the edge where the mantra begins flutters freely in the air, and the edge where the mantra ends is fixed down the length of the pole.

The flags commonly carry mantras of Avalokiteshvara (mani), Guru Padmasambhava (vajra guru), Manjushri, Vajrapani, Tara, Vajrasattva, Buddha Amitayus, Lungta (windhorse) and Gyetshe tsoemai pung-gyen (victory banner sutra). Finally, the flagpole is firmly fixed in the ground and then a consecration ceremony is held.

In most cases, high ridges and hilltops are considered ideal locations for prayer flags, because these sites provide plenty of the wind that is needed to flutter the mantra. Besides, hilltops give panoramic view of all the places below, and hence help to reach out the blessings of the prayers to all sentient beings.

3.2.1.7. Inner Relic

Statues, stupas and other religious structures are common sights in Bhutan. They are gorgeous to look at but without proper zung or inner relics, they have no spiritual values. If the statue is not filled in with the zung, it is believed that malevolent spirits get into the statue and cause harm to people. Therefore, installing zung in these structures is very important. With the installation of zung, the religious structure or statues become a living entity capable of bestowing blessings. Zung bestow them with spiritual importance and sacredness, hence inserting zung is tantamount to installing a soul in the body. Ideally, zung offering should be done by an ordained monk who does not eat meat, onion, garlic, drink alcohol, smoke or chew tobacco and has taken the vow of celibacy, but such a person is very rare to find in this modern era.

Zung consists of scriptures in the form of mantras or prayers, and precious objects, supported by a sogshing (life wood) in the centre. The sogshing must be a fruit-bearing tree with fragrant leaves such as juniper, cypress or sandalwood. It is cut into four sides tapering towards the tip while its base is kept in vajra shape. The whole sogshing is painted red and mantras are inscribed on the four sides in gold. The size of the sogshing depends on the height of the statue or stupa.

Mantra rolls are an important component in filling the religious objects. Thus, Holy Scriptures or mantras are printed and rolled but each roll is marked to ensure the right order of the scripts for installation, as Bhutanese believe that installing scriptures upside down may cause more harm than good.

Various other important components such as body, speech, and mind relics of great lamas, precious metals and a small statue (termo) are placed around the sogshing, which is then wrapped in silk brocade. After fitting the sogshing, rolls of mantras printed on papers and stuffed with sandalwood powders along with incense are arranged around it. The stuffed items will keep the zung items firmly in their respective positions. When every possible space is completely filled, the base is sealed with a bronze sheet. Finally, a consecration ceremony is performed to make the object fit for worship and refuge.

A drengeya is an insignia of the kudrung (discipline master) in the monk body. Outwardly, it is a sceptre, a whip to punish and discipline monks but inwardly it is capable of warding off defilements. It was introduced by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal to discipline the young monks and to help them concentrate on their studies and other duties. Moreover, it was a method to avoid distractions from mundane life styles. It is believed that if a person gets lashings from this scourge, his or her sins or sickness will be cleansed because of the zung installed in it. Elderly people used to ask for a lashing from the kudrung to get cured from sickness and defilements.
3.2.1.8. Prostration

Prostration is an act of seeking refuge in the Three Jewels – Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Prostrations are made at sacred sites, structures, before highly learned lamas and statues. It is a submission of one’s body, mind and speech to these entities. Moreover, it is a way of overcoming one’s ego through humility and to be freed of negative karma, one might have accrued in the past and present lives.

In Bhutan, if a person is frequently sick and physically disabled, it is believed that he or she is experiencing the results of past bad karma. In order to get rid of these defilements, a lama advises his followers to do prostrations to help clear off the bad karma. A number of people who have done this have regained their health.

There are two types in prostrations – a long stretched prostration (changcha) and a short contracted prostration (kumcha). In changcha, the whole body is laid down flat on the ground stretching both the arms in the front. In the kumcha, the ‘five limbs’ – two knees, two palms, and the forehead touch the ground. It is also referred to as ‘five-point prostration.’ When one touches the ground with the five limbs, one should be mindful and visualise that the five poisons or negative emotions are being destroyed and eradicated. The five poisons are ignorance, attachment, anger, jealousy and pride, all resulting from ego.

Before prostrating, and while facing the right direction where one is going to prostrate, one needs to take care of several principles and physical gestures:

a. think that one is in the Buddha field and not on the earth;
b. fold hands together in the shape of a lotus bud;
c. put the folded hands on the head, throat and then at the heart and think one is submitting the body, speech and mind to the object;
d. do the prostration with the five limbs touching the ground;
e. recite the refuge mantra all along;
f. when one prostration is done stand upright once, before the next prostration; and

g. think that all sentient beings are prostrating together chanting the mantra filling the universe with the combined voices.

One should envisage receiving blessings from the body, speech, mind, qualities, and activities of the Buddhas and the Bodhisatvas. Similarly, one should also pray that the prostration help cleanse all the defilements and sins committed by body, speech, and mind of oneself and others alike.

The mantra for refuge is:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I take refuge in my Guru,} \\
\text{I take refuge in the Buddha,} \\
\text{I take refuge in the Dharma,} \\
\text{I take refuge in the Sangha,} \\
\text{I take refuge in the Triple Gem, the perfect refuge!}
\end{align*}
\]
3.2.1.9. Custom of Pilgrimage

A pilgrimage is a journey made to some place of spiritual significance to a person’s personal beliefs or faith. The notion of pilgrimage is strongly embedded in Buddhism, and Bhutanese of the older generation aspire to start a journey on pilgrimage to as many places as possible in their lifetime. Bhutanese visit holy places and sites to accumulate merit and purify negative karma. This comes from their belief in the principle of ‘cause and effect’ and rebirth. Thus, it is a virtue to engage in virtuous actions for the benefit of others. To support the above principles, there is a popular maxim that says:

Look at the present life and you will know what you have done in your past life.
Look at your present actions and you will come to know what would be your next life.

This maxim has an impact on the lives of Bhutanese people. So people try to visit as many sacred places as possible during their pilgrimage to accumulate merit. Although most people are tied to their farms to sustain livelihood, they do not miss any opportunity to go on pilgrimage both inside and outside the country whenever their time permits. Bhutanese people seldom travel outside as tourists to visit amazing places and meet people for fun and enjoyment, but rather, they travel to holy places to pay their respects and pray to make their next life happier, and also to pray for all sentient beings.

3.2.2. Agrarian Traditions and Customs

3.2.2.1. Agricultural Practices

As Bhutan remained under self-imposed isolation for several centuries, modern economic development made its way to this country very much later than in many other countries. Agriculture is still the main source of livelihood for a large majority of the population. More than sixty percent of the people still live in rural villages tilling their land and raising livestock. Farmers generally use traditional methods of farming and homemade tools, but increasing numbers are beginning to use modern technology appropriate to their individual farming needs.

Bhutanese farmers grow nine basic varieties of cereal grains – wheat, barley, paddy, maize, bitter buckwheat, sweet buckwheat, pulse, foxtail millet, and finger millet. These are grown at different places and times, depending upon the altitude and season. The most dominant crop is rice followed by maize and wheat. Due to the introduction of new farming technologies and growth in market opportunities, farmers are venturing into commercial crops such as oranges, apples, cardamoms and potatoes. Commercial gardening of chilli, cabbage, cauliflower, tomato, and asparagus is also undertaken nowadays.

Traditionally, when farming works are due, a suitable day is sought from the village astrologer for ploughing and sowing of seeds. Days coinciding with animal signs such as Ox, Tiger, and Sheep are avoided when oxen are used in the fields. Similarly, days bearing the signs of Rat, Rooster, and Pig are avoided for sowing seeds. Nevertheless, farmers generally stick to the threejor-throechen and throechung, which are combinations of two of the five elements according to astrology.

Every farmer aspires for a good harvest in any season. Therefore, the very first step is to gather stubble and twigs, which are then burnt in the field. Thereafter, manure is collected from cowsheds and scattered in the fields. The farmlands are ploughed with the help of a pair of male animals – oxen or yaks yoked together. In the eastern region, two men are required to guide the oxen with one at the yoke and the other holding the